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AN INTERVIEW WITH PARWEZ IZHAR OF UFLEX

UFlex Cylinders Business focuses on innovation and operational excellence

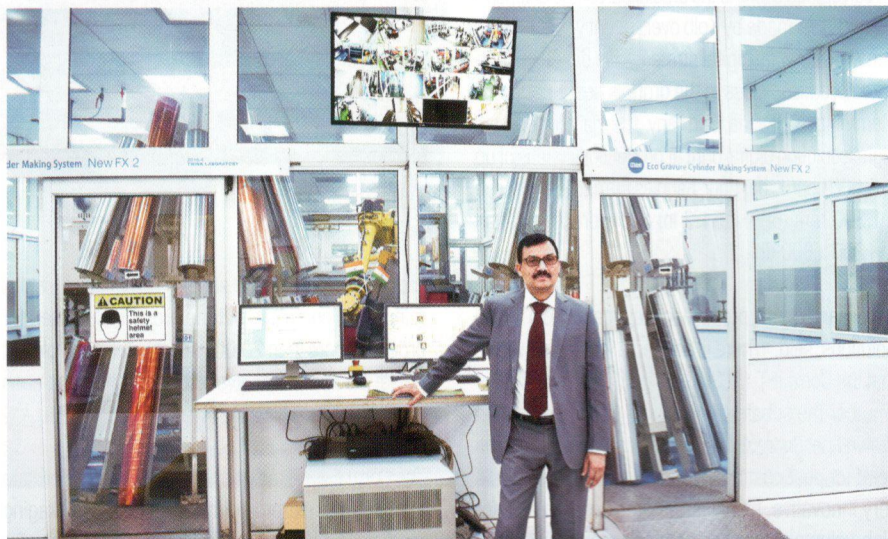
UFlex Cylinders Business is going through a solid transformation driven by innovations and unprecedented product quality. We recently met with Parwez Izhar CEO – Cylinders Business and senior VP, UFlex to know about the latest innovations and future plans of UFlex Cylinders Business. Here is an excerpt from the interview.

MANASH DAS

UFlex Cylinders Business is going through a solid transformation driven by innovations and unprecedented product quality. “We have been trying to move the needle of the company from a large-scale cylinder manufacturing setup to something that is fairly asset-light – focused more on operational excellence and innovation,” said Parwez Izhar CEO – Cylinders Business and senior VP, UFlex. “Our R&D team has been innovating and introducing new products and services ensuring that all our products are up-to-date with the latest market trends.”

LOW GSM WATER-BASED CYLINDERS

Izhar shared that some of the products introduced by UFlex Cylinders Business are observing a surge in demand. One such product is low GSM laser cylinders for water-based inks. “Low GSM laser cylinders are high in demand these days. With these cylinders, we have thrown up new business opportunities for customers who are looking for green and cost-effective solutions. All these cylinders are produced on our fully automatic robotic laser engraving line,” Izhar said. The robotic cylinder plant at UFlex offers cylinders with unparalleled performance. UFlex’s robotic plant can produce up to 80 rotogravure cylinders every day. The



Parwez Izhar CEO – Cylinders Business and senior VP, UFlex.
Photo: The Packman

plant is equipped with the best in class automation and can be operated by a single operator. The cylinders produced are dynamically balanced and can run up to a speed of 500 m/minute on a rotogravure press. This line produces high definition results and has a re-production capability of 6,400 dpi which is not attainable through the conventional electro-mechanical engraving process. UFlex plans to set up another robotic line to expand its business and to make room for that, it will evaluate shifting its existing embossing line to another location.

BRIGHT FUTURE AHEAD

Keeping an optimistic vision with the advent of low GSM laser engraved cylinders, Izhar said, “Since a lot of R&D effort has been going on in the development of water-based inks which facilitates eco-friendly printing, low VOC and low running cost, I strongly believe that the demand for these cylinders is going to be high in domestic as well as in the international markets. Queries are coming in from all corners of the globe at the moment.”

