# UFlex eyes global growth with USD 126-mn greenfield Egypt plant

The facility at Ain Sokhna will double the company's annual aseptic packaging capacity to 24 billion packs and provide faster access to Europe, Africa, MENA, the CIS and the Americas, writes **Rahul Kumar**

UFlex's aseptic liquid packaging business, Asepto, is preparing to begin commercial production at its USD 126-million greenfield manufacturing facility in Ain Sokhna, Egypt, by the end of 2026. The facility, which is currently undergoing customer trials, has an installed capacity of 12 billion aseptic packs per annum. Once fully operational, it will double Asepto's combined production capacity across India and Egypt to 24 billion packs annually.

The Ain Sokhna unit is Asepto's second manufacturing facility after its plant at Sanand in Gujarat. While the Sanand operation is spread across a 72-acre site, the new Egyptian facility occupies approximately 30 acres. According to the company, the smaller footprint has been made possible through a higher level of automation, integration and efficient material movement.

Ashwani Kumar Sharma, president and CEO of UFlex's liquid packaging business, says the Egypt facility is expected to begin operations at around 30% capacity utilisation during its first year. Utilisation is projected to increase to between 60% and 70% in the second year, before reaching full capacity by 2030.

### Egypt as a global supply hub

The Ain Sokhna facility is located within the Suez Canal Economic Zone on the Gulf of Suez. Its proximity to the Suez Canal and major maritime routes gives Asepto access to six broad market clusters: Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States, Africa, the Gulf Cooperation Council and West Asia, Latin America, and North America.

The location should, therefore, allow the company to reduce delivery times, improve customer proximity and create a more resilient international supply chain. Asepto describes the facility as a gateway connecting markets across Europe, MENA, Africa, the CIS and the Americas.

Sharma estimates the combined market opportunity across Egypt's neighbouring regions at USD 25–26 billion and said it could double in approximately eight years.

"Growth in this region is fantastic," Sharma says, pointing to the combination of expanding demand, favourable trade arrangements and Egypt's strategic location.

The plant has been configured as an integrated aseptic packaging operation covering printing, inspection, extrusion lamination, slitting, material handling, palletisation and final packaging. Automation, ERP connectivity and quality-control systems have been incorporated across the production process.

### Changing beverage market

The investment comes as the aseptic packaging market expands beyond conventional milk and juice applications.

Demand is being shaped by the growth of flavoured dairy products, nectars, plant-based beverages, functional drinks, nutritional products and other shelf-stable liquid foods. Beverage companies are also seeking longer shelf life, distribution without continuous refrigeration, reduced food waste and access to new markets.

Asepto offers aseptic cartons in multiple formats, shapes and sizes, supported by filling machines, packaging design, paper straws and technical services. The company's wider strategy is to position itself as an end-to-end liquid-packaging partner rather than solely a carton supplier. The ability to manufacture closer to customers should be particularly important for regional beverage businesses, which require shorter lead times, smaller inventories and packaging adapted to local consumption habits.

### Building international scale

Established in India in 2017, Asepto has expanded to serve more than 200 customers across over 50 countries. The Egypt investment marks the next phase of its international growth and moves a significant part of its production closer to overseas customers.

The Sanand plant has also undergone debottlenecking to increase its capacity from seven billion to 12 billion packs annually. Together, Sanand and Ain Sokhna will provide Asepto with a combined annual capacity of 24 billion packs.

For UFlex, the Egypt project also expands its presence across the packaging value chain. The Noida-headquartered group operates in flexible packaging, packaging films, aseptic packaging, chemicals, printing cylinders, holography, engineering and recycling.

UFlex already has a substantial manufacturing presence in Egypt, which has emerged as its second-largest production base after India. In addition to aseptic packaging, the group's Egyptian operations include packaging films and PET resin capacity.

UFlex reported revenue of approximately USD 1.63-billion for the year ended 31 March 2026. The group has manufacturing facilities across India, Egypt, the UAE, Nigeria, Poland, Hungary, the CIS, Mexico and the United States.

### Sustainability and material recovery

Sustainability will remain central to the growth of aseptic cartons, particularly as regulators and brand owners demand demonstrable improvements in collection, recyclability and recovered-material use.

