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Creating Innovations in Packaging



Amitava Ray
Executive Director, UFlex Ltd

UFlex is India's largest multinational flexible packaging materials and Solution Company and a leading global player in Polymer Sciences. Since its inception back in 1985, UFlex has grown from strength to strength to evolve as a truly Indian Multinational with consumers spread across the world. UFlex Ltd. has recently developed a Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Coverall 'Flex Protect' in joint collaboration with IIT-Delhi and INMAS, DRDO, Delhi. Flex Protect that comes with Four-layered Protection and Anti-microbial Coating has been approved by The Defense Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) for use by the front-line health workers who are fighting the battle against COVID-19.

Mr. Amitava Ray, Executive Director, UFlex Ltd in an exclusive interview with PharmaBio World gives our readers an insight into the successful development of this revolutionary kit as well as into the various achievements of UFlex Ltd.

Q: Congratulations. UFlex and IIT-Delhi have jointly developed a Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Coverall 'Flex Protect' in joint collaboration with IIT-Delhi and INMAS, DRDO, Delhi. Please share with our readers about the idea and the achievement.

Ans- Thank you very much! Indeed, it was an innovative effort from our R&D team along with the team from IIT-Delhi. I also extend my special thanks to ace designer Manish Tripathi for his innovative thought behind designing multi-layered security in 'Flex Protect Coverall'.

The idea that triggered the development of 'Flex Protect' Coverall was the lack of breathability in PPE kits that are being used so far by our frontline workers, to treat the coronavirus patients. The kits used are quite thick and cause discomfort during long wears. It was also observed that the PPE kits which are currently used have certain gaps that provides limited barrier against the virus from entering through the stitches and openings.

'Flex Protect' Coverall is an answer to these shortcomings and enhances the safety of health workers. It allows 30% better breathability and confirms to ISO 16603 standards. I am also glad to share that with Flex Protect' Coverall we have enhanced the safety of the health workers up to 100% as the fabric is coated with anti-microbial properties and certified by South Indian Textiles Research Association (SITRA)

Q: Can you provide our readers an overview of the company?

Ans- UFlex is India's largest multinational flexible packaging

materials and solutions Company and a leading global player in Polymer Sciences. Since the inception back in 1985, we have evolved as a truly Indian Multinational with consumers spread across the world. Integrated within our core business profile of Packaging and Packaging Films are our allied businesses like Aseptic Liquid Packaging, Engineering, Cylinders, Holography and Chemicals that create a value chain across packaging cycle to help brands fulfill consumer needs. As on date UFlex has state-of-the-art packaging facilities at multiple locations in India with installed capacity of around 1,35,000 TPA and has packaging film manufacturing facilities in India, UAE, Mexico Egypt, Poland and USA. We are expanding our global footprint further with new plants for Packaging Films in Russia, Nigeria and Hungary.

Today, we cater to markets spanning across the globe in over 140 countries. We offer technologically superior packaging solutions across multiple industries such as FMCG, Pharmaceuticals, Agriculture, Automotive, Engineering, Construction, Beauty and Skincare, Brand Protection, Packaging films, Printing inks etc.

UFlex is a winner of various prestigious national and international awards for its products' excellence including Dow Packaging Innovation Award in 2018 and PrintWeek India 'Packaging Company of the Year 2019'. We were also the 'first company in the world to recycle mix plastic waste' for which we earned recognition at Davos Recycle Forum in 1995.

Q: UFlex is one of the world's leading organizations providing brand protection and anti-counterfeiting

solutions to its customers globally. What are the cutting edge technologies provided by UFlex to develop and produce its anti-counterfeiting solutions for brand protection?

Ans – The world of packaging is entrusted with the responsibility to safeguard business interest of the brand owners from malpractices such as duplicity and counterfeiting. It is alarming to know that the drugs counterfeit market is almost double the size of legitimate pharmaceutical market, which is why at UFlex we have developed cutting-edge and non-duplicable overt and covert technologies in purview of 'Brand Protection', such as Fast Tear Strip Foil, PET based Cold Form Blister, Child Resistant & Senior Friendly Foil and Branding Solutions.

The packaging solutions for pharmaceutical are complemented with holographic anti-counterfeit offerings such as Registered Holographic lens for cartons, Self-adhesive holographic product labels, Metalized Holographic PVC, Transparent Holographic PVC, Holographic Aluminium lidding foil, Holographic Stamping Strips for PVC, Alu foil, Shrink Sleeves & Alu-Alu foils, etc. The solutions can be customized for all packaging needs for Pharmaceutical segment.

Q: How vastly and methodically has UFlex invested in its Research and Development team, considering its multifarious range of offered products?

