

# Pressing Forward

FTA Member Poly Print Talks History, Upgrades to Tackle 21st Century Demands

When FTA member Poly Print opened its doors 24 years ago, it had a single press, a laminator, a mounter and 15 employees. As the company grew, it brought on additional machinery—new presses, new slitters, new mounters, new laminators—and grew its personnel several times over. The company did so to enable expansion from beyond its home state of Arizona to select markets throughout the U.S.



“Today we have grown to more than 70 employees with direct sales representation in California, Utah, Texas, Arizona, Georgia, Ohio, Kentucky and New York,” Poly Print representatives reveal. “We also work with brokers, manufacturer representatives and distributors throughout the U.S.”

That relentless growth has not slowed. As new capabilities have come to market, new trends sweep through the industry and new ideas creep into brand owners’ minds, Poly Print has continued to adapt and expand. This year alone saw the purchase of three new pieces of machinery, chief among them a Uteco Onyx 10-color press, and the company is already anticipating being SQF Level 3 certified next year.

Here, three Poly Print employees— Customer Service Manager Kate Hanlon, Lean & HACCP Coordinator Alex Tavour, and VP Joe Genova—discuss its history, how it’s positioned to deliver on customer demands in 2016 and what it’s doing to prepare for the future.



From left: Alex Tavour, Joe Genova and Kate Hanlon

## COMPANY BACKGROUND

**FLEXO:** Talk about how Poly Print got started.

**Hanlon, Tavour & Genova:** Established in 1992, Poly Print is family owned and operated. Ron Genova (president and CEO), Elsie Genova (CFO) and Joe Genova (vice president) acquired a distressed flexographic printing and laminating converter and, over the past 24 years, strategically grew the company to be a leader in the industry. Ron, having come from the industry, was equipped with the knowledge and confidence to turn the distraught printer into a profitable growing company. Elsie, having extensive background in business administration, was the backbone the company needed to get it off the ground. And at age 10, Joe was introduced into the family business—which he would one day take over.

With corporate headquarters and operations based in Tucson, AZ, the company’s reach extends from coast to coast.

**FLEXO:** What are some important milestones in Poly Print’s history?

**Hanlon, Tavour & Genova:** After being established in 1992, we’ve had a number of milestone events:

- **1993:** The purchase of a Schiavi 6-color central impression (CI) flexo press
- **1998:** Poly Print began process printing
- **2006:** The company moved operations from a 25,000 sq. ft. building to an 80,000 sq. ft. production facility. We also made several purchases, including a 10-color Gearless Uteco press, water based Uteco laminator and (now known as) AMUT DOLCI BIELLONI slitter
- **2007:** We received an AIB Superior rating
- **2008-2011:** Poly Print survived the worst economic conditions our country has seen
- **2012:** Secured contracts with national brand food companies
- **2013:** Purchased a new AMUT DOLCI BIELLONI slitter and JM Heaford moulder
- **2014:** Purchased a new Nordmecannica SuperSimplex SL and obtained SQF Level 2 certification
- **2015:** Purchased a new Totani pouch machine
- **2016:** A trio of purchases: A new JM Heaford moulder, AMUT DOLCI BIELLONI slitter and new 10-color Uteco Onyx

***FLEXO:** How big is the company now? Number of employees, presses, shifts?*

**Hanlon, Tavour & Genova:** In 1992, Poly Print started with one press, one laminator, one moulder, one slitter and 15 employees. Today we have grown to more than 70 employees with direct sales representa-

tion in California, Utah, Texas, Arizona, Georgia, Ohio, Kentucky and New York. We also work with brokers, manufacturer representatives and distributors throughout the U.S.

Our equipment consists of four moulder proofers, three printing presses, two laminators, five slitters and a pouch machine. We are currently running some departments 24/7, but the majority run 24 hours per day only on weekdays.

***FLEXO:** Where are Poly Print's primary markets? What are its primary markets?*

**Hanlon, Tavour & Genova:** Poly Print is a wide web flexographic printer, laminator and pouch converter. Presses and laminators up to 52-in. wide allow us to compete with small to long production runs. We service a wide range of markets including food packaging, snack foods, standup pouches, nutraceuticals, lawn and garden, chemical, tissue wrap, industrial and bottle labels.

We have a superior focus on customer service which has fueled our success and growth over the years. We have dialed in on responsiveness, quick turnaround, low minimums, stocking programs and solving problems. With more than 1 million pounds in inventory and strong vendor relationships, we are able to respond and deliver on time. We have exceptional economies of scale and work hard to keep our overhead down, which is reflective in our competitive prices.



