

Ink-jet printer cost recouped through reliability

Custom dressing and sauce manufacturer praises the performance of its industrial ink-jet printer, purchased four years ago and still 'running like a champ.'

Anne Marie Mohan, Senior Editor


No matter how prudent a packager may be when shopping for new machinery, there will always be some risk involved with purchasing packaging equipment. And in today's tough economy, buyers are looking for even more assurances that their machinery investments will pay off. Says Pat Newsham, president of St. Louis-based dressing and sauce maker Arcobasso Foods, "Whether you are spending \$5,000, \$10,000, or \$400,000, you want to feel comfortable that it's going to be a reliable piece of equipment—especially in this day and age."

That's why Arcobasso is pretty pleased with the results it has achieved with an ink-jet printing system purchased in 2006 and still "running like a champ," as Newsham says. Four years ago the company installed two ProSeries® 384 high-resolution ink-jet print heads, along with a Marksman® Pro controller, from **FoxJet**, An ITW Co. (www.foxjet.com), supplied by **R.V. Evans Co.** (www.rveco.com). Since then, Newsham attests, the system's reliability has been unparalleled.

"I think of all the equipment and other things that we have issues with," he says. "We have never had a complaint or a problem with the FoxJet equipment."



TWO-SIDED. Two ink-jet print heads are positioned on either side of the packaging line conveyor and are mounted to a box taper for easy changeover.

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Flexibility is critical

Arcobasso is a custom manufacturer of sauces, dressings, and marinades that serves a variety of customers, from retail to restaurant to foodservice. Given the range of end-use applications for its products, Arcobasso's packaging includes three types of glass bottles, as well as larger drums for foodservice use. The bottles—in a small, retail size; a 1-L bottle; and two different gallon-bottle sizes—are all filled on the same packaging line, requiring maximum machine flexibility.

In 2006, one of Arcobasso's largest customers required printing on both sides of its shipping cases. "They wanted us to print on both sides of the boxes so that when the cases were stacked on a pallet in a warehouse, the print would always be visible, no matter which way the boxes were turned," Newsham says. At the time, this was a new practice for Arcobasso; since then, Newsham relates, many customers have added this requirement.

The information that was to be duplicated on both sides of the box included a bar code, a case code, a case ID number, the product description, and the expiration date. At the time, Arcobasso's existing printing equipment was only capable of printing on one side of a case. Another drawback was that it could only print a limited number of lines, Arcobasso plant manager Jim Whelehon adds.

The solution was a system of dual ProSeries 384 high-resolution ink-jet print heads capable of printing bar codes, logos, graphics, and text up to 2 in. high.

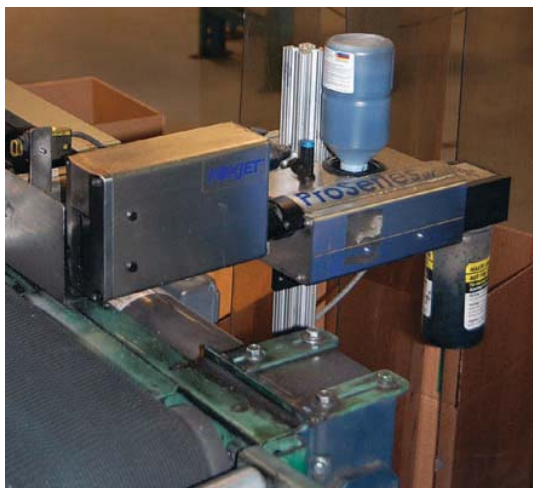
The print heads are positioned on either side of the packaging-line conveyor, mounted to a Belcor box taper from **Wexxar** (www.wexxar.com). To accommodate the numerous bottle sizes run on the line, Arcobasso uses eight different case sizes. By mounting the print heads onto the box taper, the company eliminated the need for manual adjustment of the print heads during changeover. "When we change over box sizes, our print heads automatically move with the setup for the box taper, so we never have to make any adjustments to the print heads," explains Whelehon.

Another feature of the printing system that allows for easy change-over is its use of FoxJet's Marksman Pro controller with LCD touch-screen display. According to Newsham, because the industrial controller is Windows-based, "almost anyone who is familiar with the basics of a PC can jump right in and master the system, as far as setting up new products and making any changes or adjustments." He adds, "It is very simple to move the print on a box if needed or change the font size. It's very, very user-friendly."

At its top speed, the FoxJet printer at Arcobasso runs at 24 cases/min. An encoder on the system keeps track of the case speed, ensuring that "the print size remains consistent, no matter how fast the box is moving," says Whelehon.

Value extends beyond cost

When it comes to consumables, Newsham and Whelehon agree that FoxJet's ink bottles provide good value, ease of use, and high quality. Each bottle of ink is said to last several weeks, "running a lot of product," says Whelehon.




EASY CHANGEOVER. Ink bottles are easily replaced by unscrewing the empty container and replacing it with a full bottle. No purging is required.

He adds: "As far as replacing the ink, when the bottle runs out, a low ink warning will come up on the screen to let you know that the bottle is empty. Bottle changeover is as simple as a quarter of a turn to the left, you pull the bottle off, grab the new bottle, put it back in its place, and give it a quarter turn to the right. That's all you need to do. There is no purging. You don't need to bleed the air out of the print head. It is all done automatically."

As for the print quality, Whelehon says it is "top-notch": "The print is just very crisp and very clean, and bar codes are easy to scan and to read."

The payoff for Arcobasso is that the FoxJet has met its printing needs and then some. "The cost benefit has been great," says Newsham. "The printer doesn't break down; it puts the ink on right every time. There has never been an issue where the FoxJet has caused us to stop the line."

Whelehon agrees, citing the system's consistency, durability, and reliability. "It does everything we need," he concludes. 

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