



A UNIVERSE OF PACKAGING

Italian company Universal Pack has over 50 years' experience as a leading innovator of customised packaging machines and complete production lines, specialising in multilane vertical continuous-motion and intermittent primary packaging machines for many global brands. Sales Director at Universal Pack UK Piers Lamb discussed innovation and growth in conversation with Phil Nicholls.

As a global packaging company serving multiple house-hold brand names, Universal Pack is fully aware of the need for sustainable packaging. This need is driven not only by demand from its customers and the end-user, but intrinsically too. Thus, Universal Pack has committed resources to finding ecologically sensitive solutions for companies worldwide.

"Universal Pack has always been very forward thinking," explained Sales Director at Universal Pack UK Piers Lamb. "We started a sustainable laminate sachet programme alongside some of our multinational clients. That was pretty early on for the industry, and this is now where the market focus has shifted."

The company began in 1965, releasing its first production line machine the following

year. The complexity of Universal Pack machines steadily expanded over time to meet the growing demands of customers.

Today, Universal Pack is a global company with over 400 automatic sachet and stick pack machines in operation with customers in the UK and Ireland alone. The company has turnover in the region of €50 million and exports around the world. Universal Pack has 170 employees in its single factory located in the town San Giovanni in Marignano, in the Province of Rimini, part of the Italian region of Emilia-Romagna.

A broad portfolio

From this one location, Universal Pack produces a broad range of machines, where each one is custom built. The Alfa range are vertical intermittent-motion machines to produce convenient, practical and



consumer-friendly stick packs. The Delta machines provide intermittent and continuous-motion cartoning for the packaging of stacked sachets in pre-glued or flat cartons.

Universal Pack's Gamma range are high-speed vertical continuous-motion machines operating with rotary sealing rollers, to produce convenient, practical and consumer-friendly rectangular four-side-seal and shaped sachets. Meanwhile, the new Theta machines offer high-speed vertical continuous-motion machines designed and built to satisfy the pharmaceutical industry's highest standard, to produce single dose four-side-seal shaped sachets, which we are now seeing adopted in the food industry.

The designers at Universal Pack can combine the above ranges to produce a fully automated packaging line to meet client requirements. These packaging machines can be configured for food, chemical and pharmaceutical customers and more. The Universal Pack machines can package

granules, liquids and powders, as well as a range of unusually shaped objects from straws to vials of medication.

The Universal appeal

The breadth of possibilities from the Universal Pack packaging lines makes the company appealing to customers. The depth of expertise within the company is testament to the investment strategy of the family owners and the dedication to excellence within Universal Pack.

"The essence of Universal Pack is quality control and accuracy," Mr Lamb said. "Each machine is designed in-house, down to every single moving part. The software and the user interface are also designed in-house. The only part we outsource is the electrical components and chassis for the machine, but all the mechanical parts are made at our factory."

In total, Universal Pack produces 95% of the machines in house. All of the

mechanical parts are designed, manufactured and quality checked in-house.

"This is very unique nowadays as companies can save a lot of money outsourcing parts – but this shows we are not profit-focused but driven by making the best quality machines on the market," said Mr Lamb.

"Additionally, our machines have a very ergonomic design. It is too easy to focus on performance and efficiency, then forget about the ergonomic design and how simple the machine is to run. Another feature is the ease of maintenance on our machines, because maintenance is a massive concern when operating a line all day, every day. Universal Pack machines are straightforward to maintain as everything is very accessible for the engineer."

Mr Lamb also emphasised the benefits of Universal Pack being honest in its dealings with customers: "A big global problem, currently, is with the supply of electrical components. Everyone struggled massively sourcing electrical components, mainly because of shortages of the computer chips in them, which is true for all suppliers.

Thankfully, we are a gold standard customer with our suppliers such as Allen Bradley, Rockwell Automation etc. As a result, we are given priority as a regular customer. We are working closely with our suppliers who are struggling to ensure we are affected as little as possible. And thankfully, our owner, Pietro, isn't afraid to over-order.

"At Universal Pack, we are not afraid to tell customers a genuine lead time, but at the end of the day, Universal Pack would



rather start a relationship with the client based on honesty."

Another unique aspect to Universal Pack is its in-house laboratory used for testing every single product and laminate that comes through the company. This allows the company to bring the design forward by weeks or months as its teams gain a true scientific understanding of the raw materials running through the machines.

"This, backed up with the expertise and huge database of different products and wrapping material, means our solutions are fool proof," stated Mr Lamb.

Service and innovation

The extensive after-sales support for customers provided by Universal Pack is another aspect of the company's appeal. An extensive computerised spare-parts system at the Universal Pack factory ensures the efficient collection and dispatch of spares for customers.

"We focus heavily on after-sales," explained Mr Lamb. "This can be a hugely

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difficult job for the guys in the factory who are working with different time zones. For any company, if a machine is off-line, then this can be expensive for every day of lost production. Universal Pack must meet the customer’s after-sales expectations and deploy an engineer as soon as possible. We have a UK based team available to assist at a moment’s notice. They spend time in Italy, constantly refreshing their knowledge.”

Universal Pack works in close partnership with customers to build efficient and innovative packaging solutions. CEO Pietro Donati has an innovative mindset and will invest in machinery to build a component in-house if he cannot source one of sufficient quality externally.

This innovation is supported by robust quality control processes.

“I have seen testing rigs at the factory,” Mr Lamb said, “running a new piston. This piston just operates as a test. Mr Donati will not approve the piston for use in one of our

machines until he sees it perform over a million operations.”

Universal Pack has a development programme for eco-friendly laminates to minimise the carbon footprint of customers and consumers. The company has re-configured its machines to operate with the different characteristics of these laminates, ensuring a satisfactory seal on sachets made from these recyclable materials.

For all the value in sachets that can be recycled, Mr Lamb believes the future lies elsewhere: “The way forward is compostable. A compostable sachet is so much easier for the consumer, especially if they are at home where they can simply put it on their compost heap or in the food bin, without the need to flush it out. The danger with biodegradable labels is the fear that people will just drop them on the street. Compostable is just so simple.”

Packaging growth

With new sachet options under development, the future of Universal Pack



is about growth and expansion. Production capability is being upgraded with the addition of three new six-axis automatic CNC machines. Longer-term, Universal Pack is in the process of planning to expand the size of the factory in Italy.

Likewise, the UK and Ireland branch of Universal Pack is expanding to accommodate several big projects lined up with multinational companies over the next four or five years. This UK-based subsidiary will enjoy an expanded team, new offices and a Universal Pack showroom designed to present customers with examples of the company’s capabilities.

Universal Pack is always looking to expand into new markets, according to Mr Lamb: “The African market is one we have cornered. Universal Pack is so successful there because our machines are

so rugged and cope with intermittent power cuts and poor working conditions. We really have universal machines that are so easy to operate.”

Mr Lamb is excited to watch Universal Pack’s growth: “There’s always a new challenge around the corner. I love the family atmosphere at Universal Pack and the sense of teamwork where everyone is doing their best for the company.

He concluded with a personal note: “This company has done a lot for me and my family especially. Universal Pack believed in me when I was very young and put me in a very good position – partly due to unfortunate circumstances – without even thinking twice. They really are a big family who will back anyone on their team in any scenario. This is very unique for such a high profile company.”