Photos courtesy of Poly Print

Being SQF Level 2 certified has certainly made an impression on our customers and our company culture. Food safety has become increasingly important over the years and we are always on the forefront of our markets demands. We are working to obtain our SQF Level 3 certification in 2017. We are also registered with the FDA, AIB Certified and IMS certified.

Poly Print's primary markets include California, Arizona, Utah, Texas, the Midwest, southeast and East Coast.

## QUALITY

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*FLEXO: Talk about graphics quality at Poly Print—its importance, challenges it presents, ways the company ensures high quality, prepress capabilities, etc.*

**Hanlon, Tavour & Genova:** "Quality Makes a Good Impression" is our slogan. However, our commitment to quality goes beyond that, to every aspect of our process.

Prepress and high quality graphics have changed and shaped the industry in the last decade. We have been in business long enough to remember using rubber plates and the transition to photopolymer. New technology continually presents itself in the way of color separations, printing plates and longevity.

We aim to ensure a smooth transformation from customer product design to production ready printing plates. Any issues that may occur in the prepress process will translate through every stage of production, causing a devastating chain reaction. To avoid such circumstances, we have developed procedures to ensure the printing plates are made precisely to our customers' specifications. We continually strive to understand what gives superior print quality and consistent reproduction. Our technical knowledge of the printing and converting process, along with the advances in machine technology, directly impact the quality of the printed piece.



## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

### POLY PRINT, INC.

FTA Member Since: 2004

#### Key Staff:

- Ron Genova, President
- Elsie Genova, Administrative Manager
- Ron Vukmir, Prepress & Production Manager
- Ken Bartley, Printing Department Manager

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**For as large as the industry is and with packaging being all around us, people just think it's 'there.' There is not enough awareness brought to the industry and as such, people looking for jobs do not think of our industry as one that can lead to a fulfilling career.**



Each member of our team is responsible for quality in his or her own department, to ensure we produce the highest quality product every time it is ordered.

*FLEXO: Where does process control fall in importance for Poly Print?*

**Hanlon, Tavour & Genova:** Process control and planning are the foundation for running a successful, consistent and growing company. We recognize having control of our processes simplifies our operations, reduces hazards, and cuts down on waste and service costs. In an industry that is constantly pressured by pricing challenges, solid process control will decide if you are going to be around for the long run.

At Poly Print, we have had to learn the hard way over the years and paid for our mistakes. With each mistake, we strive to identify the root cause of the issue, where the process failed and revise our procedures to ensure it does not happen again. We have adopted the systems that our SQF certification mandates and have even expanded on them to make our plant run safer, cleaner and more efficiently.

While SQF Level 2 namely focuses on food safety, we are striving to be Level 3 certified by 2017, which emphasizes quality and process control. Process control is a continuing effort and culture that starts from the top. One look around our plant and you would see that we take it very seriously.

*FLEXO: Is standardization a focus at the company? Do you deploy the Flexographic Image Reproduction Specifications & Tolerances (FIRST) methodology?*

**Hanlon, Tavour & Genova:** Process control holds hands with standardization and is the foundation for Lean Six Sigma, as well as a tool for maintaining safety, quality and productivity at high levels. The focus at Poly Print is planning, planning and more planning, to ensure job elements are efficiently organized and repeatable. Poly Print has worked relentlessly to standardize operations throughout every department in the company, including prepress, administration, press,

lamination, slitting, converting, material handling and environmental control. Standardization is an ongoing process whose goal is kaizen. If standardized work doesn't change, we are regressing.

**FLEXO:** *What is the biggest obstacle you face as a package printer in 2016?*

**Hanlon, Tavour & Genova:** The two biggest challenges we face as a printer are pressures from overseas suppliers and finding talented people. China and Asia continue to import product into the U.S. at price points that make it very challenging to compete with. On average, we see pricing 15 percent to 20 percent less, but in some cases have seen as high as 30 percent or more.

Finding good people continues to be an issue. I do not believe this is unique to Poly Print. For as large as the industry is and with packaging being all around us, people just think it's "there." There is not enough awareness brought to the industry and as such, people looking for jobs do not think of our industry as one that can lead to a fulfilling career.

