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Partnerships key in establishing global tube production and decoration standards

TubePac International's four-year objective of establishing a leading-edge, globally competitive multi-layer and HDPE mono-material tube manufacturing facility, with best-in-class printing and fault detection capabilities, offering more sustainable alternatives for oral care and cosmetic product tubes stands as a beacon of perseverance, adaptability and self-belief in fostering localised manufacturing.

MANAGING DIRECTOR Glenton Pick exemplifies smart leadership by incorporating invaluable lessons learnt throughout his 26-year packaging industry career at companies such as Huhtamaki and Nampak. Fearless in his approach, he embraces innovation and isn't hesitant to challenge conventional methods.

'Our vision from the outset has been to create a globally competitive production facility that stays ahead of the tube technology curve and facilitates brands in reducing the trade deficit by decreasing the percentage of completed tube imports (currently at 70 to 75%) via localised manufacturing capacity to the value of R3-billion that also opens export market opportunities,' Glenton remarks. 'Our ambitious two-year capacity building programme will enable the production of 280 million units per annum. We currently have installed capacity of 90 million units

and will be commissioning a further capacity of 100 million units in July.'

'We have simplified the process of printing and slitting/rewinding the tube laminate material via superior expanded colour gamut (ECG) flexographic printing quality (360°, orientated) and can form the tube body, shoulder and cap on one machine, as well as include a foil seal for oral and cosmetics/personal care product customers targeting export markets,' he reveals.

The pristine cleanroom environment, which includes a camera system that enables customers to link in to view the status and progress of their jobs live, is a far cry from the original production and warehouse environment for desalination valves and canisters. 'I could envision its potential and the transformation work required to turn it into a world-class facility based in the east of Johannesburg,' Glenton remarks.

Turnkey technologies

To understand how this all became possible, it's necessary to rewind the clock to 2018, when Glenton met with ROTOCON managing director Patrick Aengenvoort, while he was looking at different printing technologies available for a recapitalisation project plan at his previous employer.

Patrick accompanied Glenton on a visit to view an MPS EF340 in action in 2019. The quality achieved by printing directly onto tube laminate, compared to using self-adhesive labels, left a lasting impression on him. Impressed by the demonstration, Glenton promptly signed an order for the MPS just before LabelExpo Europe 2019. However, the project was not approved by his previous employer.

Despite this setback, market customers urged Glenton to pursue and deploy this ambitious world-class technology programme. Following the conclusion of his employment, he embarked on a funding campaign and achieved success in securing



TubePac MD Glenton Pick and ROTOCON's managing director Patrick Aengenvoort celebrate the progress made in enabling the localisation of oral and cosmetic product tube production through turnkey project investments.



TubePac's team of 30 will grow to 40 in May, in preparation for the second oral care machine arriving in July.

a portion of the funding from the Department of Trade, Industry & Competition with the remaining amount obtained through loans from the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) and personal funding. 'During this period, I had to go without a salary for close to three years. Although, I'm very grateful to both institutions for their support and belief in the project, the clauses and delays have been onerous and would have halted most other entrepreneurs and resigned them to failure,' Glenton concedes. 'In the final quarter of this year, I aim to be working with two funding institutions on using TubePac International as a case study to help their teams identify gaps and implement improvements in their application process as well as funding and loan systems to simplify assisting other manufacturing SMMs in the future.'

He adds that what has kept him going when the original two-year plan became a four-year plan is the handpicked team who have remained loyal since the project's inception, the unwavering support of his wife and family as well as a steadfast commitment to the overarching vision of empowering brands to implement significant localisation initiatives. 'TubePac has become a very closeknit family during all the ups and downs. I previously worked with or hand-picked 24 of the 30 employees, mapped out a skills and management developmental programme for each (based on a three-tier succession plan) and implemented a dignity policy, where everyone's treated equally and encouraged to interact confidently with visitors.'

Patrick adds that as a family-run business, ROTOCON also values honesty, transparency and consistency in offering strategic, technical, technological and customer service excellence. 'We share the outlook of partnering with the best in terms of OEM and consumables suppliers. In addition, we were resolute in our belief in Glenton's vision and that we could assist TubePac in creating a state-of-the-art tube making facility by, for instance, connecting the team with Acme Graphics to fingerprint the eight-colour MPS EF430 press for ECG printing the multi-layer and HDPE laminate material flexographically.'

