



Group Managing Director Leslie Gibson (standing) with Sales Director Shaun Morris, are confident that Frip's ongoing investment will strengthen the company's UK market position.

# FRIP INVESTS TO MAINTAIN ITS UK MARKET POSITION

NICK COOMBES REPORTS FROM HINCKLEY, ENGLAND

**T**he UK's leading hot foil stamping and embossing specialists, Frip Group, continues to invest in technology and personnel to preserve its premier position and extend its range of services. The company, which is currently under second generation management by Leslie Gibson, was founded in Scotland

by his parents in 1970 and grew into Foil Ribbon & Impact Printing Company, better known as Frip, shortly afterwards. Early business included hot foil stamping and embossing for the luxury packaging market, notably Scotch whisky, which still forms an essential part of the company's turnover 48 years later.

Today, in addition to being the leading UK specialist in hot foil stamping and embossing, the company offers a wide range of sheet lamination and finishing services from its five production sites, strategically located around the country in Glasgow, Stockport, Redditch, Redhill and headquarters at Hinckley. In addition

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to traditional lamination, Frip now offers innovative use of laminate film, varnish and other decorative finishes as well as speciality papers and boards to enhance the packaging and in some cases, add a degree of security. Frip was in fact the first finishing house in Europe to print a commercial hot foil hologram back in 1981 and in 2017 processed more than 100 million B1 sheets.

Key to the company's success has been its eye for detail. “We pride ourselves on customer service and are involved in every process from artwork creation to delivery of the finished product,” explained Gibson. Initially serving predominantly the commercial print market, Frip is now 70% packaging orientated and prides itself on the range of its capabilities and volume handling capacity. “We like to push the boundaries, so our techniques include sculptured embossing, textured and photo etch foiling and security micro-embossing,” he added.

### Investment

Each of the company's five sites is operated as a separate business and has different capabilities. For example, the Redhill location splits its business 50:50 commercial to package print. Overall, Frip Group employs 65 staff and is proud of its own training scheme which currently has five young apprentices and two mature workers under full-time instruction. All of this generates an annual turnover in excess of £6.5m and has allowed the company to invest more than £1m in the past twelve months. Machine line-up includes three Bobst 126 BMA and three Bobst 102 BMA hot foilers, along with the latest investment of a Brause Signal 1060 Fi hot foiler, which was recently installed. It was part of an investment package that includes

full reconditioning of an older Bobst 102 BMA Foilmaster and relocating it from Hinckley to Stockport that will add 40% to capacity across the Hinckley and Stockport plants.

“We chose the Brause for its build quality and high specification – it offers outstanding value for money in our eyes and will increase our flexibility with new products” said Gibson,

who pointed out that in the short time since installation, the Brause is working well and is appreciated by the operators for its vacuum delivery, pre set-up die changing table and production speed of 7,500 sheets/hour. Also from the Brause stable is a new folder gluer for straightline, 4- and 6-corner and crashlock work, which is due for installation soon.



One of several Bobst BMA hot foilers in the Frip Group.



The newly installed Brause Signal 1060Fi was chosen for its flexible production capacity that will allow Frip to develop into new product markets.

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**SHAUN MORRIS, SALES DIRECTOR**



Frip has two of the final batch of Billhöfer laminators from 2008.

Six cylinder machines and a gamut of other specialist finishing equipment, large and small, complete the production floor, along with laminators from Billhöfer, Paperplast and Steinemann. As the largest UK supplier of sheet lamination, Frip is able to undertake non-standard work up to a sheet size of 1040 x 1420mm. Gloss, matt and silk finishes are available with OPP film and PET and food grade barrier protection is also offered. Functionality includes ovenable, heat-sealable, ant-fog and microwaveable products.

### Specialities

Window lamination has become a house speciality. The laminate that forms the window can be applied to the outside or inside of the package and offers advantages over traditional window patching. When applied internally, the film creates a food safe barrier between the board and product so eliminating the need for bags, PE board or window patching.

When applied externally the film decoratively enhances the pack and gives added protection to both product and packaging. The benefits include reduced packaging waste, better shelf-impact and pack durability, protection for food (which eliminates the need for bags/PE board), added security, unlimited aperture sizes and profiles with a variety of films and a lower production cost.

Significantly, and especially in the current climate (think 'Blue Planet 2'), this type of windowing is 100% recyclable/reclaimable. "There will always be a conflict of interest between best process and best price. It's all a question of who pays the price – though it will inevitably get passed

on to the consumer," explained Sales Director, Shaun Morris, adding that Frip's aim is to use the functionality of film to reduce its volume rather than remove it altogether. "It's not so much about the creation of the packaging, much of which is governed by international legislation, it's about the correct disposal of it. That's where time and money need to be invested," he said.

In addition to its finishing, Frip now offers Metpol lamination under the brand name MetalPaper. It holds UK stocks of Bright Silver, Matt Silver and Gold films that it can laminate to any board or paper. This allows them to honour its pledge of short lead times and fast turnarounds. "Everything in packaging is JIT these days, so we have to be able to respond," said Morris, adding that flexible production capacity is key. "It's the same with our holographic finishes – we hold a variety in stock and have a swatch book that customers can choose from according to their specific requirements." Other services include tinting Bright Silver Metpol to achieve special colours and Mirror Cards, which laminates a high gloss Metpol film to a cast coated board to give a highly reflective finish.

### Future Plans

With the carton market continuing to consolidate, Gibson knows that Frip needs to become a full-service operation. "We need to cater for all processes from the printed sheet to

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final value-added packaging, including all the converting processes,” he said. With run lengths increasing, as hot foiling becomes more commercial on high volume products like ready meals, Gibson knows he must continue to invest in process and people if he is to improve productivity. “We aim to offer a 24-48 hour turnaround on work, but always keep some capacity for last minute panic jobs.” The company works a double-day shift pattern five days per week, which leaves time and energy for machine cleaning and maintenance and extra production – if required.

Like many companies supplying to the multi-national PLCs, Frip saw

the benefit of acquiring third party accreditation for its process standards. Accordingly, it applied for and was awarded BRC AA High Hygiene rating, which according to Gibson is useful as much for the job security it offers and housekeeping benchmark it sets, as for the value it has in selling the company’s capabilities. He is also proud to be the only finishing house in the UK to be accredited at this level. A walk around the production hall tells its own story of work ethics among the labour force and is in marked contrast from conditions under which food packaging was being produced only a few years back.

If there is ongoing consolidation among the package printing companies, Gibson can only see a similar situation occurring in the finishing sector. “We are already the largest in our field and I know how much it has cost to get to that position. I cannot see many in the industry being able to meet the necessary investment level to secure future business because the market is too sensitive and competitive,” he concluded. Diversification and customer service are bywords in today’s package print market and neither comes cheap. Frip is one company that embraces the concept with a planned programme of continual investment. ■