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## PRINT PROCESSES

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**FLEXO:** *Talk about any recent equipment purchases, upgrades or developments Poly Print has made lately.*

**Hanlon, Tavour & Genova:** In the last year, Poly Print has purchased and installed a new Totani pouch machine, JM Heaford moulder

proofer, AMUT DOLCI BIELLONI high speed slitter and, most recently, a new 10-color Uteco Onyx. Scheduled upgrades by year's end is a complete overhaul of the existing 10-color Uteco Emerald with all new doctor blades assembly, auto wash, viscometers, auto registration, auto defect detection, blowers and a complete software upgrade. Once complete, this press will have nearly all the features and technology our new Onyx has.

**FLEXO:** *What percent of the company's product is printed flexographically? Do you utilize other print processes side by side with flexo? If so, how do these complement the flexo operation?*

**Hanlon, Tavour & Genova:** All of our printing is done flexographically. Most of what is printed is laminated and shipped in roll stock form. We print and laminate on a range of substrates—biaxially oriented polypropylene (BOPP), cast polypropylene (CPP), polyethylene terephthalate (PET), nylons, polyethylene (PE), barrier films, cosmetic webs, shrink, paper and label film. As the market for pouches continues to grow in demand, we believe that more and more of what we print will be converted to this format.

**FLEXO:** *What are the most important factors you look for in modern day presses?*

**Hanlon, Tavour & Genova:** The most important factors are ease of operation, changeover speeds including color washups, auto register, auto impressions, and setup waste minimization. Also important is the inclusion of quality inspection systems and press speeds.

## FLEXO MARKET

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**FLEXO:** *Talk about the flexo market today: Advances, growth opportunities, output, etc.*

**Hanlon, Tavour & Genova:** The flexo market has seen many changes, especially in the last decade, the biggest advances being in artwork and printing plates. Process printing used to be considered a bit of a specialty, where nowadays is considered the norm. We are continually being introduced to new printing plate technologies. Where we once thought





HD was only referenced for televisions, we are now flexographically printing HD digital. Customers have realized that packaging has a lot to do with how a product sells and now expect high end printing. For flexo printers, that means 150 lpi, 175 lpi and, as of late, 200 lpi. Aniloxes and inks are also key components to achieving those results.

Aside from graphics and process printing as being one important advancement in printing, standup pouches have taken on a whole new spotlight. Here is where we see the market going and, consequently, a major opportunity. The installation of our new Totani pouch machine allows Poly Print to stay ahead of the curve and offer customers the latest in packaging developments. Pouches not only offer the consumer a new way to control portions with reclosable zipper features, they are also a fashionable and effective way to present products.

With so many styles of pouches on the market now—from standup, doyen bottom, box pouches, quad seals and many more—the options are nearly endless. There is also a big push for pouches to replace rigid packaging. It's much more economical and safer.

***FLEXO:** Where does the company see demand from consumers affecting operations? Are there any specific products seeing a surge?*

**Hanlon, Tavour & Genova:** We see more and more customers demanding faster turnarounds and smaller runs. It seems that as the years go on, this is the same story as it has always been. However, with so many regional and national brands constantly trying to gain and maintain market share, they do so by offering specialty flavors and evolving their product lines. This requires printers to be that much more flexible and responsive.

Prepress and artwork seem to be the bottleneck as we go through the design and approval stage. This always puts pressure downstream on

production, as timelines usually don't change. Equipment manufacturers have responded to this very well over the years. Presses that now have auto registrations, auto impressions settings, washups that take 15 to 20 minutes for the entire press, and job storage are just a few of the advancements that allow printers to respond to customer demands.

In the markets that we service, we see a particular push coming from bottled water, nutraceuticals in the form of stickpack, organic snack foods and portion controlled packaging. As mentioned before, one of the largest request is for pouches. We have gained a lot of new customers who are looking for standup pouches and many existing customers are converting some of the product lines to be offered in them.

***FLEXO:** Do you think acquisitions are becoming more commonplace in the world of package printing?*

**Hanlon, Tavour & Genova:** We have seen some acquisitions over the past few years. Acquiring another company, especially in printing, lends itself many advantages—immediate market share being one of the most important; tenured employees and an established company in the community being others.

On the other end, we have seen quite a few startups in the last three to five years. We seem a bit uncertain the mindset and strategy for some of these startups printers. It is a very difficult business to start in without experience, sales and, most importantly, a very talented staff. The industry is very capital intensive, from equipment purchases, inventory, stocking programs for customers and extending terms. Most of these startups come in, cut prices, pay for prepress and offer customers incentives that are not commonplace. ■