ROTOCON and MPS also retained the original sales order number for three years until the press was delivered and commissioned in June 2023. Patrick describes the MPS EF430 as a next-generation, highly modular, fully automated flexo printing press built with multi-web functionalities, stable web transport and the MPS Ultra-flex rail system to incorporate a range of converting modules. 'Furthermore, the MPSCoast feature, incorporating Performance Program

functionality, enables real-time data collection for all printing and operational related processes such as web speed and tension, power usage, register and pressure settings, alarm messaging, humidity and environmental temperature,' he states. 'It is supported by a designated MPS performance team who helps TubePac define goals and actions for achieving press performance improvements.'

Hauke Liefferink, founder and MD of Acme Graphics, adds that by adopting ECG printing on the MPS EF430 from the outset – via Acme's MultiGamut® single colour system to print without spot colours, using a fixed palette system such as CMYK plus



TubePac MD Glenton Pick with head of printing, David van Onselen and head of forming, Roland van der Merwe. Their experience is instrumental in the company's skills/developmental programme.

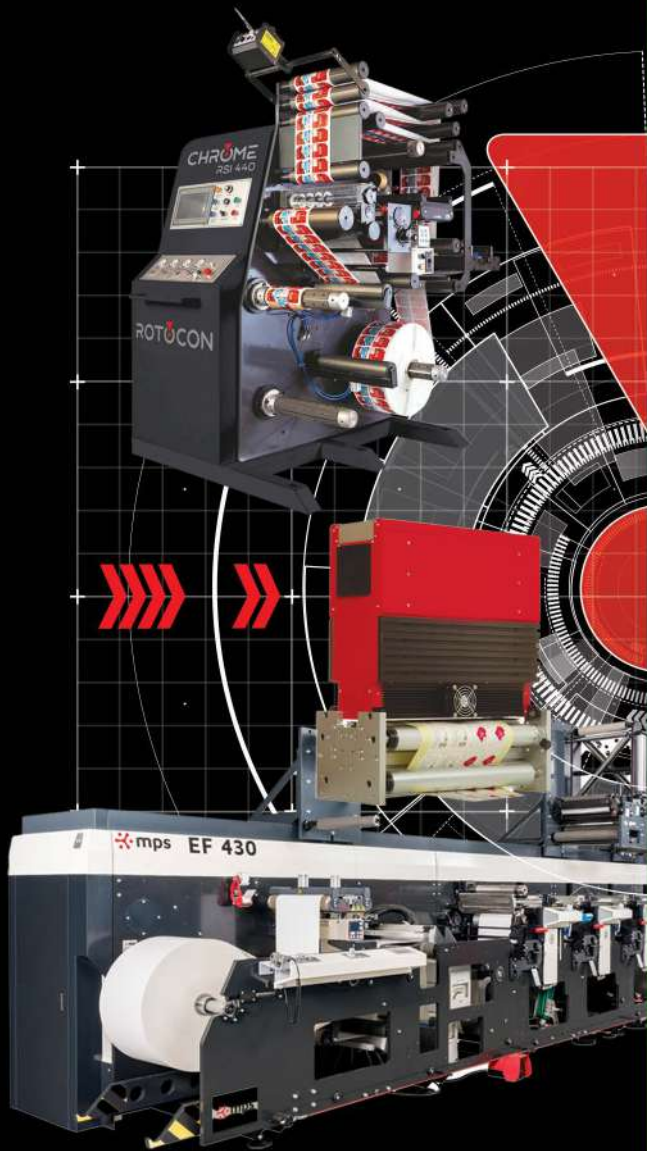


The core support for MD Glenton Pick has come from his wife Jodine, who works in the creditors' department and financial director, Bongani Mavimbela.

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orange, green and violet – TubePac International has significantly enhanced its profitability and reduced its environmental footprint. ‘This system’s especially beneficial for productivity when running multiple brand variants because operators don’t need to do wash ups with the fixed ink set, which stays in the MPS press, only changeover the sleeves and set the register and impression levels.’

