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From left, Steve Huppert, VP and COO, and Stacy Warneke, president and CEO of Warneke Paper Box.

An Inkjet Pioneer

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By Cory Francer

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From left, Hisanori Makaya, president and COO, Fujifilm Global Graphic Systems; Stephan Plenz, member of the board, Heidelberg; Stacy Warneke, president and CEO, Warneke Paper Box; Steve Huppert, VP and COO, Warneke Paper Box; and Harald Weimer, member of the board, Heidelberg, with the Heidelberg Primefire 106 at drupa.

After about five years of research, the decision came down to one sheet. Stacy Warneke, president and owner of Denver-based Warneke Paper Box, had been looking into adding digital printing capabilities to the century-old folding carton operation, but felt the technology wasn't quite at a point where she was ready to invest.

But that changed in an instant inside Hall 1 during drupa 2016. The big news from Heidelberg in the run up to the event was that the offset press stalwart would be unveiling the Heidelberg Primefire 106, a 40" digital folding carton press featuring Fujifilm inkjet printheads.

As a loyal Heidelberg customer who continues to operate four Heidelberg offset presses, Warneke made a point to check out what Heidelberg brought to Düsseldorf. She says that she knew Heidelberg had been working on a digital folding carton press, but just like the thousands of other drupa attendees, she didn't know what to expect until the show.

"I took one look at the sheet, looked at my vice president and said, 'This is the one,'" Warneke recalls. "Their quality was just spectacular. They even had a section on one of the sheets that was two-point type. It was almost to the point where you can't see it with the naked eye and you have to look at it under a loupe. It was near perfect."

Once the decision was made, the Warneke team and Heidelberg representatives hammered out the details at drupa, and before the show even ended, Warneke Paper Box was slated to be one of the first installation locations of the Primefire 106.

Seeing the Need

It's easy to get wrapped up in all of the latest and greatest technology that packs the 19 halls of Messe Düsseldorf during drupa. And while it was the quality of the press samples displayed at the show that sealed the deal, Warneke says the decision to buy was hardly spur of the moment.

Warneke Paper Box's client base is highly diverse, spanning nearly all market segments and brand types. Warneke explains that the company serves everything from start-ups to internationally recognized brands. This diverse customer group naturally results in widely varying work, from high-end graphic and special effect laden cosmetics cartons, to pharmaceutical packaging where crisply printed text is essential.

The jobs that Warneke runs tend to vary greatly, and run length variation created a need for a better short run solution. Warneke explains that the ability to move short run work to a digital press to free up the offset presses to handle long runs was a major draw of the Primefire.

Additionally, she explains that Warneke serves several customers that require high volumes of print, but their products come in several different versions. Leveraging digital printing's ability to produce multiple versions on the fly made the move even more attractive to the company.

"When you calculate in makeready sheets, plate changes, plate costs and color changes, it drives the price so far up that it's almost unreasonable," she says. "I think it's going to be an asset to the companies that are doing super large runs, multiple versions and be a cost savings there for them."

100 Years of History

All too often, the companies that resist change are the ones that have been well-established for decades, sticking to a script they see as tried and true. Warneke Paper Box has bucked that trend ever since its founding in 1907.

Stacy Warneke is the fourth-generation owner of the business, which was founded by her great grandfather Bill Warneke, Sr., and his brother Maynard Warneke, Sr. Since the beginning, the company has specialized in folding cartons, but Stacy Warneke explains that each generation of ownership has made their own mark on the business, advancing it to the next level.

"It is such an honor to be part of such a great legacy," Warneke says. "With every generation, Warneke has gotten better, and each of the owners — including my dad and his dad — never felt like anything was given to them. Everybody has worked really hard to take this company to new levels in each generation that has owned it. And I intend to do the same. There's a lot of pride in what we do."

This August marked two years since Stacy Warneke took ownership of the business. Her time with the company dates back to her high school days when she would come in to help on the gluers, but initially she explains that she didn't foresee a career in packaging.

After attending college out of state and cutting her teeth in the professional world in the promotions industry, Warneke decided to return to Colorado. When she did, she says she went back to work for her father, quickly fell in love with the packaging industry and realized that she'd be the next cog in the Warneke legacy that dates back a full century.

"I think it was always in my blood, I just never knew it," she says. "It's such a fun industry because it's always changing and it doesn't get mundane. The printing technology and diecutting technology is always evolving. With every project that you work on with a customer and everybody's needs, every single thing is different every single day."

online, there is potential for that trend to make its way into the packaging market. It's still conceptual at the moment, but Warneke says she envisions the company putting together a website where customers can order custom packaging that can then be produced on the digital press.

