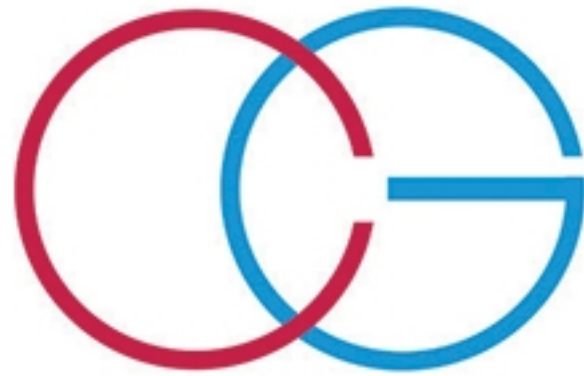


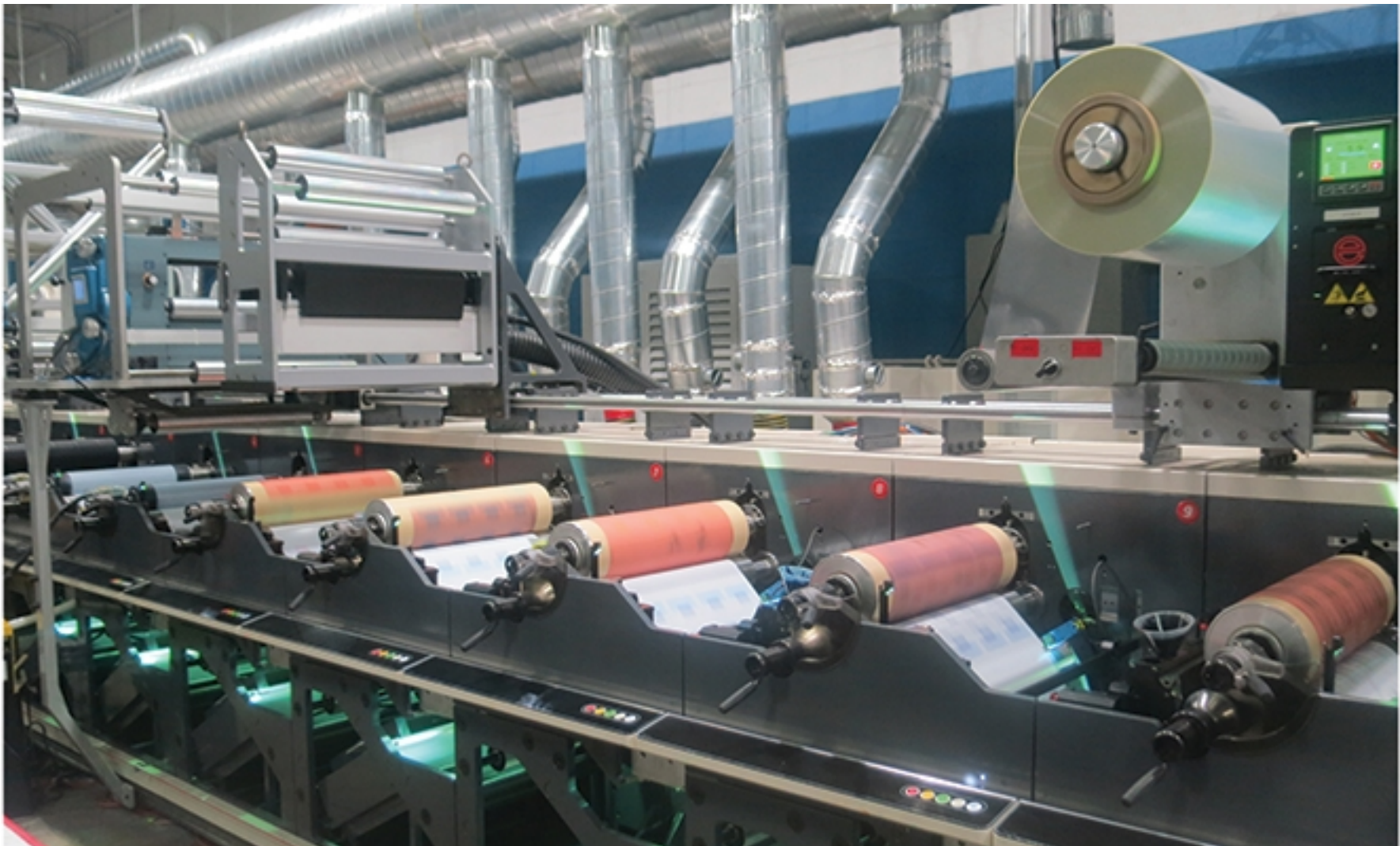
Features

Companies To Watch: Control Group USA



CONTROL GROUP®

Printed Packaging Solutions: Pharmaceutical • Cosmetic • Consumer



The Nilpeter FA-6* installed at Control Group

Control Group USA

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Control Group, a label and flexible packaging converter that has been in business for nearly 50 years, has made its name thinking outside the box and investing in research and development. Established in 1971, Bill Cheringal and Jeff Levine took over the business in 1987, with a goal of printing flexo labels. As customers were shifting from cut labels to roll-to-roll, the pair molded the business, capitalizing on Levine's expertise in pharmaceutical labels.