Asepto has been developing Enzymatic Delamination Technology to separate the principal components of used aseptic cartons—paper fibre, aluminium and polymers. The objective is to improve the recovery of valuable materials and support their return to productive applications.

Its sustainability programme also covers recycled polymers, alternative fibre-based solutions, resource efficiency and packaging-recovery technologies.

However, the long-term circularity of aseptic cartons will depend on more than the recyclability of the pack itself. Collection, sorting, transportation and commercially viable processing infrastructure will need to grow alongside manufacturing capacity.

For the Egypt facility, this creates an opportunity to develop a regional manufacturing ecosystem that combines large-scale production with local recovery partnerships and extended producer responsibility programmes.

### Challenging a concentrated market

Aseptic liquid packaging has traditionally been a highly concentrated segment, with a small number of international suppliers controlling much of the technology, material and filling-machine ecosystem.

Asepto's expansion in Egypt signals UFlex's intention to challenge that structure through additional capacity, regional manufacturing and a broader offering that includes cartons, filling systems, design and technical support.

The commercial success of the Ain Sokhna project will depend on the pace of customer approvals, production ramp-up and Asepto's ability to build filling-machine and after-sales support across multiple regions.■



# Inside the high-tech Asepto plant in Egypt

UFlex's Asepto facility at Ain Sokhna combines advanced printing, lamination, quality-control and automation technologies to produce aseptic liquid packaging for customers across international markets. **Rahul Kumar**, managing editor of PrintWeek, reports from the ground

A visit to UFlex's Asepto manufacturing facility at Ain Sokhna, Egypt, offers a compelling view of an Indian packaging company building a technologically advanced production base on the global stage.

Strategically located near the Red Sea and approximately 40 kilometres from the Suez Canal, the facility is well-positioned to serve customers across the Middle East, Africa, Europe and other international markets. Its location provides access to important shipping routes and supports faster, more efficient movement of products.

Beyond its geographical advantage, the plant stands out for its scale, modern equipment, stringent hygiene standards and high degree of automation.

### Safety first

The plant tour began with a detailed safety briefing. Visitors were provided with the required protective equipment and were instructed to remain within the designated walkways, maintain a safe distance from the machinery and avoid touching any product or production surface.

These precautions reflect the demanding hygiene requirements of aseptic packaging. Since the material is intended for food and beverage applications, every stage of production must be protected against dust, dirt and foreign matter.

The clean surroundings, disciplined movement of material and controlled production environment demonstrated the importance placed on product safety and process consistency.

### Two advanced printing lines

At the heart of the plant are two parallel Heidelberg Boardmaster printing lines. The presses have been configured to deliver high productivity, precise print reproduction and rapid job changeovers.

With a web width of 1,650-mm, the presses are designed for industrial-scale production. One of their most notable capabilities is the ability to move from one job to another without bringing the entire press to a halt. The flying-splice and automated changeover systems help reduce downtime, minimise material waste and improve overall productivity.

The printing operation is supported by an advanced plate-mounting and inspection system. Although plates are mounted on sleeves manually, the system scans the complete plate topography and conducts multiple checks to identify possible errors in mounting, curvature and pressure.

Each plate carries a unique code, enabling the inspection data to be transferred directly to the printing press. The press can then automatically apply the appropriate settings and pressure. This machine-to-machine communication reduces dependence on operator judgement and helps prevent errors before production begins.

Automation extends throughout the printing process. Inspection systems continuously monitor production parameters and provide feedback in fractions of a second.

This real-time supervision enables the plant team to detect and address deviations quickly. It also supports repeatability across jobs—an essential requirement for brand owners that expect consistent colour and print quality across different production batches and markets.









**One of the most impressive areas of the facility is its quality-control laboratory. Rather than limiting inspection to the finished laminate, the laboratory is equipped to evaluate incoming raw materials, intermediate structures and finished products**

### Building the aseptic laminate

Following printing, the material passes through the lamination process, where the different layers required for an aseptic packaging structure are brought together.

Paperboard provides stiffness and structural strength, while aluminium and polymer layers offer barrier, sealing and product-contact properties. The plant's extrusion-lamination system applies these layers under carefully controlled operating conditions.