Ans– Packaging is an ever-changing and dynamic concept that is triggered by shifting needs and buying behavior of the consumer, brand focus and innovation. Serving our clients with customized, high-quality and unique packaging

UFLEX
A part of your daily life

FLEX PROTECT
THE CAPE TO PROTECT THOSE WHO PROTECT US ALL

JOINTLY CREATED BY UFLEX AND IIT DELHI

- Special Fabric with low GSM for longer wear
- High Strength Seam Cover Tape
- Elimination of Cross Seam
- Double Forearm Protection
- Multi-Layer fastening with four layer security

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solutions is of utmost importance to UFlex. Recognizing the increasing demand from customers for our various offerings, we are steering the path of innovation by developing cutting edge technology and products that meets the needs of our patrons. This requires continuous focus on innovation and investment in R&D. We have a robust team of scientists and engineers working on developments of products for all the verticals that we house. They help us develop at least 10-12 new products every year.

To highlight a few milestones, we have developed Alu-Alu blister packs, which is a replacement to the conventional Cold Form Laminate. Alu-Alu packaging is a special polyester film that has

replaced the conventional Nylon and PVC while retaining Aluminum in it. For this unique development, UFlex has also been granted a US patent.

Then a Green film 'Asclepius' has been developed by UFlex which blends up to 100% of post-recycled content thereby helping brand owners have a packaging that is green sourced without any compromise on its attributes and create a loop economy.

We have also developed FlexFresh™, a modified atmospheric packaging that provides extended shelf life to perishable produce.

Our Engineering Business has developed RELAM 250 machine, a one of its kinds recycling machine induced

with a technology that makes all types of multi-layered flexible plastics (MLP) bags, carry bags etc. be recycled homogeneously into granules, without separating layers of plastic and aluminum.

Our chemicals business has also launched multiple path-breaking products that revamped the scope of chemicals and inks in printing over packaging. We launched Water-based Ink for paper printing for flexible packaging, paper & board segments. Some others like FlexSeal HSL-WBHS 18, a heat seal lacquer that is water-based and balances low seal initiation temperature with high seal strength was developed. Keeping in view our sustainable nature, we launched Flex Seal Blister Coating (Water based PUD), Aqueous narrow web ink and Aqueous water resistant OPV to name a few.

Our R&D team at Holography has developed various brand identity and protection solutions that have proven to be extremely beneficial to pharma companies in arresting counterfeiting.

UFlex R&D is developing a technology that will make plastic films biodegradable as well recyclable. Thus, the plastic waste that remains uncollected and seeps into landfills shall become biomass at the end of its assigned life.

Q: UFlex Group has been a trendsetter when it comes to sustainable innovation and commitment towards the 'Circular Economy'. Could you tell us more about the 'Project Plastic Fix' – the initiative designed to make the UFlex a part of a solution to keep plastic in the economy and out of the environment.

Ans– Project Plastic Fix is UFlex Group's global sustainability initiative which is intended towards keeping the plastic in the economy and out of the environment. The Project Plastic Fix will convert plastic waste into products that have an economic value. In essence, 'waste becomes wealth'. UFlex will have a mix of various methodologies as part of Project Plastic Fix.

1. Recycling plastic waste into granules which can be further used to make household and industrial essentials products such as dustbins, paver tiles, outdoor furniture, road dividers etc.
2. Converting plastic bottle waste and MLP into Green plastic packaging. Asclepius is our special range of BOPET film having as much as 100% PCR content and has the same properties and application as any standard fossil-fuel based substrate twin. This method creates an endless loop of polymer that is reused to make a new product each time.
3. Reprocessing plastic waste into fuel through Pyrolysis, which emits zero carbon emission. So what could have been incinerated is reused to produce energy employing an anaerobic system that ensures zero carbon emission.
4. UFlex is working to introduce a Biodegradable and Recyclable renewable solution product that will convert uncollected plastic waste/laminate waste into biomass, upon degradation.

The first leg of it has already been launched in India with the commencement of our PCR and PCPR lines in Noida that

washes and recycles post-consumer PET Bottles and Multi-layer Packaging waste collected from Delhi-NCR thereby helping reduce plastic waste and turn them into valuable commodities. UFlex is working on similar models to be implemented across our facilities globally.

Q: What impacts and / or transformations do you see digitization and digitalization make in the Pharma Packaging industry? How do you think it is changing the today & tomorrow of the industry?

Ans– Digitisation and Digitalization are the buzzwords in the packaging industry. Compared to other sectors, pharmaceutical production and packaging underlies more demanding regulations. Changes in Pharma packaging production mean changes to the machines and processes which could ultimately impact the whole value chain. Nevertheless, it is today 'A need, not greed.'

