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## Prime partner for Axcyl

*In the following article, the fourth about Trelleborg's partners, we speak to Dave Johnson at Prime Solutions, UK distributor for Trelleborg's Axcyl flexo sleeve range, and Damien Leterrier, who heads sales and development for the flexo sleeve business globally.*

Dave Johnson formed Prime Solutions in 2002, having worked in the flexo industry for the previous 33 years. A few weeks later, he picked up the distributorship to represent Axcyl flexo sleeves in the UK and Ireland.



Dave Johnson, owner of Prime Solutions

"It was one of those bizarre coincidences that resulted in a life-changing moment," he says. "Damien Leterrier was meeting a customer who at that time was the only large UK printer using the Axcyl product and by chance was a friend of mine who knew I had just set up my own business. Damien mentioned that he needed to appoint a local company to represent the range. The following day I went to Manchester airport and over a coffee we agreed terms before he caught his flight back to France!"

With an experienced technical person on the ground, sales of Axcyl sleeves in the UK took off significantly over the following years and Prime Solutions remains one of the most successful of all of the 30 Axcyl distributors around the world.

"Our narrow web customers are primarily label printers and are more likely to be independent and smaller than wide web companies, which typically handle flexible packaging for the big brands. The trend for shorter print runs continues across the board, as end users are less keen to hold large quantities of stock. Ironically, in the last couple of years, the economic downturn has increased some areas of business because there has been a move to reduce sizes of packaging for food products and these new designs require new sleeves."

Damien Leterrier, says, "The continuing growth of flexo, generally at the expense of gravure, combined with our own success in bringing new products to market via an expanding network of local distributors, has resulted in a year-on-year worldwide rise of

Axcyl sales. This has been helped by new geographical areas opening up to us, such as Latin America and Asia.

“We work closely not only with printers but with flexo press manufacturers and an increasing number are equipping or recommending Axcyl sleeve technology. The ability to handle make-ready offline by fitting a flexo plate to a sleeve that can quickly allow register and print pressure to be set up with great accuracy is hugely attractive to the printer. In addition, the lightness of modern sleeves means that the press drives require less energy.”

There is a friendly banter between the two men showing that there is a very close working partnership. Indeed, ‘partner’ is a word Damien uses more than once. “Dave has become much more than a distributor for Trelleborg and his many years of experience in the flexo market means that he is regularly involved in giving feedback on new products before their launch.”

Trelleborg’s R&D department is based at its offset blanket production plant in Lodi Vecchio near Milan, Italy, and includes staff dedicated to flexo sleeve technology. The most recent product launch was a carbon fiber bridge sleeve, which was received with great enthusiasm by users. The excellent damping properties and exceptional rigidity offered by this new sleeve enable higher productivity to be achieved on the press.



Trelleborg’s R&D at Lodi Vecchio - Italy

The demands put on to the production chain by brand owners who want new designs produced at ever shorter notice, led to Trelleborg introducing at the end of 2015 its ‘Fast-track’ service, which has proved to be extremely popular, particularly in the UK.

“What often happens is that brand owners, designers and printers will be involved in discussions about a new packaging design for quite some time, then when the decision is made the printed item is required almost immediately,” says Damien.

“To help meet such tight deadlines we introduced a service whereby, printers can have sleeves delivered within ten working days of receiving the order. This is a completely new concept for the flexo market and has proved to be highly successful, winning us not

just more business around the world, but adding new clients who value such a quick response.”

“Don’t forget to mention,” interrupts Dave, “that Prime Solutions was the first distributor to win a ‘Fast-track’ order!”

“Yes, yes, that’s quite true,” laughs Damien. “And you’ve won many orders for the service since then. In fact, the model that has been created in the UK is one that we are trying to replicate with distributors in several other countries. Our aim is that, in the coming years, all small to medium sized Axcyl orders will be delivered via the ‘Fast track’ service, because the flexo market is heading down the path of quick turnaround.”

“What I find so reassuring,” says Dave, “is the huge commitment Trelleborg has to the flexo market. To me, the Axcyl sleeve range was already the best available t continues to forge ahead and improve with an extended the range. During the next year there is a significant investment taking place at Trelleborg’s Axcyl manufacturing facility in France so that capacity will be increased by 2017.

“The introduction of a product such as the carbon fiber sleeve was a major addition. However, the R&D experts are constantly examining the small details as well. This has resulted in many improvements to sleeves, allowing even greater registration accuracy. UK flexo printers are some of the most receptive to innovation and new technology. Being able to show a customer something that will enable them to be more profitable is a great pleasure to me.

“There is also a fantastic team at Axcyl,” says Dave. “From the people on the shop floor to those in administration, the support I receive as a distributor is first class and that goes a long way to making my job easier ... and to provide the best service possible to customers.”

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