Temperature, coating and other critical parameters are monitored after every stage. Even a minor variation can affect the performance of the finished laminate, particularly during package forming, filling and sealing at the customer's plant.

The production line applies the internal contact and sealing layers as well as the external protective coating. This multilayer construction helps protect the packed product while enabling the material to withstand subsequent converting and filling operations.

After lamination, the wide-web is slit into the required reel sizes for customers' filling machines. The material is handled through an automated system designed to reduce manual intervention and protect it from contamination.

### A quality laboratory

One of the most impressive areas of the facility is its quality-control laboratory. Rather than limiting inspection to the finished laminate, the laboratory is equipped to evaluate incoming raw materials, intermediate structures and finished products.

Paperboard, polymers, aluminium foil, print quality, layer adhesion, repeat length, laminate strength and folding characteristics are among the parameters tested.

A precision repeat-length tester checks the linear dimensions of the pack. Accurate repeat length is critical because any variation can affect package formation on the customer's filling line.

The laboratory also checks paper and laminate thickness, moisture content, bond strength and relative crease strength. Crease performance is especially important because the material must fold correctly during package formation without developing cracks that could compromise its barrier properties.

Another important test concerns the surface smoothness of the paperboard. The plant measures Parker Print-Surf values to assess whether the board surface is suitable for high-quality printing. A smoother and more consistent surface contributes to improved ink transfer and print reproduction, while the board must simultaneously retain the bulk and strength required for liquid packaging.

### Beyond production lines

Automation at Ain Sokhna continues into material handling and finishing. Rolls move through the different production stages with limited human intervention, while programmed systems help position, transfer and manage them.

The finishing area is designed to maintain hygiene and product integrity as the printed and laminated web is converted into customer-ready reels. Traceability and process data support the movement of each job through production.

This connected manufacturing approach brings together equipment, inspection systems and production information. It provides the plant team with greater control while making it easier to identify and correct deviations.

While the equipment is a central feature of the facility, the plant is equally defined by its people. Its workforce brings together professionals from India, Egypt and other countries, creating a diverse operational culture.■

## AIN SOKHNA FACILITY AT A GLANCE

**Investment:** USD 126-million
**Location:** Ain Sokhna, Suez Canal Economic Zone, Egypt
**Site area:** Approximately 30-acres
**Annual capacity:** 12-billion aseptic packs
**Commercial production:** Expected by the end of 2026
**First-year utilisation target:** Approximately 30%
**Second-year target:** 60–70%
**Full utilisation:** Targeted by 2030
**Combined Asepto capacity:** 24-billion packs annually
**Key markets:** Europe, CIS, Africa, GCC, West Asia and the Americas
**Key processes:** Printing, inspection, extrusion lamination, slitting, material handling, palletisation and final packaging
**Printing platform:** Heidelberg Boardmaster XL 1650
**Extrusion lamination:** SML Triplex
**Slitting:** IMS
**Automation and material handling:** CSI Madern
**Quality testing:** ABB L&W systems



Egypt offers a powerful combination of geographical reach, trade access and a strong domestic market. From Egypt, we can reach North and Latin America in approximately 30 days

**Ashwani Kumar Sharma,** president and CEO of UFlex's liquid packaging

# Asepto's Egypt plant will turn UFlex into a global powerhouse

With a capacity of 12-billion packs annually, UFlex's new Asepto facility in Ain Sokhna will double the company's aseptic packaging capacity to 24-billion packs. Ashwani Kumar Sharma, president and CEO of UFlex's liquid packaging business, discusses the technology behind the plant, Egypt's strategic importance, global growth ambitions and why sustainability will define the industry's future in conversation with **Rahul Kumar**

**Rahul Kumar (RK): Asepto entered the aseptic liquid-packaging business in 2017. How has the business developed since then?**
**Ashwani Kumar Sharma (AKS):** We started in India in 2017 and have not looked back. Our Indian facility has an annual capacity of 12-billion packs, although the actual output can vary according to the pack sizes being produced. Today, Asepto serves more than 250 customers worldwide and is present in approximately 50 countries. Around 35–40% of our production in India is exported.

