**GFIA Winner Profile**

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***Litoplas’s Award-winning ECG implementations “made possible by FLEXCEL NX Technology”***

***Partnership concept gets pushed to new levels, “highlighting possibilities of close collaboration between converters and brands”***

Partnerships between converters and brands matter in today’s fast-changing, dynamic packaging industry. Many businesses make such collaborations a big part of their strategy, but few have taken the partnership concept to the level found at Colombian flexible packaging converter Litoplas. Add in its intricate approach to Expanded Color Gamut (ECG) flexo printing, which, according to the company’s Chief Customer Officer, Luis Mora “has only been possible to implement successfully with FLEXCEL NX Plates,” and you’ve got an award-winning business strategy.

Founded in 1967, food packaging forms the bulk of production at its manufacturing plant in the northern city of Barranquilla (a second plant will open in Guatemala in 2023). The Litoplas website describes the company’s mission as “delivering unique solutions through the design, development and manufacture of flexible packaging”, and its vision as becoming brands’ “first-choice partner for flexible packaging value.”

The partnership between Litoplas and its customers was one of the things that caught the attention of the judging panel at the Miraclon-sponsored Global Flexo Innovation Awards, where Litoplas won a Silver Award for achievement in two categories: *Gravure-to-Flexo Conversion* and efficiency in *Print Production Workflow*. The judges noted that Litoplas’s entries — all of which were examples of ECG printing produced with FLEXCEL NX Plates — “highlighted what can be achieved when converter and brand work closely together.”

**‘Only FLEXCEL NX Technology makes ECG possible’**

Litoplas first added ECG printing to the toolbox in 2015. “We had seen ECG at drupa, and at first sight it appeared magical because of the efficiency and capacity benefits it offered – to both converters and brands – especially as there has been a need for shorter turnaround times as well as an increase in SKUs. However, it also seemed utopian, because at first the all-important statistical process control was missing. Anyone could buy a machine, the inks existed, but without strict process control you couldn’t reap the productivity benefits. For us, that was a critical shortcoming, which wasn’t rectified until FLEXCEL NX Technology came on the scene.”

By the time Litoplas invested in a FLEXCEL NX System in 2017, he recalls, “we understood what we needed to make ECG work, and the flat-top dot made all the difference. Our previous technology was plagued by pinholes and voids that produced poor data for process control. The flat-top dots delivered the precise, predictable and consistent color. Without that, excellent ECG printing is impossible.”

There are other ways in which FLEXCEL NX Plates enable ECG to show its potential, says Luis. “We can print more vivid colors without using excess ink, which adds to the on-shelf impact at a competitive price. And the flat-top dots don’t wear, they stay stable during the run so we stop the press less for adjustments.”

**Tightly embedded partnerships**

Luis Mora’s title as Litoplas’s Chief Customer Officer testifies to how tightly the company has embedded partnership with customers at the heart of the business. To ensure this, Litoplas has formalized the concept into two models — a ‘Partnership Model’ designed to ‘build trust through collaboration’, and a ‘Packaging for Value Model’ that aims to build value through technology.

The models are the result of much careful thought and analysis, as Luis Mora explains: “We are a very technology-focused company, and the idea of applying technology to create value is very important to us. But we recognize that it is essential that our clients trust us to provide the level of technology and support that is right for them.” He goes on to explain how the Packaging for Value Model achieves this. “The model has four ‘Levels’ — 1 through 4 — to which customers are allocated depending on which of the technologies in our toolbox best fit their requirements. The higher the Level, the more of our technologies the customer can call on.”

A major benefit of this approach, he continues, is “it prevents us overpromising and underdelivering, because if that happens it damages trust. Take ECG as an example: we only offer it to customers on Level 3, because they have the right level of technical expertise.”

The ’Partnership Model’, meanwhile, complements this approach by reimagining how Litoplas’s people work with their customers’ internal staff. “Businesses today are too complex for a one-to-one relationship alone, so now our structure encourages fluent conversations between all our people working on the account and the corresponding contact at the customer. In this way, every conversation between the two companies is high quality, which builds trust.”

**Patience, hard work and trust drives ECG adoption**

As with any radical new technology, persuading customers to implement ECG printing requires patience, hard work and trust between converter and brand. The reason why Litoplas only provides ECG to Level 3 customers becomes clear when Luis describes the negotiations involved in planning a typical gravure-to-flexo conversion. “There are times when for FLEXCEL NX Technology and ECG to play to their strengths, the customer might need to change the design slightly. For example, we recommend printing small typefaces in a single color to avoid any possibility of misregister. Or, the pastels enabled by FLEXCEL NX Plates are a big benefit brands can play on. A mature conversation like that doesn’t happen the first time you talk. But if we’re talking after winning the customer’s trust, it’s a different matter.”

The execution of the winning entry, Cordillera Dark Chocolate packaging produced for Compañía Nacional de Chocolates, is a prime example of the Litoplas partnership strategy in action, and of the company’s innovative approach to selling technology. The commission was a direct result of a ‘Packaging Academy’ Litoplas organized to show the customer what ECG is about — as Luis puts it, “to show the pros and cons, and how best we could reproduce their artwork.  
  
“We asked the design team to give us a really challenging job, and they did. It was a premium-quality chocolate product, currently in cardboard packaging but which they wanted to switch to flexible packaging. The color of the chocolate on the packaging had to exactly match the product itself, and because for a period both forms of packaging would be side by side on the shelves, it was vital there was no difference in color between the cardboard and the flexible packaging. They also wanted to get the product to market as quickly as possible and produce a relatively small quantity.”

Litoplas met the requirements in every way, using green, orange and violet in ECG to render vivid, dense colors that the customer liked, and precisely matching the background color. In a radical approach to color measurement, to match the color of the chocolate Litoplas went so far as to spread real chocolate on a sheet of Pantone white paper and measure the color using the color measurement system.

**Bettering conventional technology**

As Litoplas prepares to expand into Guatemala next year, ECG printing will continue to be central to the company’s offering — so much so that one of the three new presses in Guatemala will be a custom-built Bobst machine dedicated to 100% ECG production. “As for how big a share of production ECG can reach,” says Luis, “to migrate customers to ECG we need to build an ECG technology that’s better than conventional technology. We believe we are busy doing that.”

He adds that Miraclon have provided excellent support so far, and he expects this to continue in the future. “We really value their support to enhance print capabilities and press performance. With the in-country technical support here in Colombia, any issues have been solved promptly - one thing Miraclon has is adaptive capacity, backed up by persistence. We could not have been as successful as we have been without our partnership with Miraclon.”

**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).