

Image Awareness

Lorpon Labels Talks Rebranding, Print Quality, Digital's Impact

They say, “Don’t judge a book by its cover,” but, as members of the flexographic community, we’re all guilty of doing it. It’s why standards and repeatability are so important, it’s why there are thousands of Pantone colors, it’s why the Excellence in Flexography Awards even exist. So naturally, when a brand owner or CPC is seeking out a printer, it is not only looking at the image coming off their press, but also their website, corporate identity, company logo—their image.



Pontarollo



Sommer

“The right package lets a product speak for itself, stand up against the competition—and own that shelf space,” note FTA member Lorpon Labels’ President Andrea Pontarollo and Vice President, Business Development Jeff Sommer. “We see our new brand and website no differently.” Here, the executives talk about their recent rebranding, how print quality concerns are handled day to day, and how digital printing has become a part of their production process.

COMPANY BACKGROUND

FLEXO: Talk about how Lorpon Labels got started.

Andrea Pontarollo & Jeff Sommer: Bob Pontarollo founded Lorpon Labels in 1985 with one goal: to provide his customers with the best products and best service possible. And that’s what he’s been doing for three decades—building solid relationships with loyal clients, many of whom have stuck with this family owned firm since day one.

FLEXO: What are some important milestones in Lorpon Labels’ history?

Pontarollo & Sommer: In 1999, we moved into 4-color process—prime label. Automation became a focus from 2006 through 2010, as it allowed for continual automating of turret rewinders and butt splicers. And in 2014, we made the move to digital.

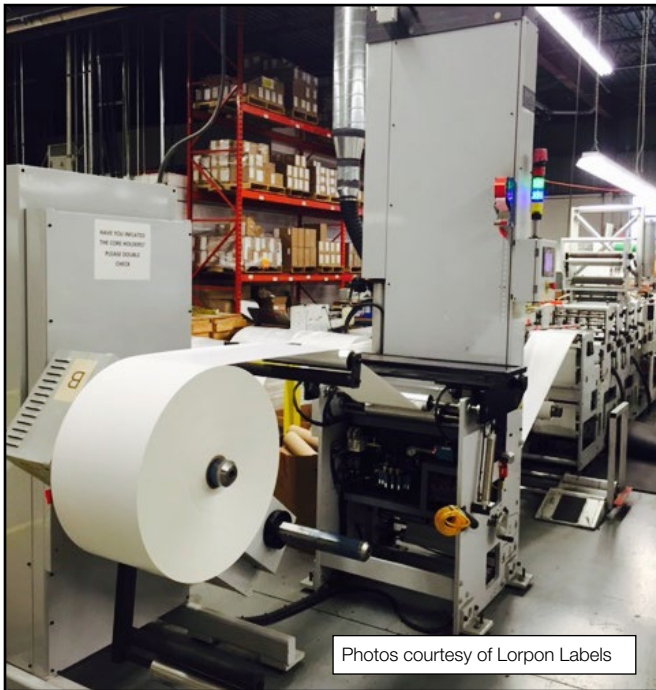


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FLEXO: How big is the company now? Number of employees, presses, shifts?

Pontarollo & Sommer: We have more than 30 employees, who operate eight presses across two shifts.



Photos courtesy of Lorpon Labels

FLEXO: Where are Lorpon Labels' primary markets?

Pontarollo & Sommer: Our main focus is Canada and the Northeastern U.S. Our primary markets are food and beverage, sports nutrition, health and beauty, industrial, and warehousing and logistics.

IMAGE

FLEXO: Lorpon Labels recently unveiled a new website and brand. Talk about the importance of a printer's image: Does it help attract new clients? Retain existing customers?

Pontarollo & Sommer: Yes—we see our image as integral to our business. We think of our image no differently than our clients' packaging. What we mean by that is we inherently believe and advise our clients that a package is the face of their product—the first (and often only) chance to make an impression. So it should communicate clearly and have the visual appeal necessary to get a buyer's attention. The right package lets a product speak for itself, stand up against the competition—and own that shelf space. We see our new brand and website no differently.

FLEXO: What were the motivations that led to your decision to rebrand?

Pontarollo & Sommer: We saw an opportunity in the market. We had started to work with different buyers, we had invested significantly in new equipment, and we saw an opportunity to showcase how our offering can enhance the business of our current and future clients. Our team is creative and idea driven, not just transactional—we're not about being order takers, but about using our knowledge to add real

value to our clients' brands. We were motivated to vocalize to prospects and current customers that they could rely on our team for an engaged, consultative approach to help them make the best packaging decision for their product.

FLEXO: As a printer, what value do you see in having a modern website that is mobile friendly and responsive?

Pontarollo & Sommer: We don't see this from the viewpoint of a printer, but rather a business. So much of the buying behavior is determined, and decisions are made, before a business has the chance to speak to customer. Having a modern website, especially one that is responsive, was a necessity to doing business.

FLEXO: What role does social media play in your marketing and branding efforts?

Pontarollo & Sommer: We see social media as conversation with our customers, prospects, vendors and peers. It is engaging and important to our brand, and our commitment to the industry. From a straight marketing perspective, we knew a website wasn't enough. Our digital storefront had to extend to social media. It enhances our trustworthiness, it enables us to educate the industry through valuable content and it supports our sales efforts.

