**GFIA Winner Profile**

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**KODAK FLEXCEL NX Technology Helps Victory Graphics and Caps Cases ‘Unbox’ Silver in Global Flexo Innovation Awards**

“Delightful, beautiful, surprising, and exciting” — four adjectives the judging panel at the Miraclon-sponsored Global Flexo Innovation Awards reached for to describe the remarkable entry from tradeshop Victory Graphics and corrugated printer Caps Cases.

Produced for luxury fashion brand The Rake, the entry won UK-based Victory and Caps a Silver Award for its creative use of graphic design in a successful conversion to flexo from offset. Furthermore, Victory used a single KODAK FLEXCEL NX Plate to create the arresting black-and-white, photographic-quality image, with its hugely challenging mix of highlights and dark shadows,

The entry is a perfect example of the ‘unboxing’ phenomenon that has taken on an increasingly important role in retailing and packaging since the first ‘unboxing’ video — subject, the Nokia E61 phone — hit YouTube in 2006. Elaborate videos documenting products being unpacked and displayed are now a crucial component of consumer marketing campaigns by direct-to-consumer brands.

**Packaging working differently**

Packaging designed for unboxing and e-commerce must work differently from packaging in the physical retail environment, combining exterior anonymity — because deliveries may be left on the doorstep — with interior impact when the package is opened. For judge Ken McGuire, from Procter & Gamble, Victory and Caps achieved this brilliantly: “The outside of the shipment box is very plain, but when you open it there’s this delightful, surprising artwork — a very striking black-and-white high-quality image. It shows the brand equity and gives the consumer a delightful surprise when they open the package. This is exciting for brand owners because it delivers an experience that you can’t get in bricks-and-mortar.”

Karl Pampus, Victory Graphics owner and Managing Director, says this new opportunity for corrugated has not gone unnoticed by the company’s printer customers: “A number have invested in presses specifically designed for this type of work, to print — in a single pass — two or three colors on one side, and one or two on the other, saving press time and consumables.”

Reducing production costs was an important factor in The Rake packaging project, explains Victory Graphics Operations Director, Dean Darby. “We and Caps Cases were asked by Macfarlane Packaging to explore flexo post-print as an alternative to litho-lamination, which was proving too expensive. Digital had been ruled out on the same grounds. They knew the advantages flexo offered — lower cost, shorter lead times and more flexibility on smaller lots — so the only question was whether flexo could match the visual impact of the litho printed product.”

Victory and Caps took on the brief with confidence. Says Dean: “We’ve worked with Caps on other, similar jobs and built a good working relationship. Like us, Caps’ print manager Wayne Booker is passionate about flexo, and pushing the boundaries of what’s possible with post print. The combination of the work we do on the digital file, the capabilities of the FLEXCEL NX Plates and Caps’ on-press expertise produces exceptional results, as it did in this case.”

As for other flexo benefits, the job cost 30% less than the litho equivalent, and the lead time for re-orders was slashed by 50%, from six days to just three. “This gives the brand the flexibility to order smaller lots, which is essential for designs where it’s hard to forecast exact quantities — The Rake package has been reordered multiple times, for instance.” Caps also injected a strong sustainability element into the job by printing with plant-based inks. Unsurprisingly, Macfarlane has since entrusted other litho-to-flexo conversion jobs to Caps and Victory.

**Distinct market segment**

Originally a supplier of coating plates, Victory Graphics entered the corrugated flexo market in 2014 and in 2016 installed the KODAK FLEXCEL NX System, complete with large-format 50” x 80” imaging unit. Karl Pampus says FLEXCEL NX Technology has enabled the company to successfully target a distinct market segment — “independent corrugated sheet-fed operations that want to print more higher-margin, premium-quality work. In many cases, their presses are older models with lower specifications, but by running FLEXCEL NX Plates they produce excellent solid coverage, crisp reverses and fine tones — often reproducing both line and tone on one plate. We see our job as enabling them to compete for quality work they previously thought was beyond them, and delivering on-press benefits, too, such as getting to color faster, and longer intervals between plate cleaning stops.”

**A focus on labels**

Having firmly established Victory in corrugated post print, Karl and Dean have embarked with a fresh focus on high-quality flexo labels using a new, automated workflow specifically designed for label customers. The system has two main aims: to make job submission and tracking as simple and transparent as possible for customers, and to minimize manual interventions and possible errors. Branded *Print Pilot* — it has been well received in trials with label customers and is in the early stages of a controlled roll-out, initially to customers with internal studios.

Explains Dean: “Customers submit one-up artwork and job parameters via the portal, but that’s the extent of their input. From then on, they can chart its real-time progress through the departments and get live updates via smartphone. The jobs are stepped automatically, and customers can check files separation by separation before the plates are produced.”

“FLEXCEL NX Technology’s quality and reliability are important to the solution,” adds Karl Pampus. “The plates enable the premium finishes that are essential in the drinks sector, plus the reliability and consistency on-press cements a coherent workflow, from the brand’s initial design through to the finished product.”

**Automation is essential**

Process automation along these lines is critical to Victory’s business plan, he continues. “We’re operating in a market where input costs are rising but where price is a big factor in customers’ purchasing decisions, so increased automation makes all the difference.”

Looking to the future, he sees huge opportunities for flexo to take work from litho and gravure, despite a slight slowdown in transitions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. “Understandably, many companies have been in survival mode for the best part of two years, sticking with the status quo. But the demand was there before the pandemic, and there are signs it’s back. So long as we have FLEXCEL NX Technology, the arguments in flexo’s favor are persuasive — the best plate technology with consistently high quality, significant production efficiencies and cost savings.”

**ENDS**

**About Miraclon**

Miraclon is the home of KODAK FLEXCEL Solutions, which have helped transform flexographic printing for more than a decade. The technology, including the industry-leading FLEXCEL NX and FLEXCEL NX Ultra Systems, and FLEXCEL NX Print Suite that enables PureFlexo™ Printing, maximizes on-press efficiency, delivers higher quality and overall best-in-class results. With a focus on pioneering image science, innovation, and collaboration with industry partners and customers, Miraclon is committed to the future of flexo and continues to be positioned to lead the charge. Find out more at [www.miraclon.com](http://www.miraclon.com), and follow us on [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/company/miraclon-corporation/) and [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCAZGpziB6Lq_Kx8ROgoMdCA/featured).