

Axcyl gains favour in Italy

In the second of our articles examining Trelleborg's partners for printing solutions, Enrico Albani, Sales and Marketing Director at Italian firm Simonazzi, explains how he was so impressed by Axcyl products that he wanted to buy the company.

Enrico Albani is passionate about flexography. He has been since entering the industry in 1982 following a career that took him around the world once he had qualified as a chemist. The interview for this article, which took place on April 1st, was by chance 14 years to the day since he began work for a small family business in Milan called Simonazzi.

"It was a big shock," he admits with a laugh. "I had spent the previous 18 years working for global corporations and Simonazzi employed 12 people at that time. But do you know, I regained my enthusiasm to get up in the morning, and to be part of something where I could make a difference was a breath of fresh air. In addition, Mr Simonazzi, the founder of the company, was a truly inspirational man and it was a pleasure to work for him."

Simonazzi sold a wide variety of letterpress and flexo products, from photopolymer plates to the equipment needed to process them. However, it did not sell flexo sleeves and shortly after he joined Enrico travelled to the French factory of Axcyl, which was part of the US MacDermid group.



Manuela Simonazzi, Enrico Albani and Luciana Simonazzi.

"As a chemist and with many years in the industry, I could see immediately the potential offered by Axcyl sleeves. They were totally outstanding compared to anything else available from the competition. Their honeycomb construction, using leading-edge



materials, was groundbreaking. The challenge was that the brand wasn't well known and the sleeves were expensive. Even so, we snapped up the opportunity to take on the agency for Italy.

"We spent the next few years trying to convince printers why it was worth spending the extra money, but it was a huge hurdle. Most of them were small businesses, often operating only one or two presses with a handful of people and it was difficult for them to appreciate the benefits of paying more for sleeves than they were used to. We faced the problem of people trying to compare 'apples with apples' when in reality the Axcyl product was a different concept altogether.

"We were totally committed to the Axcyl products and knew they offered advantages that far outweighed the extra cost – it was simply a case of people seeing these with their own eyes. Perhaps 'simply' is not the right word! We



changed our approach and focused on narrow web printers producing high-quality work such as labels.

Axcyl sleeve brand is synonymous with reliability, quality and accuracy.

"Eventually, printers began to trial the sleeves and the significant improvements they experienced in terms of print quality, reduced vibration at fast press speeds and ease of mounting led to us acquiring an enthusiastic user-base. Price ceased to be an issue as soon as they tried the sleeves."

In 2008, Trelleborg acquired Axcyl when it purchased the MacDermid Offset Printing Blankets business from the US parent group. The team at Simonazzi arranged a meeting with senior management at Trelleborg.

"We said we wanted to purchase the Axcyl company - they were a bit surprised to say the least!" jokes Enrico. "But we were serious. We believed so much in the future of the Axcyl sleeves that we were willing to take over the production plant in France. However, Trelleborg could also see the potential so they politely turned down our offer."



Part of the attraction was the anticipated growth of the European flexo market, which had on the whole avoided the problems faced by the commercial offset sector. This expectation proved to be accurate. In 2015 the Italian flexo sector grew by around 6% and there are now thought to be around 2,000 flexo printers, although most of these are small businesses and they're spread throughout the country.

Today, Simonazzi is managed by Luciana and Manuela Simonazzi, the daughters of the founder, and it has grown significantly since the day Enrico joined. In addition to serving the flexo market the company continues to supply consumables for letterpress printing and provides magnesium, zinc and brass for metal engraving.

"We have a great deal of specialist knowledge within Simonazzi and this expertise plays a vital part in being able to give customers the right products and advice for their requirements," says Enrico. "We've worked very closely with the Trelleborg team. They're extremely professional and friendly while their enthusiasm for the Axcyl flexo sleeves has been fantastic."

Major investment by Trelleborg at the French facility where the Axcyl sleeves are made has resulted in more efficient production and sustained development of the technology. In 2015 the company launched a carbon fiber bridge sleeve, which enables higher printing productivity due to the excellent damping properties and exceptional rigidity.



Simonazzi's premises on the outskirts of Milan.

Health and safety always has an important influence on any new design and no Axcyl sleeves weigh more than 30 kg. The recent introduction of its 'Fast-track' service has also been very popular, as this allows printers to obtain sleeves quickly if their timescale demands it.



“Trelleborg has demonstrated its long-term commitment to the flexo industry and its skill at implementing well-organised plans has been invaluable in keeping Axcyl sleeves in a different category to anything else on the market. As presses become faster and wider the mechanical stresses placed on sleeves and plates grow, yet the demand for ever higher print quality is constant. We have customers managing tolerances on a daily basis of 0.01 mm on jobs consisting of more than a dozen colors.

“During the last five years Simonazzi has doubled its share of the Italian flexo sleeve market and we now have almost 20 per cent,” says Enrico. “This has been a significant achievement and a great endorsement for the Axcyl products, which have steadily been winning printers around, often by word of mouth recommendation.

“The next few years are set to be even more exciting at Simonazzi and we’re looking forward to continuing to help printers meet the full potential of their presses and businesses. Many customers are family firms, similar in size, culture and attitude to us and so it’s particularly rewarding to play a part in their success ... and it ensures I’m still keen to get up in the morning!”