"It would be an ecommerce site where we target certain industries and offer certain size boxes that they could then upload their artwork to and get that customization," she says. "I think that will be a huge driver in what we're trying to do."

Additionally, Warneke explains that while the digital press will provide excellent opportunities for more customized, versioned packaging, bringing the Primefire on board will also help with the overall balance of work being done. Short run work is on the rise, Warneke explains, and prior to the digital press, the company's offset presses were tasked with these jobs that are better suited for digital.

"It will relieve our presses for longer runs," she says. "To take the short runs off of there and put them on the digital press will be great."

The press will also be a differentiator for Warneke, as it is one of the few digital folding carton presses of its size. While there are



Warneke Paper Box manufactures folding cartons for a wide array of market segments.

Poised for the Future

While digital printing has been an ideal solution to solve the pain points being caused by increased short runs, Warneke sees the Primefire as a way to evolve with the ways purchasing is happening overall.

She explains that as more and more purchasing is happening

other folding carton converters who have brought digital printing on board, the Primefire's print width was a major selling point.

"Being able to offer our customers what nobody else can is a big deal," Warneke says. "It helps separate us from the competition. I know there are other half size digital presses, but this will be one of the first 40" digital presses available. We will be able to get double the amount per sheet as our competitors."

Another advantage of opting for the Heidelberg press is that if a job needs to be transitioned from the Primefire to offset, it will be easier to calibrate the job from one technology to the other.

Warneke explains that this provides great opportunities for companies who want to do test marketing of new products. If they want to just start with a minimal amount of packaging to see how a product performs, they can then transition to producing a long run of the same packaging on one of Warneke's offset presses without missing a beat.

"If they want to run 300 [packages], they can put it on the market and see how it does," Warneke explains. "Then we can calibrate our digital press to our offset presses and offer the same type of quality and color consistency. That was another reason it was important to partner with Heidelberg."

Getting Creative with Customers

Although installation of the press is targeted for the end of 2017, conversations are already underway with Warneke's customer base to determine how they can make the most of digital printing.

Warneke explains that the company's sales staff is already spreading the news to customers and explaining what the new press is capable of. One of the interesting aspects of these conversations, she says, is that it's not just the customers learning about how digital can help serve them. As they begin to understand what the Prime-

fire can do, they're coming up with their own creative concepts to share with Warneke.

"We're getting our customers excited about what's to come and getting them excited about new ideas that maybe we hadn't thought of," Warneke says.

She says it has also been encouraging that even though Warneke Paper Box's customer base is so widely varied, all ends of the spectrum are getting excited and coming up with creative, albeit drastically different, ways to leverage digital printing.

For example, she says that in the cosmetics industry, customers are getting excited about being able to package the same product, but have each carton look different. That way a consumer can choose a package in their favorite color, catering to the



Norval Baker, lead pressman at Warneke Paper Box, sets up a job.

growing trend of packaging personalization.

In the medical field, Warneke says the serialization capabilities that digital printing provides, allows the package to be more secure and medical brands can be assured their products travel to the proper locations.

"With the medical companies, we're getting a lot of requests for serialization and track and traceability," she says. "That will be important for all of them because every box can have a unique number or different identifier such as a varying QR code."

Additionally, being based in Colorado has provided Warneke Paper Box with a substantial amount of business from the cannabis industry. She explains that due to the nature of the product cycle, this market is very well suited to digital printing. Because the regulations for cannabis packaging are changing constantly, brands often want to produce in small volumes. Plus the product itself can also change, so it's far more cost effective to produce this type of packaging digitally.

Technology Leaders

Though Warneke acknowledges that it can be risky to be among the first to implement a new technology, she explains that she takes comfort in just how much research the company has put into digital and how well the Primefire fits its needs. Plus, as a 100% Heidelberg shop, Warneke Paper Box has established a great relationship with Heidelberg and is very comfortable with them as a partner.

Plus, she says being on the cutting edge of new technology helps position Warneke as a leader that is willing to make a substantial investment like this to best serve its customers.

"There's no doubt in my mind that [Heidelberg and Warneke Paper Box] are going to be able to work together to help shape the future of where digital printing is going," she says. "It's more exciting to be on the forefront of that and work with such a great partner than it is to wait until it's out and ready and just be another person that owns it."

In an evolving industry, Warneke adds, technological capabilities can be the differentiator in what makes a company sink or swim.

"I think in general, if you don't stay up with technology, you're going to be left behind," she says. "There are companies like us that are reaching for the stars, taking leaps and testing new technology. We want to be the first, we want to be innovators and we want to offer things nobody else can offer."

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Robert Leeper, lead pressman on Warneke Paper Box's Heidelberg Speedmaster CD 74, checks the color density on a printed sheet.