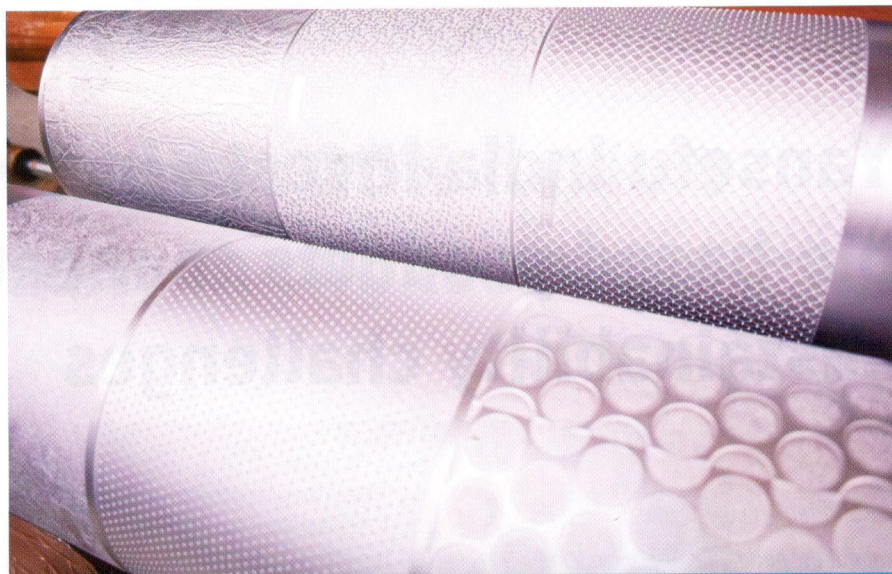
In low GSM laser engraved rotogravure cylinders, cell structures of the cylinders are optimized to an extent that can result in about 15-20% reduction in consumption of ink than the electro-mechanically engraved counterpart to render the same image resolution and enhancement. Izhar explained, "In the printing industry, ink is one of the most expensive consumables. If we can reduce even 10-15% ink wastage, it can result in substantial savings."

"In addition, a laser engraved rotogravure cylinder produces much enhanced and high definition images as compared to an electro-mechanically engraved cylinder. Also, the life of the laser engraved rotogravure cylinder is higher compared to conventional cylinders, which is also a big advantage. Today, laser engraved rotogravure cylinders produced on the robotic line are most suitable for anti-counterfeiting and brand protection solutions and, for the same reason, they are in high demand. Unique security features such as the halo lens effect can be ingrained on these cylinders."

LASER-EMBOSSED CYLINDERS FOR HAND-EMBOSSED EFFECT

Another innovation by UFlex Cylinders Business is the laser-embossed rotogravure cylinder. According to Izhar, these cylinders are ahead of the curve. We have been able to create new business opportunities in the area of embossing technology. For laser-embossed cylinders, UFlex has one of the latest 3D scanners from Germany and laser etching systems from Switzerland. A unique embossing effect made possible by UFlex on these cylinders is the hand-embossed effect. The company is targeting a niche market with this product and is already witnessing an upsurge in demand in the domestic as well as international markets.

"Hand-embossed effect on rotogravure cylinders is much popular in China where it is done manually. Manual engraving is a time-consuming process; however, hand engraving is proficiency with labors in China. Of late, due to the strained India-China relationship recently, Indian customers who were earlier looking up to China for hand-embossed effects are now scouting for vendors and suppliers in India. In India, UFlex has started producing laser-embossed cylinders with hand-embossed effects. Getting a hand-embossed effect on a table cover, car sheet, cover, curtain, etc. has been made possible with the launch of laser-embossed cylinders by UFlex. Since we are in the initial phase, the volume is low but the interest for hand-embossed cylinders is on an upsurge," said Izhar.



UFlex produces its cylinders keeping in mind the latest market trends and requirements. Photo: The Packman

Cylinders for metal embossing and textile printing UFlex is using its laser-embossed cylinders in the steel industry for metal embossed sheets. "Metal embossed sheets are used in home interiors and out of home applications like decorations of modular kitchen, false ceiling, corporate signboards, lift and metro wall, etc. Due to increased demand for these cylinders, we are in the process of ramping up our capacity to meet the increased demand."

"In addition, for the first time, we have started making cylinders for bulk textile printing which was again an area where China had always displayed its expertise. So, with the help of our R&D team, we have set up our engraving parameters to achieve the desired effect on the textile," said Izhar.