The new facility in Egypt will add another 12-billion packs annually, taking our combined capacity to 24-billion packs. This places us among the world's top five aseptic packaging companies. The important point is that we have reached this position from virtually zero in less than a decade. We are no longer simply exporting from India. We are becoming a multi-location, globally positioned aseptic packaging company.

**RK: What differentiates Asepto from a conventional packaging-material supplier?**
**AKS:** We are an end-to-end aseptic liquid-packaging solutions provider. We do not only manufacture laminates. Our offering encompasses the packaging material, filling equipment, technical service, design support and value-added technologies. We offer filling machines capable of producing 10,000 packs per hour as well as high-speed lines capable of producing 25,000 packs per hour. We have more than 100 service engineers operating across different markets. This service platform, which we call AseptoPro, supports customers with technical assistance and machine maintenance.

We also have an in-house design shop that works with customers and their creative teams. It helps brands understand how their packs can become more attractive, meaningful and visible on the retail shelf. In India, we additionally have an annual capacity to manufacture 200-million paper straws. Therefore, our proposition extends from the packaging laminate and filling equipment to service, design and sustainability solutions.

**RK: Why did UFlex select Egypt?**
**AKS:** Egypt offers a powerful combination of geographical reach, trade access and a strong domestic market. From Egypt, we can reach North and Latin America in approximately 30 days. Depending on the destination, GCC markets can be served within two to ten days, Africa within five to 30 days, CIS markets in around ten days and Europe within five to ten days.

Ain Sokhna's location close to the port provides additional logistical advantages. We are also approximately one-and-a-half hours from Cairo. This allows us to import raw materials and export finished products efficiently while serving customers within Egypt very quickly.

Egypt also enjoys favourable trade arrangements with several important regions. Therefore, this investment is not based on geographical proximity alone; it combines logistics, market access, tariffs and the growth potential of Egypt itself.

The Middle East, Africa and Europe represent an aseptic-packaging market of approximately USD 26-billion, and we expect this market to grow strongly over the coming years.

**RK: What has UFlex invested in the Sokhna project?**
**AKS:** We have earmarked an investment of USD 126-million for the project, of which close to USD 100-million has already been invested. The Asepto facility occupies a land parcel of approximately 30 acres. The plant and its associated sales operations currently employ more than 400 people.

This is the first aseptic-packaging manufacturing plant in Egypt. We have brought experienced technical professionals from India to support installation, trials and skills development. They are training and upskilling the local workforce. As the Egyptian team gains the required capabilities and experience, it will progressively take complete ownership of the operations.

**RK: When will the commercial production begin?**
**AKS:** All the equipment is now operating at its optimum speed, and we have begun customer trials using their actual artwork. Commercial production is expected to begin soon — hopefully within the current calendar year — subject to the successful completion of customer validations and product life-cycle trials.

The plant has been designed for a capacity of 12-billion packs annually. We plan to utilise approximately 30% of this capacity during the first 12 months following commissioning, reach around 70% in the second year and move towards full utilisation in the third year.

Our immediate focus is to commis- ➜

sion and ramp up this facility successfully. We will consider the next major expansion only after utilisation moves beyond 70%. Maintaining focus is important when undertaking an investment of this scale.

**RK: Will Egypt take business away from the Indian operation?**
**AKS:** No. The Egypt operation will complement India rather than disturb its business. We have a clearly defined strategy covering the markets that will continue to be served from India, those that can be supplied from either location depending on format, and those that will be served predominantly from Egypt.

Egypt also gives us the ability to offer formats that are not currently manufactured in India. The product portfolio covers formats such as Base, Square, Mid, Slim, Ultra Lean, Spectra, Curve, Trio, Crown and Pillow, with multiple sizes within each category.

For North and South America, I would prefer to supply from Egypt because the sailing time can be approximately 30 days compared with more than 60 days from India. Similarly, Europe and Türkiye can be served much faster from Egypt.

India will continue to grow. Egypt, however, has been established to deliver exponential international growth.

**RK: How important is packaging differentiation to Asepto's strategy?**
**AKS:** When we entered this business, we studied products and consumer behaviour across supermarkets in India, Europe and the Americas.

We found that although sizes and shapes varied, aseptic cartons offered limited scope for aesthetic differentiation. We wanted to create a product that was world-class in functionality but also stood out on the shelf.

