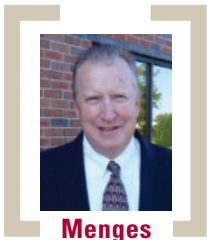


Roller options and advice for converters



Flexible Packaging was given industry insight from Menges Roller Company president, Matt Menges.

Q ■ HOW WOULD YOU CHARACTERIZE THE ROLL MARKET TODAY AND WHERE IS THE MARKET HEADED? HOW HAS THE MARKET CHANGED IN THE LAST FEW YEARS?

A: The market has changed in the past few years in two ways: the supply-side and the demand side. I would place roll suppliers into one of 3 classes.

Small regional roll supplies are often run by owner/operators who specialize in rolls for offset printing or smaller sized rollers in general.

Then there are the larger sized regional companies, like Menges, that cover the gamut but specialize in packaging, converting, steel and industrial rolls. These entities typically control the market within a specific area, are strong on engineering, and typically make the most technically proficient rolls.

The final class is the national companies that have 4 or 5 locations across the country. The national roll companies have a larger portion of the “generic” roll business, which is high volume, low margin – like offset printing.

On the demand side there has been an erosion of the country’s manufacturing base. At Menges Roller, we don’t lose customers because of the competition; we lose them because they don’t exist

anymore. Customers have closed or have consolidated plants. Some plants have moved offshore. Some OEMs are still in business, but have been decimated in the current economy. Not as many new machines with new rollers are being purchased and foreign competition is increasing.

The market is headed toward the use of new coverings in plastics, rubber and

“Rolls are the heart and soul of a converting or packaging process line.” —Menges

the combination of the two. For instance, we have developed a sustainable product that can be recycled and up to 65 percent of the covering can be sustained and used again.

Q ■ HOW HAVE YOUR PRODUCTS CHANGED IN THE LAST DECADE? WHAT MAKES TODAY’S ROLLS BETTER THAN THOSE IN, SAY, 2000?

A: Roll design is being given much more attention. Today, everything is being questioned to find a better way and at a lower cost. A properly engineered roll taking

into account web tension, PLI, feet-per-minute and deflection ensures that the roller is engineered for its function – no more, no less. Over-engineering a roll is as expensive as under engineering. Proper engineering saves cost all up and down the processing line. For example, less roll weight equals less start up inertia, which reduces motor size, which reduces amps per hour, etc. This cost savings is directly reflected in a converter’s bottom line.

Q ■ TO WHAT DEGREE HAVE SUBSTRATE AND FILM CHANGES AFFECTED ROLL DESIGN AND SELECTION?

A: With the demand for better packaging such as 7 layer barrier films and other highly technical substrates, rolls have to be of much higher precision in its RA, straightness TIR and roll balance. Complex roll profiling, like parabolic crowning, can counteract uneven web tension so these complicated substrates can be processed like those 7 layers and coatings in a complex barrier package. Rollers are a key part of this complex processing.

Q ■ WHAT ARE THE KINDS OF QUESTIONS CUSTOMERS SHOULD BE ASKING WHEN THEY RESEARCH ROLLS?

A: Rolls are the heart and soul of a converting or packaging process line. The roller engineer should actually be asking the customer and meeting with the engineering department to understand the process trying to be achieved then bringing all the data back to the roll plant and having an assessment done to present back to the customer. The customer has to provide all the data like PLI and chemical make-up, operating temperature, etc. They then need to be sure they have a competent roll supplier that has the technical ability to interpret that data.

Q: WHAT ARE SOME MISCONCEPTIONS CUSTOMERS HAVE ABOUT ROLLS?

A: The answers to a converting operation's roll challenges are found in their technical ability to communicate those challenges to a competent roller supplier. All the data needs to be given to find a solution. We have had customers tell us they have a wrinkling problem but are unable to give us the PLI that the substrate is applying to the roll. A roll supplier cannot work with just a couple pieces of the formula.

Q: WHAT ARE KEY FACTORS THAT COMPEL SOMEONE TO REFURBISH A ROLL?

A: Just about any roll can be refurbished. If you can repair or re-cover a 20-year-old roll to give you the end processing result you need, then we encourage it. However, if you need to run at faster speeds or utilize a more sophisticated process, then re-engineering is really the best option and may not cost you more up front, but your operating cost will be drastically reduced in more product getting out the door.

Q: WHAT IS ONE PIECE OF ADVICE YOU CAN GIVE CONVERTERS IN SELECTING THE RIGHT ROLL?

A: Get a competent roll supplier that offers engineering expertise. Don't just use a local machine shop. Make sure the

roll manufacturer does everything from core manufacture, to covering, welding with certified welders, roll balancing and coating. This will ensure a proper roll selection each time. ■

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