



Ercus Packaging becomes a solely digital in-house packaging operation able to drive innovation

For more than 110 years, the companies of Ercus Group have provided innovative solutions to its customers while demonstrating a commitment to a sustainable future for Mexico. Ercus is primarily a food and beverage group that also works closely with farmers to improve crop yields, conserve resources and help them overcome poverty. To support its food and agricultural business, since the 1950s Ercus printed its own packaging in a continually growing operation.



ERCUS
PACKAGING

Industry sector: Labels & Packaging

Business name: Ercus Packaging, part of the Ercus Group

Headquarters: Mexico City, Mexico

Interviewees: Alejandro España, chairman of the board, Ercus Group

HP equipment: 1 x HP Indigo WS6000 Digital Press; 2 x HP Indigo WS6600 Digital Press;
1 x HP Indigo WS6800 Digital Press; 1 x HP Indigo 20000 Digital Press

Website: grupoercus.com



Challenge

“We weren’t printers, yet we had carton and flexible packaging capabilities that included conventional offset, gravure and digital printing technologies. Who would have thought that we’d carry out the largest digital printing job ever, or that it would lead to becoming a 100 per cent digital packaging business?”

Alejandro España, chairman of the board, Ercus Group



Developing an in-house digital printing capability

Candy making is at the core of Ercus Group’s business. Today the company is one of the largest domestic confectioners in Mexico with 100 varieties of hard candy, compressed tablets, liquorice and chocolates.

“Package printing began at Ercus to ensure reliable supplies and prices,” says Alejandro España. “We began with offset litho and later added gravure, moving from one to two to three colours. We were printing 10,000 – 15,000 bags at a time, which is a lot of candy but a very short gravure run. In 2005, we had the chance to buy a used HP Indigo WS2000 Digital Press which allowed us to eliminate expense of make-ready but retain high-quality colour print.”

In 2010, convinced of the benefits of digital printing for flexible packaging, Ercus installed the HP Indigo WS6000 Digital Press. “For us, this was the big breakthrough,” says Alejandro España. “The faster speed and improved print quality were well suited to our needs and we could make money printing for ourselves and other customers. We could do runs of 10,000 photo-quality pieces with no plates or chemicals and with full colour variable data print.”

Two HP Indigo WS6600 Digital Presses were subsequently added in 2013, and with this capacity, Ercus began to pursue the idea of being the company to print the ‘Share a Coke’ campaign in Mexico.

“There was only one small problem: we weren’t packaging printers – we were a candy company,” says Alejandro España.

Solution

“Having printed 650 million labels for the ‘Share a Coke’ campaign, our experience with HP Indigo digital presses convinced us that this technology was best for us and that the investment in the HP Indigo 20000 Digital Press would be the right move.”

Alejandro España, chairman of the board, Ercus Group



Sharing the experience

With the assistance of Peter Overbeek, CEO of Eshuis BV in the Netherlands, who had coordinated the European ‘Share a Coke’ campaign, Ercus’s printing capabilities, location and experience, secured the job for the Mexican market.

“One of the factors was that we had been printing flexible packaging and understood tension control, which is important for the Coke wrap around labels,” says Alejandro España. “Other HP Indigo presses weren’t centrally located, and those close by were printing self-adhesive labels with thick substrates where tension control isn’t as critical as it is for unsupported film. In the end, we printed 650 million personalised labels for the campaign. Not bad for a company that wasn’t a printer.”

The HP Indigo presses strengthened Ercus’s position as a packaging supplier for external customers, and made it more attractive to its own marketing department and designers, enabling faster responses, greater flexibility and creativity. “Without the constraints of conventional print, we are able to make our own products more attractive and innovative,” he says. “It’s also opened a lot of doors.”

In October 2014, Ercus installed an HP Indigo 20000 Digital Press, providing a larger format for the production of pouches and other products. “With the great team from HP and our own expert team, the press was installed and running in a month,” he says. “We trained 15 operators in two weeks – that would be unthinkable for conventional presses.” Ercus Packaging was 80 per cent digital until mid-2015, it retired its last conventional press to become the first fully digital in-house packaging operation of its size in the world.

Result

“Packaging informs the palate. Very few people have the ability to distinguish between the taste of common foods: chocolate, coffee, even wine. The expectation created by packaging and labels is a major part of the experience and enjoyment of a product.”

Alejandro España, chairman of the board, Ercus Group



Making digital print work for ourselves and for others

The success of Ercus Packaging has enabled Alejandro España to replicate activities helping Mexican cocoa growers to benefit its coffee producers.

“The Ercus Foundation is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation that helps farmers through financial aid, economic education, technological development and partnerships,” explains Alejandro España. “The foundation guarantees the purchase of raw materials from producers. Commodities like cocoa and coffee go through many processes and between each, there is often a middle-man; eliminating them means farmers can earn more. The Café Franqueza project is aimed at helping coffee growers escape poverty.”

“Working with Chambers of Commerce, the OECD, the UN and other foundations and agencies, we are helping them improve their yields and get fair prices for their crops,” he says.

“To promote the Café Franqueza brand, we have printed pictures of coffee farmers with a brief biography and a map showing their location on each pouch of coffee,” he says. “Initially, we printed 5,000 pouches (1,500 linear metres) each of three designs. With the HP Indigo 20000 Digital Press we aim to print thousands of different designs with images of farmers on them.”

“We showed these to Walmart and they took up the brand within two weeks,” he continues. “The Walmart Foundation is also part of the Café Franqueza initiative. For us, the whole transformation to being 100 per cent digital with our HP Indigo presses has been an exciting and empowering development,” Alejandro España concludes. “It also means that we are now a packaging printer.”



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