UFlex's experience in holography gave us a unique advantage. We integrated that capability into aseptic packaging and pioneered holographic and foil-stamped aseptic cartons.

These technologies are not purely decorative. Holography can also provide anti-counterfeiting and authentication benefits.

Brands are willing to invest when differentiation creates value. Fresca, for example, moved its portfolio to foil-stamped packs and has continued using them for several years. The company has seen significant value in how consumers perceive the brand.

Packaging cost must be evaluated against the value it creates. If a relatively small increase in packaging expenditure delivers stronger visibility, premium positioning and higher sales, it becomes a commercially attractive proposition.

**RK: What digital and smart-packaging features does Asepto offer?**
**AKS:** We offer dynamic QR-code technology through which every pack can be made unique. It supports track-and-trace requirements and allows brands to run consumer promotions and engagement programmes at the retail level.

Customers can create schemes around individual packs, generate consumer interaction and improve traceability across their supply chain.

We also have a magnetic design reader that controls the accurate movement of the laminate through the filling process. Accurate web movement supports productivity and consistency.

We plan to introduce the dynamic QR-code capability at the Egypt operation as the facility develops.

**RK: How is the plant's production information managed?**
**AKS:** Good manufacturing equipment must be supported by equally good information integration. Without this, a company cannot optimise its operations.

The UFlex Group operates on Oracle ERP, and we are replicating that infrastructure at the Egypt facility. The production equipment communicates directly with the ERP system.

We can monitor batches, productivity, material input and production output. Information travels directly from the equipment into the system.

We are also evaluating CRM platforms that can sit above the ERP. Since this is a global business, we need ready access to the history, installed equipment, discussions and requirements of customers in markets ranging from Canada and Norway to Uruguay.

Integrating CRM with ERP will provide a more complete picture of every global customer relationship.

**RK: How does the cost of manufacturing in Egypt compare with India?**
**AKS:** The fundamental cost structure is broadly comparable because the products use standardised inputs such as polymers, aluminium and paperboard. Our focus is not on compromising input quality to create a lower-cost product. We want customers to experience how Asepto's material can improve their productivity and reduce wastage on filling lines.

To manufacture excellent quality, three pillars are essential: state-of-the-art machinery, the best available raw materials and skilled people. If a company compromises on raw materials, inconsistencies will eventually appear in the product. We do not encourage that approach.

The Egypt plant should achieve lower production waste because job changes can be completed without repeatedly stopping and restarting the printing lines. Even an improvement of a few percentage points is meaningful at this scale. I am confident that this facility will deliver quality comparable with the best available anywhere in the world.

**RK: Is Asepto material compatible with existing filling systems?**
**AKS:** Our material is compatible with roll-fed filling machines. In most cases, it is essentially plug-and-play. It runs on different competing equipment platforms, including low-, medium- and high-speed roll-fed filling machines.

We also have a fleet of service engineers who can assist customers whenever technical support is required. Customers trust us not only with the quality and runnability of the packaging material but also with the maintenance of their existing machines.

We undertake annual maintenance contracts for equipment supplied by other manufacturers. This demonstrates the confidence customers have in our technical capabilities.

The service relationship also creates an opportunity to introduce Asepto filling lines as customers plan future investments.

**RK: What role does sustainability play in Asepto's product-development strategy?**
**AKS:** Sustainability will drive the next phase of innovation in packaging.

The most important measure is not how much material we manufacture or how many billions of packs we sell. The real question is how responsibly we manufacture and how effectively those materials can remain within a circular economy.

Packaging becomes meaningful when it can be recovered, recycled and ➔

used again over an extended period, reducing the requirement for virgin resources.

At the same time, sustainability must remain economically viable. Packaging cannot become so expensive that it is unaffordable to consumers. We must balance functionality, environmental responsibility and commercial practicality.

Smart packaging, automation, aesthetic innovation and supply-chain integration will all be important, but sustainability will sit at the top of the agenda.

**RK: What progress has UFlex made in recycling aseptic packaging?**
**AKS:** We have developed a patented enzymatic delamination process through which we can recover nearly 99% of the paper fibre from used aseptic packs while separating the paper, polymer and aluminium components.

