



Left: The Bobst EXPERTFOLD 110 A2 recently purchased by Ellis Packaging in Pickering has been called the next generation of folding carton technology, with higher speeds and a cleaner operating environment.

Right: An Ellis Packaging employee carefully loads printed cartonboard into the Bobst EXPERTFOLD 110 A2 for folding and gluing assembly.

MANIFOLD DESTINY

State-of-the-art folding and printing equipment keeps boxmaker well ahead of the chasing pack

Knowing what your customer wants and being able to deliver it on a consistent basis is a fundamental prerequisite for success in the fiercely competitive folding-carton industry at the best of times, but it takes on a whole new critical importance in times of economic downturn and uncertainty.

For folks at the Pickering, Ont.-based **Ellis Packaging Limited**, a family-owned paperboard packaging producer currently celebrating its 25th anniversary, providing its clients in the food, confectionery, pharmaceutical and automotive product industries with economical,



Cathie Ellis, Vice-President, Ellis Packaging Limited.

high-quality packaging solutions has proven to be a highly rewarding path to growth ever since the owner and company president Bill Ellis originally purchased the Pickering facility from **Redpath Sugars** back in 1983.

Steering the company through a series of well-executed strategic acquisitions and a well-rounded capital investment program that has

significantly expanded the scope and range of the company's production and service capabilities enabled the Ellis family patriarch to build up a major new player in the Canadian package converting industry, with the likes of **Mars, Hershey, Procter & Gamble, Ciba Vision, Hiram Walker, General Electric** and other CPG (consumer packaged goods) stalwarts contributing to a highly prestigious client list that keeps growing year to year.

Today operating three Ontario-based production facilities serving targeted CPG industry segments, **The Ellis Group** is a well-diversified packaging producer that feels justifiably confident about weathering whatever challenges the unfolding economic downturn throws its way, according to the company vice-president Cathie Ellis.

"The 80,000-square-foot Pickering facility, which is also our head office, is where we service all of our market sectors from one location," Ellis explained to **Canadian Packaging** on a recent visit to the Pickering plant.

"We also operate at 50,000 square-foot facility in Mississauga, which is primarily the domain of our pharma and nutraceutical work," she relates, "while our 45,000-square-foot plant in Guelph focuses on the food and confection-

ery markets."

With a combined workforce of 215 employees, the three plants today generate close to \$60 million in revenues, according to Ellis, with the central Pickering plant poised to hit a \$30-million mark in sales for the year ending March 2009—a 20 percent rise from the previous year.

"Our company is continuing to grow—hiring more people every year," says Ellis, "and as one of the few remaining family-owned and operated carton plants in Canada, it is important to us that the majority of our workers are long-term employees that are totally devoted and committed to our long-term success."

Maintaining that success will be a stern challenge in coming months, acknowledges director of sales Brad Weale, who says he expects the company's long-enduring industry reputation for quick speed-to-market capabilities, high product quality, reliable on-time deliveries, and top customer service to be enhanced even further with the industry's keen focus on more environmentally-sustainable packaging.

NOTHING NEW

"Ellis Packaging has been producing sustainable packaging for over 25 years, so this is nothing new to us in itself," points out Weale.

"What's new, however, is the general awareness that environmental sustainability is on the minds of all North Americans right now—making it important for The Ellis Group to not only be a good corporate citizen, but also to have the highest possible level of social awareness by being responsible for what we take out of and put back into the environment on everyday basis."

To this end, the company has already initiated several key measures aimed at improving its environmental performance, including:

- Tracking its current waste numbers from **METRO Waste Paper Recovery Inc.**, a subsidiary of **Cascades Inc.**, and setting new goals and targets for continually improving waste reduction in all its operations;
- Implementing advanced energy conservation programs;
- Becoming one of the first folding carton companies to have achieved the joint **FSC/SFI (Forest Stewardship Council/Sustainable Forest Initiative)** certification in August of 2008;
- Conducting periodic VOC (volatile organic compound) audits;

- Reviewing its vendors for the availability of more environmentally-friendly consumables, chemicals and materials for its production needs.