Control Group benefited from significant growth in pharma labels, and the partners decided to expand into flexible packaging by investing in a 20", 8-color Mark Andy press in 1998. "They purchased it without having any packaging business, but they knew that was the future," explains Jim Imburgia, COO at Control Group. "That enabled us to do pouches and some of the other finer packaging." Further growth necessitated a move to Control Group's current location in 2008. Inhabiting a facility that used to make parts for space shuttles, the company purchased the building and totally renovated it. The renovation included purchases such as two Aquaflex presses.

"We were running things that were not normal for the average flexo guy," says Imburgia. "It was thermoform work running on plastic. Getting the inks to work was a project because it's not something that's readily available. In fact, it wasn't available, so we designed the inks with a couple of different vendors and it worked. And that was our foray into flexible packaging, and from there the business has really taken off."

Today, Control Group has 65 employees and maintains three buildings. The main building, located at 500 Walnut Street, accounts for nearly 65,000 square feet, although the company operates over 100,000 square feet across all of its locations. In the last 10 years, the company has tripled its operational space and number of employees. Current growth rates have also spurred a search for additional space.

The expanding business led Control Group to purchase its first Nilpeter press, a 13" FG hybrid servo press with 12 color stations, rotary screen and cold foil, as well as diecutting. "Our relationship with Nilpeter was actually really unusual and really good," explains Imburgia. "We bought that first FG, and a press like that hadn't really been designed yet. We had a great idea for a press, so we called up Nilpeter and said we just need someone to build it. They said, 'You must've read our minds,' because they wanted to build this press, and they were wondering if they could find someone who would buy one like that. We hooked up on the very first press, and everything that went on from when it got delivered and we installed it was great; nothing ever kept us from printing. Nilpeter was Johnny-on-the-spot and it was more than what I had anticipated. I think that's because they're a great company."

Control Group's positive experiences with the FG led it to invest in two more Nilpeter presses. The FA-6, a 13-color press with rotary screen, was the first one in North America to be that size with that many colors. Most recently, Control Group added a Nilpeter 22" FA-6*. Its third Nilpeter press, also featuring 13 colors, caught Control Group's eye at Labelexpo Americas 2016 in Chicago. Imburgia adds that the new FA-6* is also "one of a kind."

The company still does most of its work in the pharmaceutical labeling area, which includes some two-sided labels. Health and beauty also generates work, especially in the flexible packaging market. Control Group is responsible for printing flexible packaging for anti-inflammatory drugs, nicotine patches and sample pouches for cosmetics.

In addition, Control Group has an HP IndigoWS6800 digital label press. Imburgia says that the company does a lot of pharma labeling on the HP and cites its reliable register. Control Group was recently the recipient a TLMI award for a digitally printed flexible package—a champagne bottle that is designed as a container to hold a glass.

Control Group has built its business on a willingness to take chances. The converter is not afraid to heavily invest in R&D, and this long-term vision can often take several years before a product comes to market.

"A lot of our requests are not normal jobs, and that's why customers come to us," says Imburgia. "Our specialty is that we do the jobs that everybody else looks at and says, 'It's too much work, and it'll take two years to get the R&D done.' Most people are looking for that quick hit that'll be done tomorrow. We plan ahead."

One of Control Group's current projects is set to come to market within the next couple of months. That product has spent three years in the research and development phase. "As far as the future goes, we're poised to do some really great things," says Imburgia. "We have so many R&D projects, and if any one of them comes to fruition it's a game changer. If you talk to any of the vendors we use, they'll tell you that we don't do the normal jobs. We're way off the sidetrack."

Control Group has built a niche with its finishing capabilities. The company specializes in special finishes and effects like foil and rotary screen, as well as extremely complicated diecuts. It has established relationships with Gonderflex, which has provided Control Group with three inspection rewinders. It also relies on Rotoflex and PC Industries quality control units on all of the presses and rewinders.

“I think we’ve seen the packaging industry change so much over the last 10 years. Ten years ago, 15 years ago, everyone was consumed with doing soda bottle wrap in BOPP, and everyone was looking to get into that business,” says Imburgia. “What happens is eventually it gets to a point where everyone’s doing it, so the designs are not fulfilling and it becomes ‘plain Jane.’ What we’re doing here is stuff that’s so out of the ordinary on materials that you wouldn’t even think about running it.

“Watch us over the next year – there’s going to be a lot of great products coming from us,” he adds. –*Greg Hrinya*