For a while now, pharmaceutical brands and converters have been contemplating on fully digitizing and digitalizing their packaging. One might say that this COVID19 is the 'straw that broke the camel's back,' but both Digitization and Digitalization are going to drive the growth of packaging industry in the near future and so on. As the dependence on man-driven processes will get automated, packs will become self-communicative and a huge quantum of supplies will be easily met. I am sure, that the relevance of both these terms in pharmaceutical packaging will be ascertained in no time, once the vaccine of Novel Coronavirus is found.

Q: How do you think that your products, services and digitalization methods will impact maintaining sustainability in this dynamic industry?

Ans– At UFlex, sustainability is the first focus. We are an environmentally responsible organization and each of our product, process and service comply to the sustainable norms and beyond. With more digitalization methods coming into picture, we can surely look up to lesser industrial waste and achieve economies of scale while continuing the sustainable practices of converting 'waste to wealth' in parallel so that the offerings retain their utility for a longer time and in loop but it's impact on environment and the surroundings can be nullified

Q: Make in India is a major new national program of the Government of India designed to gain momentum for investment, innovation and enhance skill development and build best in class manufacturing in the country. What is the impact of this program on Pharma packaging sector?

Ans – The Make in India initiative gave a thrust to strengthen the self-dependence notion within the country. Much as many sectors got a boost, so did the packaging for pharmaceutical sector gained impetus. With the initiative by Gol the local manufacturing of medicinal drugs witnessed a rise and so did our dependence on foreign manufacturers lessened.

A study by IBEF (Indian Brand equity foundation) Indicate Indian domestic pharmaceutical market turnover Rs 1.4 lakh crore (US\$ 20.03 billion) in 2019, growing 9.8 per cent year-on-year (in Rs) from Rs 129,015 crore (US\$ 18.12

billion) in 2018 and is likely to reach \$ 158 bn by 2025. Packaging that carries pharmaceutical from the point of manufacturing till point of consumption also had a proportionate rise as a matter of sector growth. However the growth also led to fake drugs manufacturing and counterfeiting on the other hand, which has been well curbed by the development of track and trace technology by the offerings as part of pharma packaging.

Q: Your views on the future of Pharma Packaging in India and where do you think the market is heading under the current circumstances?

Ans- Being under the umbrella of pharmaceutical sector, the growth of pharmaceutical packaging market is also exponential. A recent study by Markets & Markets underlines pharma packaging sector's growth at a CAGR of 6.27% to reach up to \$ 111.9 bn by 2024. However the packaging sector faces the warmth of business challenges as there is always a constant pressure from the companies to curtail the cost of final packaging without compromise on the packaging quality and aesthetics.

It is noteworthy to state that the global trends in pharma packaging are moving towards compliance packaging which provokes use of high quality barriers and solutions to pack pharma produce which aid to make it easy for the patient to use them. The trends in pharma packaging are also transformed as a result of business focus of Pharmaceutical drug manufacturing companies, which are speedily turning towards adopting eco-friendly packages to overcome environment related concerns arising due to packaging materials. Hence it is a backward integration of analysing the demands and constituting deliveries.

Q: The Pandemic has caught us all off guard and pushed us to the edge of a new normal. Being the market leader in your domain, how do you think it has impacted UFlex's work process as well as operation?

Ans - Coronavirus is unique and every one was unprepared as anyone else. It would be apt to state that 'believing in ourselves' was the biggest strength we had while coping up with the current pandemic. Being an essential commodity to FMCG and pharmaceutical sector, we were prompt to get necessary permissions to operate during the lockdown; however the challenges that we faced in the initial phase were related to movement of raw material, finished goods and shortage of manpower. As India is gradually unlocking, we are back to normal and are operating at almost full capacity with increased hygiene, proper sanitization and safety protocols.

Q: Though there are still lots of uncertainties, there is also a new opportunity to do better. How is UFlex looking at this unfamiliar challenge?

Ans- The outbreak of COVID-19 has left everyone bewildered, like many other organizations the initial few days were a matter of struggle for UFlex as well. However since we are an into packaging of essential commodities for lifeline sectors such as Pharmaceuticals and FMCG, we were able to avail necessary permissions to continue our operations. We relied upon the three Ps of Production, Planning and Productivity to lift our capacity utilization and as on date we are operating at almost full capacity to meet the needs of the essential sectors with the belief to 'Do More with Less' now and going further.

I am sure that in times to come there will be more innovation and findings to make packaging thinner yet sustainable, which has always been a preference by pharmaceutical companies hence I foresee use of mono-layers in packaging for pharma products.

In addition to this, anti-microbial and sustainable packaging will play a major role in strengthening the scope of packaging in the pharmaceutical space. UFlex has already been focusing on creating sustainable pharmaceutical packs, our Alu-Alu Blister Packs being one of the best examples of that. We would now want to see how we can blend anti-microbial pharma packaging into this and other pharma packaging formats that we manufacture, so as to address pharma companies' need and allay consumers' fear.■