

NEWSPRINTERS



A job well done

Back in November 2004, PJ exclusively reported News International's plans to invest over £600 million in its printing operations. Now that all three print sites are in production, PJ returns to complete the story

WHEN News Corp announced on 12 October 2004 that it was to invest over £600 million in the printing facilities of its main UK subsidiary, News International (NI), it was heralded as a massive commitment to the future of printed newspapers. As this magazine reported at the time, the investment also involved a number of innovations in terms of newspaper production.

With all three NI plants – at Eurocentral (Glasgow), Knowsley (Liverpool) and Broxbourne (London) – now commissioned and in production, the question to be asked is did everything go as planned and, in hindsight, would anything have been done differently?

“When I look back to 2004 and realise just what we have achieved in such a relatively short space of time, I think it is amazing,” replies Brian McGee, managing director of Newsprinters, NI's printing subsidiary. “Although the project schedules were set three plus years ago, we have met all the targets and were ahead with some.”

“To a great extent, this has been due to the people involved, especially NI's managing director, Ian McDonald, who encouraged us to ‘think

outside the box’. We had a great team of professionals who were determined to deliver the project on time and on budget.

“We are immensely proud of what has been accomplished. We knew that it was never going to be easy with such a massive project but we have achieved what we set out to do. Of course, we had some sleepless nights but that is not surprising considering the number of innovative technologies which we've implemented”.

Many of the innovations were necessary due to the decision to install triple-wide Manroland Colorman presses. For example, this had a significant impact on handling the newsprint reels. Due to their large size and the implications to safety, it was decided to handle the reels on their belly rather than on their ends. This involved not only changes in the transportation of the reels from the mills but also their unloading and movement through the plant.

“Moving paper around on the belly required a big change as did handling the triple width reels,” says McGee. “However, using a specially developed Aurosys/Joloda unloading systems, we are able to off-load all the reels on a lorry in three

to four minutes. At Broxbourne for example, we can handle 30 to 40 lorry loads a day.

“The automatic belly-unloading concept was a good example of genuine co-operation between UK hauliers and European suppliers, Manroland and Joloda, to deliver this Newsprinters initiative.

“The way the paper is moved through the plant using the manroland Aurosys system is also very slick and is working very well”.

This is not only a very bespoke but also a ‘smart’ system. At Broxbourne, for example, which due to its size has the highest amount of automation of the three sites, the whole area from reel delivery to high bay warehousing, to the Uveritas reel preparation stations, to low bay storage and then to press reel-stands is completely automated. This does, though, put more pressure on the paper suppliers as McGee admits: “It does mean that you have to rely on the paper suppliers to treat paper as it should be treated and supply it in the right condition. A triple width paper reel is worth, say, £800, and needs to be treated as such. When you have a television delivered it is expected to be packaged and handled so that it is not dam-



● Brian McGee, Newsprinters managing director (right), and Nick Francke, manufacturing improvement and development manager

aged. The suppliers should treat paper in the same way.

“These days, the mills handle paper carefully on their sites but during shipment, it is moved by clamped trucks, and can be damaged in the warehouse or when loaded on to the lorry. A percentage of reels delivered have been repaired and re-wrapped due to damage sustained in transit or storage. Retailers and other manufacturing industries would not accept some of the poor quality being supplied and it is not acceptable to us.

“We monitor all the reels being delivered and feed back the information to the mills. We weigh every reel and quarantine any paper which is not acceptable, not just when it is damaged but when the reel numbers do not correspond to the docketts.

“Traditionally, we used to judge the paper according to the number of web breaks, print quality and it's performance on press, but it is different now. As the price of paper rises, waste is becoming more important for everyone.

“In addition, with increasing automation, we are having to trust our systems more and more, and therefore have to get the newsprint supply right. It is all about attention to detail and taking responsibility.

“The automatic reel handling facilities at Broxbourne highlight the actual condition of the reels as delivered and suppliers now need to recognise that things have to change. It is only basic good practice after all”.

Mill co-operation is also required to meet another of the Newsprinters' aims, that of using re-usable cores. It is important to News International that there are two types of re-usable cores available. This is beginning to happen at the Eurocentral and Broxbourne plants which are now using aluminium core reels from Norske. UPM Shotton have been supplying newsprint on composite cores to Knowsley for over 12 months. In addition, Eurocentral has started using RFID tagging for reel identification and there are plans for the other two sites to move over to the technology when possible.

Nor is that the end of the story so far as the paper supply is concerned. Changes are also required to enable the reels to be handled completely automatically by the Uveritas reel preparation system, Newsprinters being the first to install this particular equipment outside of Japan.

“This was a tough nut to crack,” admits McGee, “This was not due to the equipment but to the variations in the wrapping quality of the reels. In Japan, the printers specify that the newsprint suppliers have to provide reels with wrappers which are easy to remove and which do not necessitate wasting any of the white paper.

“At Knowsley, the reels which come from the UPM Shotton mill, can go through the Uveritas system at up to 28 to 30 an hour without the involvement of any people.

That is the fastest anywhere in the world.

“Broxbourne is more of a problem because of the number of paper suppliers involved. Currently, several winds of newsprint are being removed due to the wrap being glued to the surface of the newsprint. Consequently, with the reels from some mills, an operator has to be involved. We, of course, recognise that changes cannot occur overnight and we are working with the mills so that we can be supplied with wrappers which are waste and through-put friendly”.

The plate production area represented another innovation for the company in that it was the first world-wide to outsource the complete operation to Agfa, appointing the company as a complete supplier/facilities manager to deliver more than 200 plates an hour on each line and maintain the technology for the life of the ten year contract. McGee reports: “To give Agfa credit, the installation was of a standard that everyone should copy. The hardware, the plate-setting and sortation systems are first class and we have had no real platemaking issues whatsoever. The software which is mostly based on Agfa's Arkitex workflow system has been very good. However, we are now in the process of finalising the development of the file management system.

“So far as outsourcing press is concerned, it offered us



● Newsprinters Ctp: a world first outsourced to Agfa