

# Demand for Flexible Packaging Looks Northwards

After COVID-19 Outbreak



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“After COVID outbreak, we are seeing a good demand for certain types of packaging machines; so is the case for converting machines,” highlights Ajay Tandon, in dialogue with POLYMERS Communiqué.

**Q. If you have to name the top 5 attributes that have been the major business drivers for UFlex and its Engineering Business, which would they be?**

At UFlex, the growth of Engineering Business is geared by innovation backed approach that complements the customers’ packaging requirements. UFlex’ success can be attributed to,

- Unparalleled leadership at the top.
- Trust and respect for people.
- Thrust on new developments and innovations.
- Customer-centric approach.

- Work towards continuous improvement with an open mind.

**Q. From your Engineering Business, what is the next big thing in the pipeline for the industry to look forward to?**

UFlex' Engineering Business is determined to develop path-breaking technologies that are all set to give an experience of convenience and enhanced efficiency to its customers. These are:

- Wide web secondary slitters.
- Fully-automatic mask making machine.
- Continuous type, high-speed full servo VFFS machines.
- Continuous type, high-speed multi-track machines.
- Stick pack machines up to 600 mm web width.

**Q. What are the challenges you foresee for capital intensive business as yours in the post-COVID period?**

Capital goods are always the last to revive after depressed markets and hence, generally speaking, post-COVID it may be a challenge for capital goods industry to get back to its usual normal in a short time. As flexible packaging is one area which is least affected, our engineering, packaging and converting machines business is also less affected and, in fact, doing better than the previous year, so far.

**Q. In specific, how important are new developments and innovations going to be? Do you see a change in buying parameters in coming times?**

New product development and innovation will always continue to be the business focus. We consider innovation and new product development as one of the prime factors for maintaining our leadership position in the industry. Our management invests a large proportion of their time and focus along with the R&D team to create unparalleled engineering innovation.

With buyers getting sensitive and looking for improved quality every day, they will always look for value for money and the benefits they can get out of their purchase. In case of flexible packaging materials, key factors are likely to get strengthened; such as, barrier properties, safety

of products packed so as to also have anti-counterfeit features wherever required, customer convenience in handling and using the package, and the attraction / appeal of the pack. In case of machines related to flexible packaging, customers will be more inclined to the overall quality, reliability, new features, automation and machines with higher speeds giving higher productivity, meeting the Industry 4.0 norms.

**Q. With demands on urgent deliveries, is the industry witnessing a stock pileup of packaging machines? What do customers need to know?**

After COVID outbreak, we are seeing a good demand for certain types of packaging machines. So is the case for converting machines, as the flexible packaging material demand is looking northwards due to the hygiene factor spreading like wild fire even in certain backward towns and rural areas. End customer is now more conscious and is cognisant about importance of hygiene for them and their family. Accordingly, our intermediate customers need to build capacities to supply to the needs of the end customers.

**Q. High-speed packaging automation...is this a reality? Where are we today?**

In our country, we are still falling short of thinking 'big' and not really working as fast as our neighbouring countries in implementing things that make a 'big' difference. Higher speeds and automation are and will be the focal and integral areas for the Indian machine producers to look into, specifically to make the other manufacturing industries (using these machines) 'big'. There is absolutely no doubt about that.

**Q. Being a dominant player in packaging engineering, please share your plans relating to development of recycling machinery; a step that would have a huge impact in the near future.**

Mixed plastic laminate packaging is there to stay and grow in parallel with the flexible packaging consumption. It is the duty of packaging manufacturers to make this sustainable. Technically, it is very much possible to recycle mixed plastic laminate waste. We are doing the same in a reasonably big way at our Noida packaging plant. We offer the technology and equipment to the interested parties through

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our engineering businesses. Another area where UFlex is already working on solutions to make plastics sustainable is by producing bio-degradable plastic films for certain applications to begin with. For sustainability of plastic packaging, it is most important for the users to have discipline and to discard plastics in the correct manner after its use.

**Q. Please share with us your views on circular economy and its impact on the ecosystem.**

Today, mono-layer plastics are being recycled in reasonably big quantities. But the mixed plastic laminate waste has not been brought to the desired large-scale recycling stage. Imagine, with its proper disposal, proper collection and bringing it back with recycling, a new business opportunity can be created with a huge magnitude.

Recycling mixed plastic waste to form granules which can then be moulded into thousands of products and bringing this mixed plastic waste into circular economy helps the ecology. On the other hand, recycling of PET bottle waste can help development of an upcycled film which also has endless applications.

What could be a better solution than to treat PET bottle and mixed plastic waste, and generate wealth out of it. It is just a question of people and the industry coming forward and start segregating and recycling the discarded plastic waste. That day is also not far for sure and the good news is that some of the converters have already started adopting recycling processes. UFlex has adopted both these methodologies to reinstate the utility of plastic and form a loop economy.

**Q. In these trying times of the pandemic, what is the strategy you deployed to support the end customers in terms of delivery, installations and addressing production bottlenecks?**

The outbreak of pandemic was 'out of the blue', for which everyone was unprepared. With the vision and the great leadership of our Chairman and Managing Director, Mr. Ashok Chaturvedi, we took necessary permissions from the local

authorities and continued our operations during the lockdown period; this ensured uninterrupted supply of all packaging materials and machines to our customers in the FMCG and pharmaceutical space and meet public demand. Though we continued our operations, but we strictly followed all safety measures as advised by the authorities to protect our people from getting infected.

During the pandemic, we learnt a lot on how to tackle tough times. Yes, there were initial bottlenecks on the supply chain and raw material front, but we rose to the occasion and developed more with limited manpower. We shifted gears to digital mediums to reach out to our customers to give them the understanding of machine installation, commissioning and impart technical training without our physical presence on their production floor.

**Q. Who do you consider to be your greatest mentor?**

My personal belief is that there need not be just one mentor. There can be more from whom one can learn and get inspired. On professional front, I admire the ideologies and philosophies of Mr. Ratan Tata, admire the speed and risk-taking abilities of Mr. Mukesh Ambani and, in our packaging industry, I respect none other than our Chairman and Managing Director, Mr. Ashok Chaturvedi who has created one of its only kind, this totally vertical integrated empire and made UFlex a brand known world over in the field of flexible packaging and films. On personal front, my father taught me the values in life.

**Q. Your advice to the gen-next of our industry.**

Flexible packaging is set to grow manifolds in decades to come. Sky is the limit, especially in the country as populous as India. My suggestion to the engineering fraternity is to compete with technology and not get into a price war; instead, get into new product development with innovation for everyone's good. Keep growing with caution and step-by-step, don't try to hop, skip and jump.

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