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Hueck Folien's R&D route

Hueck Folien invests heavily in its research and development practices to quicken the introduction of new products and satisfy market demands, as David Pittman reports

Hueck Folien takes its production seriously, as you might expect from a company that produces security threads, holographic foils and security laminates for banknotes, tax stamps and sensitive documents.

At its facility in Baumgartenberg, Austria, which is certified by the European Central Bank as a Security Production Plant, this side of the business is carried out under lock and key, and away from the eyes of unauthorized personnel and site visitors.

Hueck Folien is a 45-year-old web coating specialist, while it has built up a solid knowledge base in metallization since the late 1970s, with security threads for banknotes added to its expertise a decade later.

As well as security products, the Baumgartenberg site produces label facstock and lamination films. In labels, Hueck Folien manufactures products for decorative, technical, security and graphic applications, and transdermal patches.

'Labels and security are our main business units,' says Karl Lippe, director of Hueck Folien's pressure-sensitive industry business unit. 'The pressure-sensitive label side of the company accounts for around 43 percent of business, and is relatively stable.'

Hueck Folien also develops technical, bespoke products by customer request, which Lippe sees as a growing and important part of its activities. 'Label printers want to diversify their business with more complex label types and become a specialist in a niche area,' notes Lippe. 'This means they require more complex products from us for technical and security label applications.'

'We are still heavily involved in the bulk

business, but it is decreasing in the volume of business. Certain characteristics of our products are appreciated by the market, printability, etc., but we are seeing a definitive move towards more complex products.'

Further, the security, label and lamination sides of its business feed off one another, with developments in the high security space for example often finding a secondary purpose in the label side of the business, and vice versa, as the benefits offered by products from one part of the company are sought out by customers in another.

This trend can be seen in the development of Hiperprime, introduced in 2012 and continues to be at the forefront of its sales in the label market. Hiperprime is a printable primer that is said to have outstanding chemical resistance for high performance labeling, and is engineered for applications needing extreme chemical and mechanical resistance of the printed label surface.

It is available with gloss and matte finishes, and the coating can be applied to different substrates including clear, white and metalized polyester. Further, it is designed to be printed using thermal transfer technology and offers more efficiency as there is no need for overlamination.

Hiperprime can also be combined with other features such as tamper evidence or holograms, which are often highly sought after in industrial label markets such as automotive and electronics.

R&D investment

As with production, Hueck Folien pays close attention to research and development, reinvesting around 10 percent of its 50 million

EUR annual turnover in R&D. This has helped it secure more than 100 patents.

It operates an R&D pilot plant and develops lacquer, primer and ink systems in-house, systems which it also produces alongside hologram embossing tools. This is serviced by a staff of 23 experts, and a trio of pilot lines for coating, printing and laminating, vacuum metallizing and slitting.

In 2013, it expanded dedicated R&D presence on the Baumgartenberg site. This included doubling the floor space allocated to R&D and a pilot coating line at the heart of a cleanroom coating center. Other elements of the new innovation center include application labs, creative areas and modern offices for the R&D team, while the existing R&D building was rebuilt.

As part of the inauguration, Tamplex was presented as an innovation in Hueck Folien's label portfolio. Tamplex features a unique color-shifting effect that disappears after the label is peeled off its backing.

'The R&D channel operates in both directions, with the majority developments customer-driven. This often requires us to meet specific criteria as specified by the customer, often with our R&D team working to combine existing features we can offer to create something new.'

'We also develop products under our own steam, such as Tamplex, and are always working on ways to develop our offering.'

With the new R&D possibilities presented to Hueck Folien by the developments in Baumgartenberg and product innovations like Tamplex, the company is working to cement its already-strong position for the delivery of optically active and functional coatings.