Additionally, stocking just seven primary colours, with no need to mix or adjust for spot colours, prevents having to send any inks to landfill and results in substantial savings across the board, Hauke reports.

The MPS press has been mounted with an EyeC ProofRunner 100% inline inspection system and is connected via Quality Link workflow system software to the ROTOCON CHROME RSI 430 slitter/rewinder (both ordered at Propak Cape 2023) to check and remove any detected defects in the text, graphics, colour variations, variable data or 1D and 2D codes – making it easy to meet the stringent quality standards demanded by the cosmetics and personal care sectors.

In addition, the highly-customisable CHROME RSI 430 slitter/rewinder has been specified with an upgraded drive system to rewind the tension-sensitive laminate materials at output rates of up to 320m/min, as well as an automatic slitting system to improve production efficiencies.



TubePac MD Glenton Pick in action at the 2023 BRICS Business Summit held in Sandton.

For this turnkey project, ROTOCON has also supplied TubePac International with an ECOLINE Eco Clean Plate Washer, ECOLINE Pro Clean Anilox Roller Cleaner, as well as consumables in the form of anilox rollers and doctor blades. Patrick describes the ECOLINE Eco Plate Wash 450 as providing a fully automatic, more environmentally responsible two-stage cleaning process. ‘The unique combination of a soft brush and special liquid cleaning solution ensures an efficient and gentle plate cleaning process during stage one. Rinsing with water removes the ink residue and cleaning fluid during stage two,’ he explains. ‘After hot air drying, the plate is 100% clean and dry and can be reused immediately. The whole process only takes a few minutes.’

Similarly, Patrick adds that the ECOLINE ultrasonic anilox roller cleaner quickly removes ink and dirt from any line count anilox cells. ‘It’s equipped with a roller swivelling wheel and constant temperature heating system, which reduces any “hot spots” in the liquid that can create high intensity power levels and potentially damage components.’

For Patrick it has been personally satisfying, partnering with Glenton and the TubePac International team. ‘Beyond supplying the state-of-the-art technologies required for this specialist turnkey project, ROTOCON’s excited to continue nurturing this long-term partnership and witnessing how the second growth phase will assist in enabling localised manufacturing capacity.’

Localisation uptake

In September 2023, TubePac International hosted a two-day alignment Indaba at its facility and at Emperors Palace for two multinational customer teams. The event showcased presentations from the company’s equipment and consumables suppliers across six countries, detailing their technological capabilities and integration into TubePac’s developmental journey.

These capabilities, aligned to ISO 15378 standards, will enable the multinationals to localise a significant portion of their tube production. Moreover, it sets a precedent for future import replacements and competing in export markets (projecting R3-billion’s worth over the next two years), safeguarding local manufacturing jobs and bolstering the country’s GDP.

Next phase of data and production expansion

Following the installation and commissioning of a second, larger SAESA 240 laminate tube forming machine in July, TubePac gears up for its next phase of expansion. Glenton reveals plans for acquiring a 1 500m² warehouse in Q3 2024 and a black-tie grand opening in October, marking developmental and localisation milestones achieved, and acknowledging the steadfast support of staff, suppliers and customers.

The company’s commitment to innovation is evident in its capability to produce paper-based and shoulderless tubes when market demand materialises and the development of a Microsoft-based resource planning system by its IT specialist. ‘Unlike conventional ERP systems, our Digital Operations Platform (DOP) aims to centralise all data systems under one umbrella using AI, machine learning and cloud-based computing. Ultimately, this will streamline workflows and enhance efficiency, data accuracy and user-friendliness.’

TubePac aims to broaden its presence to the Western Cape by establishing a 1 600m² production facility in Atlantis in 2025. ‘We are in the process of securing the funding for this R120-million investment through unconventional channels and approaches,’ Glenton reveals.

The PPM team anticipates reporting on these developments as TubePac continues setting new benchmarks in global tube packaging production, embodying Nelson Mandela’s philosophy: ‘It always seems impossible until it’s done.’