

US PRICE HIKE

US-based AF&PA reports that the US containerboard mill operating rate was 98.3 per cent in January, up from 97.0 per cent in December 2007 and from 95.4 per cent in January 2007. Containerboard produced for export totalled 335,000 in January, up from 333,000 in December and from 278,000 in January 2007. Mill inventories totalled 293,000 tons at the end of January, down from 316,000 tons at the end of December 2007.

Not surprising then to note that the top seven North American producers of liner and medium have announced price increases of \$50 a

ton effective immediately.

This comes after Fibre Box association statistics reported that average week 2007 box shipments were down 2.1 per cent from 2006's total, and some fear that the current housing and lending crisis will slide the US into further recession.

Lean board inventories, despite high mill operating rates, and rising fibre and other costs may have necessitated the increases, but some observers fear that sluggish domestic box demand may move implementation of this price increase back by a month or so.

SOFTWARE UPGRADE

GSE Dispensing has upgraded the software used to run its ink dispensing systems. This new update, known as IMS 3.61, comprises a host of new functions. These include the ability to make recipe corrections according to anilox roll types, bucket parking facilities, improved ink return management functions and a user interface in several languages.

Ink Management Software offers several features that allow fast, fully automated and precise ink recipe formulation. Using a clear and easy-to-use operator interface, the operator simply enters the required PMS or spot colour, and the software

calculates the necessary ingredients in an instant. As a result, a four-colour printing job can be prepared in as little as five minutes, cutting make-ready time significantly. Its ability to calculate press-return inks (the surplus ink after a production run) into new recipes, normally too complex to be calculated manually, enables significant reduction of waste.

Other benefits include a database facility for easy tracing of ink-components of previous recipes, real-time ink stock availability, and barcoding of surplus inks after a production run for efficient stockholding.

ROBOTIC SOLUTIONS

Corrugated machine specialist, Smurfit Kappa Machine Systems, has joined forces with FANUC Robotics (UK) Ltd by becoming one of its Strategic Systems Partners. The partnership recognises Smurfit Kappa's close working relationship with FANUC Robotics in the packaging sector. Acknowledging the need for specific industry knowledge and the skills offered by system integrators, FANUC Robotics will provide Smurfit with sales and engineering support to provide end users with highly efficient robot systems. Smurfit has already supplied 10 FANUC robot systems and is using its industry knowledge to use them innovatively.

"We are continually identifying additional tasks that robots can undertake on our end of line systems. Keeping the robots fully utilised is our aim and we're excited by the prospect

of future developments," explained Matt Weeks, General Manager, Smurfit Kappa Machine Systems. "The flexibility of the robots together with their reliability is a welcome benefit for this industry. Minimum time to market is critical in the Retail Ready Packaging (RRP) business, and the flexibility and multi-tasking ability of robots is essential to cost-effectively achieve short lead times.

As a Strategic Partner to FANUC Robotics, Smurfit's engineer's have access to advanced programming training and support together with FANUC's bespoke simulation software, ROBOGUIDE, to prove proposed systems. Programmes generated help reduce installation and commissioning time together with increasing customer confidence by having proof of achievable cycle times and capability.



L TO R: CHRIS SUMNER, MD, FANUC ROBOTICS, MATT WEEKS, GENERAL MANAGER, SMURFIT KAPPA AND ROGER HARRIS, REGIONAL MANAGER, FANUC ROBOTICS.

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