The recovered fibre can be converted into moulded-pulp products such as egg trays. We can also bale the pulp and send it to paper mills, where it is converted into paper for non-food flexible-packaging applications.

The polymer-aluminium fraction, or poly-al, has traditionally been converted into composite boards and roofing sheets. These boards are waterproof and can be used in furniture, portable structures and other applications.

We have now taken this development further by converting the poly-al fraction back into resin and using it to produce a film. The prototype film retains visible aluminium content and could potentially be used as a middle layer in multilayer flexible-packaging structures.

The next stage is to scale the technology and complete the necessary application trials and regulatory certifications. The objective is to return both the recovered fibre and poly-al material to productive use.

UFlex has more than 100,000 tonnes of overall recycling capacity, including substantial capability for recycling multilayer packaging.

**RK: Is removing aluminium from aseptic cartons the ultimate sustainability objective?**
**AKS:** Aluminium provides an important barrier and also interacts with the induction-sealing system used on high-speed roll-fed filling lines.

It is technically possible to replace aluminium with high-barrier films or reduce it substantially through metallisation and barrier coatings. As a polymer-science company with experience in coatings and films, we understand these technologies and are working on them.

However, the question is not limited to whether a barrier structure can be created. The material and filling machine must work together.

If the aluminium layer is reduced to a metallised coating, the frequency and performance of the induction-sealing system may also need to change. The solution must therefore balance barrier properties, sealing performance, machine speed, cost and commercial scalability.

A laboratory or pilot concept must ultimately work at industrial scale and remain economically practical. We are prepared technologically, but the complete system must be validated.

**RK: Asepto offers 10,000- and 25,000-packs-per-hour filling lines. How significant is the higher-speed platform?**
**AKS:** We are among a very small number of companies globally capable of supplying a filling machine operating at 25,000 packs per hour. In Asia, we are the only company offering this speed, and globally we are second only to the largest established competitor.

The machine is performing well in India, and our next objective is to introduce both the 10,000- and 25,000-packs-per-hour platforms in international markets.

Filling equipment is a critical part of our end-to-end proposition. It allows us to combine packaging material, machinery, technical service and application support within a unified customer relationship.

**RK: How does geopolitical uncertainty influence UFlex's international manufacturing strategy?**
**AKS:** Geopolitics has become part of normal boardroom discussion. Some form of macroeconomic or geopolitical challenge will always exist.

Our multi-location manufacturing presence helps us maintain customer deliveries, raw-material availability and supply-chain agility during difficult periods.

Deep, long-standing relationships with suppliers and customers are also important. Scale and a differentiated manufacturing footprint provide resilience that smaller companies may not possess.

Every crisis also creates opportunities. Our responsibility is to understand how conditions are changing and use our geographical presence to respond intelligently.

The Egypt facility strengthens this resilience by giving Asepto a second major production base and placing us closer to several important markets.

**RK: You spent much of your career in the paper industry. How has that experience influenced Asepto?**
**AKS:** I began my career in India and later worked in Europe, where I became CEO and chairman of a sack-kraft paper company. I subsequently led Century's paper business in India, worked with APP in the United States and served as its global managing director in Indonesia before joining UFlex in 2014.

The transition from paper to aseptic packaging has been fascinating.

My background helps me understand fibre, forestry, pulp manufacturing, papermaking and different paper applications. Aseptic packaging involves marrying paper with polymers, so understanding both materials is extremely valuable.

We have also helped an Indian paper manufacturer develop liquid-packaging board. The company went through the learning curve and now produces significant volumes for us.

This experience enables us to evaluate how fibre and polymer structures interact and how they can be improved further.

**RK: Finally, how do you maintain your energy while managing such a demanding global business?**
**AKS:** Physical fitness and mental fitness are closely connected. If the body is not fit, the mind will also be affected.

Even when I am working for 12 hours or travelling extensively, I try to find time for physical training three or four times a week. I dedicate approximately 30–45 minutes to vigorous exercise whenever possible.

If I want to work hard, remain energetic and think clearly, I must ensure that my physical condition supports my mind.

My advice is simple: work hard, eat sensibly, stay fit and take care of yourself. Doing so helps you perform every responsibility better.■