SPECIAL EFFECTS THROUGH SPECIALIZED CYLINDERS

"We are the pioneers in making specialized cylinders. We developed special effects like glitter printing for gift wraps and textured embossing on artificial leather (PU/PVC). These products are in very high demand in the European and the US markets," said Izhar.

AUTOMATED CHROME PLATING ON ROTOGRAVURE CYLINDER

UFlex Cylinders Business has installed a new automated chrome plating line for Rotogravure cylinders. "The manual chrome plating line that we had since long

has completed its product life cycle. Hence the need to replace it with an automatic line was felt. With the automated line in place, efficiency, consistency and quality of the cylinders have improved multi-folds. The new line can produce 200 cylinders per day," said Izhar.

LEAN TOOLS

In a view to reduce waste, improve efficiency, eliminate non-value added work and ensure better material flow, the Cylinders Business at UFlex has implemented lean tools. Some of the lean tools implemented are Value Stream Mapping, Kaizen, 5s+S, Set Up Reduction, Poka Yoke, TIMWOOD, JIT, Visual Management and TPM.

COVID-19 CHALLENGES

"Lockdown was an unprecedented experience for all of us and nobody was prepared for it. As soon as the lockdown was announced, there was a serious disruption in our operations because of the supply chain challenges – products were ready but we were not able to dispatch it. However, we managed to overcome this challenge without much delay as our products fall under the essential products category. Another challenge was about getting the workforce into the factory and re-organizing the factory keeping social distancing norms in mind. Our focus was always to keep our workforce safe and healthy. During this difficult time, our visionary chairman and managing director supported and motivated us to work hard so that our products could reach our customers on time," concluded Izhar. ■

SEVEN BILLION PACKS PER ANNUM

UFlex to double production capacity of aseptic liquid packaging plant in Sanand

UFlex, India's largest multinational flexible packaging and polymer science company and first Indian manufacturer of aseptic liquid packaging, will double its aseptic plant's production capacity from 3.5 bn to 7 bn packs per annum, in Sanand, Gujarat. The capacity expansion will be completed within the next 10 months approximately.

According to UFlex, the expansion is in response to the new contracts and increasing demand for the company's aseptic packaging laminates. Driven by a strong and healthy order book and consistent market growth, this initiative doubles the production capacity and will allow creating company's expanding operations team by adding more workforce, which will strengthen the company's expansion plan.

Ashwani Kumar Sharma, president and CEO, Aseptic Liquid Packaging Business, UFlex, said, "Asepto expansion is part of the growing need for aseptic packaging, and I am excited that our team and state-of-the-art facilities are well-positioned to respond to the increasing demand for our services and innovative technology in aseptic packaging. Despite the pandemic, we have continued to deliver services without a pause and carried on with innovative thoughts to deliver expected results from our customers.

"We have been working on taking Asepto globally, and our expansion takes a leap to enlarge the brand's horizons to different continents. We remain the most innovative packaging company when it comes to aesthetic rejuvenation in aseptic packaging space. The expansion steps in our operations reflect Asepto's strong position in the marketplace and positive outlook for the future."



New capacity additions will allow UFlex to double its aseptic plant's production capacity from 3.5 bn to 7 bn packs per annum

Once the commissioning of the project is complete, the company would take steps for global expansion. Ashok Chaturvedi, chairman and managing director of UFlex, said, "Asepto has now grown and entering into its next phase of life cycle with the first expansion plan announcement. This expansion of production capacities is our natural progression, addressing our rapid growth in the aseptic liquid packaging space, and stepping strong footsteps into the global arena. Asepto is taking one step at a time, and that's the best way I foresee to imbibe growth approach in the given global economic scenario."

The first phase of expansion will focus on adding new machines to the existing line i.e., the best-in-class new generation Gallus printing line. The new-age machine has progressive features, loaded with sophisticated technologies that make it extremely efficient and sound in operation. The machine prints at a speed of 500 mpm.

The slitting line is high-performance machine from IMS technologies, Italy, with speeds up to 1200 mpm. In addition to increasing the capacity, the company has also added doctoring line and over 8 new tools/formats as part of its expansion. This is targeted to be completed within approximately ten months, adding Asepto's capacity to address the increasing demands. ■