



It's not easy to thrive in a crowded marketplace, especially against well established competitors. But MPI Packaging Inc, a producer of polyethylene terephthalate (PET) containers, is flourishing following a significant investment by chairman Paul Morton and president Ron O'Brien. In fact, business is so good, sales and volume have been soaring by about 50 per cent per year.

As a result, the company that started up in 2004 with one stretch blow moulding machine now has eight machines and is in the process of installing two more. Each is capable of producing up to 15 million containers per year on the company's three-shift-per-day, six-day-per-week schedule.

A new thermal-transfer labelling line from Turner Plastics applies labels from Multi-Color Corp and makes it possible for MPI to supply pre-labelled containers to customers. An inkjet coder from Imaje on the same line marks date codes while pressure-sensitive labelling is another option.

In addition to the growing stable of stretch blow moulding machines from Mag-Plastic Machinery SA, Vouvy, Switzerland, MPI's success can be attributed to an experienced management team, operational excellence, design expertise, low minimum order requirements, low mould costs, quick turnaround and a focus on special niche markets such as energy drinks, liquor and other high-end beverages and aerosols. Canadian customers include Bacardi Canada, Kittling Ridge Wines & Spirits, Vincor International Inc and Avalon Natural Products.

MPI's sales effort in the US is spearheaded by Zuck-

PET promise

In just two years Toronto-based MPI Packaging has proved itself a top-notch supplier of high quality PET containers. The reasons for its success were quickly apparent during a tour of the plant floor by US correspondent Hallie Forcinio

erman Honickman Incorporated, one of the largest container distributors in the US. Headquartered in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, clients include Glaceau, Metro Mint, and Fuze Beverages.

Each member of the management team is a seasoned veteran in PET container production. Tony Casamento, vice president of Product Development; Vincent Madrey, production manager; Anwar Bashi, purchasing and planning; and Fred Sava, quality manager; each spent part of their careers at Pet-Pak. Shawn Talebpour, director of operations, joined the company from Amcor PET Packaging, Custom Division, and Vince Grande, director of finance, was previously with CCL. MPI's IT department is managed by Patrick Ribbons, who came to MPI from GVFX.

The company is based near Toronto airport in an 80,000sq ft facility originally constructed for PET preform maker Aquapac. Amenities include six loading docks, filtered air to ensure clean conditions for produc-

tion of food and beverage containers and air conditioning. "Controlling the ambient temperature is important to the process," explains Talebpour. "It's essential for the production of high quality containers."

The company follows strong standard operating procedures and has a stringent preventative maintenance programme to ensure product consistency and quality and to minimise downtime. "We use Japan Institute of Plant Maintenance (JIPM)/Total Productive Maintenance (TPM) techniques to ensure maximum uptime," says Talebpour, who is a certified JIPM/TPM instructor.

Quality control is equally stringent. Inspector/packers not only check each container as it is hand palletised, but also conduct a more elaborate exam every hour. Twice per shift, or as often as the customer dictates, the facility's fully equipped lab verifies that the physical characteristics of each container are within specifications. The lab also carries out a wide range of



testing to ensure product quality and consistency.

MPI owns three models of Mag-Plastic Machinery SA machines, four SSB-20HP, two SSB-02 with preferential heating and two SSB-02 with the 5L option. One SSB-20HP is installed at a satellite operation in Los Angeles, California, where it makes containers for Glaceau SmartWater.

The low cavitation machines, which generally feature two cavities, are well suited to smaller orders that often are impractical for larger firms to do. "If a customer needs smaller volumes, say 1 to 5 million, they have to buy stock containers," says Talebpour. Lower cavitation machines also reduce mould costs, which average about US\$ 12,000 for the Mag-Plastic stretch blow moulders at MPI.

Most of the company's containers are proprietary designs created by MPI's engineering team and a local mould supplier. Finished moulds can be turned around in as little as three weeks, but the best turnaround was four days. "Customers are looking for innovation," reports Talebpour.

Although MPI primarily produces custom containers, it does offer a few stock bottles including a

187mm and a 750mm for fortified wine. Like most of the company's output, these are monolayer structures. However, the company does make a few barrier containers using multi-layer preforms from Europe. MPI also sources some preforms from South America, but the bulk are made in eastern Canada by Trans Atlantic Ltd using virgin resin from Wellman.

Characteristic of the custom designs the company can produce is a rounded clear 1.14L bottle with a 28mm Kerr neck finish that mirrors the glass container used for Small Cask Brandy from Kittling Ridge in Grimsby, Ontario. "Blowing the preform to the diameter of this bottle was very challenging," notes Casamento.

Another unusual container designed by MPI is a clear, faceted 1.75L bottle with a 33mm Kerr neck finish for Premium Prince Igor Vodka from Kittling Ridge's KR Estate Distillery. Both bottles run two up on the Mag-Plastic stretch blow moulders.

A pleated bag for aerosol containers, developed in conjunction with Assure Packaging, withstands pressures to 200 psi. The bag, which is blown from an extremely lightweight preform, holds 7oz of a foaming

MPI

Founded: 2004

Employees: 70

Locations: Toronto, Ontario, headquarters and plant; Los Angeles, California, production facility

Products: PET containers ranging in size from 100mm to 5L

Operation: 3 shifts/day, 6 days/week

Machines: Eight stretch blow moulders from Mag-Plastic Machinery SA, seven in Toronto, one in California

gel product that will be introduced this summer.

With container sizes ranging from 100mm to 5L and 35-50 changeovers each month, quick changeover is essential and is maximised by the SSB-02's easy access to the mould and simple mould fixture concept. To maximise efficiency, none of the machines are dedicated to a particular container. Even the two machines designed for the production of 5L containers may run other sizes. "All our moulds will fit all our machines," says Talebpour. Bottles are palletised by hand, although this operation may be automated in the future.

The two machines being installed this year include a SSB-02 5L, and the first SSB-02 wide-mouth machine in North America. "It will allow us to serve the wide-mouth sector of the market," says Talebpour. It also means significantly lower mould costs—less than US\$20,000 versus US\$60,000 to US\$ 120,000 for moulds for a single stage machine.

The wide-mouth machine will be able to handle neck diameters up to 80mm and proprietary shapes so "customers can customise their container without a lot of expense," explains Talebpour. Various thread finishes are available. The company is also investing in moulds for preforms, which are being sourced from Europe.

Once the new machines arrive, Talebpour expects them to be up and running in about 10 days. "We do a lot of preliminary work beforehand such as piping and electrical," he explains. Mag-Plastic also helps with installation and can provide sales and support from its North American office in Cincinnati, Ohio, which is about 500 miles away.

More information from Mag-Plastic Machinery SA, Rue Alfred-Pot 1, Vouvry (VS), CH-1896, Switzerland. Tel: 41 24 482 0820. Fax: 41 24 482 0819. www.magplastic.com

MPI Packaging Inc., 7400B Bramalea Road, Mississauga, ON, L5S 1W9, Canada. Tel: 1 905 673 6447. Fax: 1 905 673 6706. www.mpi-pet.com



Main: Shawn Talebpour, director of operations at MPI, holds two custom PET containers the company makes

Bottom left: MPI's first stretch blow moulder from Mag-Plastic Machinery SA has been joined by six more in Toronto and one in Los Angeles, California

Inset: Palletising is currently done by hand one layer at a time

