

**GFIA Winner Profile**

Media Contact:

Elni Van Rensburg – +1 830 317 0950 – [elni.vanrensburg@miraclon.com](mailto:elni.vanrensburg@miraclon.com)   
AD Communications: Imogen Woods – +44 (0)1372 464 470 – [iwoods@adcomms.co.uk](mailto:iwoods@adcomms.co.uk)

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**Numex Blocks takes the ‘direct-to-tube’ route to awards success**

*Gravure-to-flexo conversion “enabled by the productivity and quality offered by*

*KODAK FLEXCEL NX Technology”*

When asked what sets Numex Blocks apart from the competition, owner Nitin Patil replies: “We treat every job that comes in as if it’s the first job for that customer. They all deserve the same time and attention.”

This strategy has served the Mumbai-based trade shop well for over three decades of steady progress, crowned most recently with a Silver Award in the Miraclon-sponsored Global Flexo Innovation Awards (GFIA), awarded for a successful gravure-to-flexo process conversion involving ‘direct-to-tube’ printing of over 2,500 skincare SKUs. As for the contribution of KODAK FLEXCEL NX Plates to the success of the job, Nitin believes the switch to direct-to-tube printing would have been impossible without them, both in terms of productivity and quality. “The manufacturer achieved excellent results at a screen ruling of 150-175 lpi and a production speed of 130 tubes a minute.”

**Faith in flexo**

Numex invested in a KODAK FLEXCEL NX System in 2014. Subsequently, FLEXCEL NX Systems have also been installed at Numex’s sister companies — Nuflex Graphics in Pune, and NS Digital Flexo in Hyderabad. The quadruple investment – with a fifth system planned for later this year - is a clear sign of Nitin Patil’s faith in flexo and FLEXCEL NX Technology, especially for flexible packaging. “The transition from gravure to flexo is happening across Asia, not just in India,” he says, adding that one factor in favor of flexo, and in particular FLEXCEL NX Plates, is its “ability to deliver high-quality results on thinner, more sustainable PE substrates — an area where gravure has limitations.”

The award-winning entry demonstrated precisely these advantages, as well as Numex’s trademark job-to-job attention to detail. A key objective of the job was to improve the sustainability performance of a substantial number of tube-packaged skincare products — over 2,500 SKUs in total. Says Nitin: “Gravure and other production processes typically involve printing on plastic-based substrates, which are then applied to the tubes. As well as the additional production step, this adds complexity at the recycling stage, when labels and sleeves have to be separated from the tube.”

Numex’s customer, a packaging manufacturer, wanted to explore a ‘direct-to-tube’ workflow that would remove the variability in recycling and eliminate a manufacturing step, and for the purpose had invested in a special 13-color rotary form press. The next step was discussions between Numex, the manufacturer, and the brand owner to identify any potential challenges posed by the products themselves and the planned workflow, including achieving the right skin tone colors, the best way of refreshing the overall packaging, ensuring quick set-up and fast changeovers given the vast number of SKUs. “The tubes were of standard PE coextruded construction, which is challenging to print on,” says Nitin. “In addition, most jobs were eight colors and each SKU featured different design features — for example, matte coatings to add a premium ‘look and feel’, spot varnishes, and graphics with demanding gradients that faded almost to zero. All these coatings and varnishes were done using FLEXCEL NX Plates. So we put a lot of work into establishing how best to render, and even improve, colors and textures.”

**“Great colors, wonderful imagery”**

The hard work paid dividends, with the GFIA judges praising the successful streamlining of the production process and its enhancement of the products’ sustainability, as well as the “excellent print quality, great colors and wonderful imagery”.

Productivity and quality were precisely what Numex wanted from its investment in the FLEXCEL NX System. Recalls Nitin: “By 2014, and largely thanks to FLEXCEL NX Technology, brands recognized that flexo produced high-quality results and that it was also a more cost-effective and productive solution that would remove expenditure from the supply chain — a key consideration.” He lists a host of benefits that FLEXCEL NX Technology delivers, including accurate imaging, speed to register and color for faster set-up, durability and significantly greater productivity: “Imaging, processing and drying times are all faster — the overall production time for a plate is 30-35 minutes less than with other technologies.”

Over 60% of Numex’s production — both flexible packaging and labels — now goes on FLEXCEL NX Plates, he says, and singles out the multiple advanced plate surface patterning features from Miraclon for delivering “optimum ink densities, whatever the substrate. It controls the ink flow like a mini anilox! We can confidently handle fine halftones in jobs using 175-200pli screen rulings, and smooth vignettes are also achievable.”

Nitin further comments positively on the support provided by Miraclon since becoming a FLEXCEL NX user. “They do a fantastic job of giving us end-to-end support, of both hardware and software, from calibration and workflow optimization to contributing to our gravure-to-flexo discussions with customers, which really helps the industry grow.”

**A bright future with flexo**

Looking to the future, Numex has plans to cement its position as a leading flexo-focused trade shop, including working more closely with customers in the early stages of projects. “That way we believe we can help brands shorten lead times even further.” Key to this is keeping abreast of the latest technology, because that will ensure we keep growing, and growth is a must if we’re to have a better tomorrow.”

In line with this strategy is Numex’s investment in the new KODAK FLEXCEL NX Central Software. Developed by Miraclon specifically to support customers in their drive for efficiency, waste reduction and labor savings, the software is tailored to the FLEXCEL NX System and enables customers to automate plate production while still employing multiple advanced plate surface patterning features.

Nitin concludes: “With FLEXCEL NX Central Software we’re able to execute the plate layout function much faster than doing it manually, which simplifies ganging of jobs. We have easily been able to save as much as 50% of our time with the automatic plate layout function, as there is no thinking or planning involved – we just add the files into FLEXCEL NX Central and it prepares the plate layout automatically.”

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**About Miraclon**

KODAK FLEXCEL Solutions have helped transform flexographic printing over the last decade. Now brought to life by Miraclon, KODAK FLEXCEL Solutions – including the industry-leading FLEXCEL NX System – give customers higher quality, improved cost efficiency, better productivity and 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 is positioned to lead the charge. Find out more at [www.miraclon.com](http://www.miraclon.com). Connect with us on LinkedIn; [Miraclon Corporation](https://www.linkedin.com/company/miraclon-corporation/).