WORK

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

Pontarollo & Sommer: Graphics quality is of the utmost importance, which is why our cutting edge equipment also includes several X-Rite devices for unparalleled color matching. Files are fully optimized for our print process using Esko Automation Engine, which allows for unparalleled consistency, speed and control. And to ensure the best print quality possible, we provide comprehensive prepress advice and support. Our experts work with our clients' designers on tooling, die cut issues, white inks, etc., and help them add any special decorative requests into the artwork. In the end, there are records on every job to ensure consistency from run to run.

FLEXO: Where does process control fall in importance for Lorpon Labels? Is standardization a focus at the company? Do you deploy Flexographic Image Reproduction Specifications & Tolerances (FIRST) standards?

Pontarollo & Sommer: We use *FIRST* and all of our operators are trained in our standard operating procedures. We run *FIRST* densities for our process work and we measure our output with the X-Rite devices as well as obvious visual inspections. We've standardized our

pressroom: Printing presses, anilox rolls and tools are standardized across the whole flexo division. We haven't just stopped at hardware either—we've cross trained our operators on all of our equipment. We strongly believe standardization is of the utmost importance to be able to offer our clients reliability and consistency. It's the key to repeatability, consistency, reduced waste and higher productivity.

FLEXO: *Is there a particular recent job that demonstrates Lorpon Labels' capabilities or a feature that is increasingly popular? Talk about the job—its client, run size, parameters, obstacles, etc.*

Pontarollo & Sommer: We ran a holographic film with unique graphical elements, very fine details, as well as multiple varnishes, with tactile effects. It was a large run that went to four different countries and required color consistency and strict brand standards to be met.

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

Pontarollo & Sommer: Probably managing the volatility in currency. Our Canadian Dollar (CAD) is a double edged sword. When the CAD drops, exporting to the U.S. is good, as the buying power of the U.S. Dollar (USD) goes a lot further. We have been lucky prior to 2015, as both the USD and CAD had been fairly stable. This is not a problem unique to Lorpon, however, and we do our best to manage the effects to our business.

Another challenge would be managing growth while still maintaining the high level of service our existing clients deserve. We do not want to sacrifice any of our existing loyal clients that have helped to get us to where we are today. From a sales and marketing perspective, we put a lot of effort into digging deep into our client's real everyday business challenges, versus just focusing on cost per unit... our primary focus is on providing real, tangible value to our clients and their brands in more ways than cost reduction. That's not to say cost reduction isn't a focus, but often the largest return on investment for our clients can be realized in other ways.

PRINT PROCESSES

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

Pontarollo & Sommer: We made an investment a year ago in a new HP Indigo WS6800 Digital Press. We felt that of all the choices currently in the market for digital label and packaging production, the Indigo platform allows us to produce the absolute highest quality. The color gamut and control is really second to none. This allows us to meet even the most stringent brand standards. We did not want to have our clients compromise on anything to have digital labels and packaging.



FLEXO: *What percent of the company's product is printed flexographically? How does digital complement the flexo operation?*

Pontarollo & Sommer: With the recent addition of the HP, currently 90 percent of the jobs are run on flexo, but we anticipate that number to shift in the next year. We've profiled our flexo to print identical to our digital, allowing our clients to test markets without incurring high costs. Using the digital technology allows our flexo to focus on what it is good at—running larger volumes

FLEXO: *Does Lorpon Labels operate any combo or hybrid presses? If so, what type—what processes' decks are added to the flexo press? Are these relegated to specific types of jobs?*

Pontarollo & Sommer: At this time we are not offering any combo or hybrid process, but it's on our radar for the near future.

FLEXO: *As a flexographic printer, what made you invest in digital printing?*

Pontarollo & Sommer: Market demands have been changing for quite a while now: SKU proliferation, CPCs wanting to reduce inventory, faster speed to market, smaller order volumes with more frequent ordering, growth opportunity in personalization and customization. Adding digital output complements our flexo offering and allows us to be nimbler.

FLEXO: *How do you see digital printing affecting the printing industry, now and going forward?*

Pontarollo & Sommer: It is here to stay. The technology continues to improve; digital puts pressure on analog print technology, which is in turn bringing improvements to analog. But there is a time and a place for each technology. The flexo process really shines with larger printruns. Digital fills in the gaps where flexo is not the best choice. It's really about using the right tool for the job.

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FLEXO/LABEL MARKETS

FLEXO: *Where has the flexo market gone in Lorpon Labels' history?*

Pontarollo & Sommer: Flexo used to be considered a low cost, low quality process. The changes in the presses and the input technology (anilox, stickyback, photopolymer plates and improvements in water based and UV inks), have increased the quality of flexo where it is comparable to offset.

FLEXO: *Specific to labels, what has Lorpon Labels seen in terms of customer demands, new capabilities, etc.?*

Pontarollo & Sommer: There are always pricing pressures—customers are looking at ways to save money or improve productivity. We have seen a trend to more films, less inventory, shorter lead times and more decorative options to stand out on the shelf

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

Pontarollo & Sommer: Really, it depends on the client. We are always focused on bringing the most value to the client and this means different things to different customers. It depends on the product and their offering. There is definitely a trend moving to clear labels, and of course we are seeing more demand from the consumer for digital prints.

FLEXO: *Do your clients' demands differ depending on the region they do business in? Do you notice regional trends?*

Pontarollo & Sommer: Yes, Canada tends to be smaller volumes. Also, Canada always has to account for French language requirements. Canada is not a homogeneous country; many of our clients are very region focused, which can lead to different branding, graphics and flavors of products in different regions. This rationality can favor different print processes depending on the volumes. However, in terms of materials and client demands, things are pretty consistent. ■

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

LORPON LABELS

FTA Member Since: 2005

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