With such far-reaching goals and targets, it is imperative for the company to maintain its competitive technological edge, reasons Ellis, by constantly reinvesting a good portion of its profits into the latest production and converting technologies.

"Our commitment to the pharmaceutical industry is demonstrated by our leading-edge technology that ensures efficiency, accuracy and ultimately, product integrity," asserts Ellis, stressing the company's comprehensive range of capabilities enabling it to take on everything from hand-filled specialty packaging to high-speed auto-filling,

"We are constantly challenged and thrilled by new innovation," she states. "While Canadian businesses have historically been under-investing in their technology infra-

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The Valco Cincinnati OT-120 touchscreen data entry terminal aboard the EXPERTFOLD folder-gluer from Bobst is utilized to ensure 100-percent gluing and finishing quality assurance.



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structure, we make it a point to budget for new technology and R&D (research-and-development) annually.

“One of the best examples of this would be our new primographic press we recently purchased to complement our manroland 700 (seven-color) presses,” explains Ellis, which currently account for a lion’s share of package printing work at the Pickering plant.

Purchased last year, the new **Carton Master** is a primographic flexographic press—manufactured by Cambridge, Ont.-based **C.P.S. Canadian Primoflex Systems Inc.**—providing the plant with several new key value-added capabilities, such as the inline application of holographic images onto the cartons.

Says Bill McKnight, director of the Ellis web flexo division: “Our Carton Master primographic printing press is a highly modified rollfed hybrid of letterpress and flexography that is capable of printing UV (ultraviolet) and wa-

A sampling of some of the high-quality paperboard packaging produced by Ellis Packaging at its Pickering facility.



ter-based inks, at well over 200-line screen or 20-micron stochastic printing.”

Boasting 11 printing units, along with inline hot-foil stamping, cold-foil transfer, rotary die-cutting and 100-percent pharmaceutical vision inspection capabilities, the new press features a carefully selected combination of ink, plate and anilox technologies to produce folding cartons in vibrant colors with very high repeatability.

“The press is used primarily to create value for our customers by bringing affordable innovation to their packag-

ing and, subsequently, to the marketplace,” reveals Ellis.

“An excellent example of this is our new ‘holocoat’ process—a newly-developed package decorative method that gives a holographic appearance to selected areas of an image by applying a special micro-embossed UV coating.

“From a cost and performance standpoint, the holocoat technology outperforms any current decorating option we have at our disposal,” Ellis relates, “while giving our customers the option of taking advantage of its inherent anti-counterfeiting properties.”

In September of this year, the company has also completed the installation of a brand new **EXPERTFOLD 110A2** folder-gluer—manufactured by **Bobst Group**—which is being hailed as one of the most flexible machines on the market.

Capable of folding and gluing over 3,000 different box styles—from small pharmaceutical cartons to large cereal boxes—the **EXPERTFOLD 110** is claimed to be 11 per cent faster than the previous generation of Bobst folder-gluer, while delivering enhanced ergonomics, lower power consumption and much quieter operation.

READY TO GO

“We purchased this new gluer to increase our make-ready running speeds as well as to aid with gluing of nontraditional carton styles,” says Ellis, praising its vast operating speed range of 20 to 450 meters per minute.

“So far, we are very pleased with its ability to store our make-ready information, as well as the flexibility and greater running speeds,” relates Ellis, saying it all adds up to quicker production and improving the company’s delivery time-lines.

“Compared to the machine it replaced, we’ve seen our speeds double,” states Ellis. “We have also found that the cartons do not move or realign when running at high speeds—the end result being much improved quality and far less waste.”

In addition, the **EXPERTFOLD** helps optimize the work process, explains Weale, by being able to simultaneously carry out other inline processes like Braille embossing, window patching, leaflet insertions, creasing and embossing—proving to be another solid capital investment for the Pickering plant.

Says Weale: “We are quite thankful to be financially strong, and being an independent, family-run business allows us the luxury to react quicker to the trends in the marketplace.

“This enables us to identify quickly what capital improvements we need to make to keep us current in the marketplace for now and for the future,” Weale concludes.

“It’s why we purchased our Carton Master press and our Bobst **EXPERTFOLD**—to work more effectively with our clientele.” ♦

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