

A three-part modernization strategy helped Vista Color transform its high end commercial printing skill set into a profitable folding carton business. By Jackie Schultz

In the 43 years that US based Vista Color has been in existence, the Miami, Florida, company has served a variety of markets in the graphic arts industry. Jesus Serrano started the company in 1968 as a color separator. With the advent of desktop publishing and the Internet, the company was forced to evolve into a prepress supplier and then a commercial printer

VISTA COLOR'S EVOLUTION

specializing in fashion and jewelry catalogs and annual reports.

Serrano's son, Henry, President of Vista Color, recognized that commercial printing was a mature and saturated industry that offered no growth. He knew that he was going to have to reinvent the company yet again in order to stay in business. "That's when I met Juan," he says.

Juan Roque worked for a pharmaceutical printing operation, one of the largest in Florida. The company wanted to consolidate and was looking for a buyer. Roque and Serrano soon became partners, establishing Vista Color as a folding carton manufacturer.

Initially, the company kept the commercial printing business, but the two partners viewed folding cartons as a more stable market. "Over time we realized we were really good at printing folding cartons in full color because we had the prepress background and data management," Serrano says. "We started a strategy to one day completely exit commercial printing and only focus on folding cartons and packaging printing."

Last year the company made the final transition out of commercial printing and today is 100 percent folding carton.



From left, Henry Serrano, Vista Color President, Juan Roque, VP of Sales & Marketing, and Jess Hernandez, VP of Operations, next to the new Bobst Expertfold 110 A-2 CS folder-gluer.

Expansion Plan

Vista Color employs 67 people and operates two shifts from its 50,000-sq-ft facility. As part of the decision to focus on folding cartons, Serrano and Roque, who is Vice President of Sales and Marketing, implemented an aggressive three-part modernization and expansion plan that included upgrading the facility for improved workflow, purchasing new equipment and training personnel.

"We decided to upgrade all of our older technology and bring in the most modern and efficient type of equipment we could," Serrano says. This included the installation of a Bobst Expertfold 110 A-2 CS folder-gluer. The folder-gluer was on exhibit at the 2011 IADD•FSEA Odyssey in Nashville, Tennessee, in May, running a complex multi-step Nashville-themed folder.

Serrano and his Finishing Manager, Marco Ferrer, traveled around the U.S. evaluating several different gluers. "When we saw the Expertfold we immediately knew that it was not just a new machine but a jump in technology. On a smaller footprint we can do all types of boxes — lock bottom, four corner, six corner, straight line, trays and folders. The machine is very versatile."

The Expertfold can fold and glue more than 3,000 different box styles and can handle all grades of cartonboard. It assures

near 100 percent quality control with a Bobst Flipper-Ejector, which monitors and automatically removes defective products without slowing the speed. Vista Color's machine has a Baumer hhs extrusion glue system with quality control.

"The Expertfold is making a difference already and it has only been running for two months," Serrano says. "Vista Color entered the folding carton market in what is considered short runs. This machine allows us to do lots of fast makereadies. We're seeing increases in efficiencies, productivity throughput and total counts and we've been able to reduce our labor and overhead costs."

In addition to the Expertfold, the company purchased a Bobst SPeria 106E Autoplaten diecutter, a diemaking system from Gerber Innovations and a Radius Pecas Vision MIS software system.

Quality Assurance

Vista Color specializes in pharmaceutical packaging, a market that requires stringent quality control for documentation, traceability and accountability.

"Everything we print, regardless of the product's intended use, goes through our strict pharmaceutical quality control standards," Serrano says, adding that the

price of nonconformance can be extremely costly. "If you catch the defect at the proofing cycle, you might have spent \$75. If you catch the defect before platemaking, you spent \$200. If you get to the printing plates you might have spent \$600. If you printed and diecut the defect you might have spent \$2,400, and if it reaches the customer it's not only an embarrassment, but you need to ship it back for reprinting."

Early on, Serrano and Roque implemented a "root cause" program to find the cause of any mistakes and take corrective action. "That allowed us to start to market ourselves as pharmaceutical printers, the first ones in Florida," Serrano says.

The company prints up to seven colors on its Heidelberg Speedmaster presses. "Fortunately, we saw the writing on the wall (with the commercial printing market), and when the second generation of printing presses came in we bought Heidelberg CDs that can handle board," Serrano says. "Those presses have been excellent. They're our workhorses."

Both presses have coating towers and extended delivery and one is a UV hybrid press that can print on synthetics including polystyrenes and polypropylene and other specialty materials like metallic papers.

Cost-Saving Solutions

The third component of Vista Color's expansion into folding cartons involved personnel. The company recently joined the Paperboard Packaging Council.

"We're still fairly new to the folding carton industry so we decided to become members of the Paperboard Packaging Council and we've been sending personnel to boot camps and technical conferences and we've been exchanging data so we can benchmark to the industry and to profit leaders," Serrano says.

"We've been busy trying to become more efficient and even more profitable because the margins are so low nowadays," he continues. "When we're doing well we're averaging 4 to 5 percent profit, which is nothing to brag about, but I guess is good



Vista Color's new Expertfold was featured at the IADD•FSEA Odyssey in Nashville, Tenn., in May. From left are Vista Color President Henry Serrano, Finishing Manager Marco Ferrer and Lloyd Kent of Bobst.

considering what others in the printing industry are going through. We've basically expanded not by selling a commodity or selling price. We really add value for the customer," he says.

Serrano views the company more as a consultant, partnering with customers to identify order buying patterns and design custom packaging solutions. This often

results in cost savings in tooling and paper. For instance, Vista Color helped one customer reduce its cutting dies from 24 to 19. "They have 1,600 SKUs, but by being able to eliminate certain sizes of cartons we were able to reduce their inventories and the frequency in which they buy. We saved them a quarter of a million dollars in one year without having to give them a penny discount," Serrano says.

Another example is a frozen fish company. With the help of Bobst and Heidelberg, Vista Carton reengineered the package. "We run their work four times faster. We've been able to reduce our costs and pass those savings onto them," Serrano says.

"We think that's the future of the sales relationship where you partner and consult with other manufacturers," he adds. "We feel comfortable in that area because we're manufacturers and now we work with manufacturers as opposed to how we used to work with ad agencies and publishers and the creative side of the industry."



Last year the company made the final transition out of commercial printing and today is 100 percent folding carton.