SUPPORT BEYOND INK
Support beyond ink

Siegwerk InHouse is a long-term partner to Plásticos Uribe, a fast growing Mexican printer. Six Siegwerk InHouse employees work at the Plásticos Uribe (PU) printing plant in Guadalajara, where they help ensure consistent color and print quality. Ricardo Ramírez, director representative at Plásticos Uribe, is thankful both for the enormous technical support provided by Siegwerk InHouse and the results they’ve helped the company achieve.

45 percent less ink-related print waste, 80 percent less time required for color matching and significant reductions in press return inks – for Ricardo Ramírez the five-year working relationship with Siegwerk InHouse has been an overwhelmingly positive experience: “The cooperation with Siegwerk InHouse has brought us several improvements,” says the director representative at Plásticos Uribe. “We receive valuable technical support which helps us to operate our business more efficiently and at higher quality levels.”

Simply put, Plásticos Uribe is a success story. Established in 1985, the company now has 130 employees and is a powerful player in the Central American packaging industry. The family-run business based in Guadalajara specializes in flexographic printing and, with its automatic packaging for milk and fruit juices, has carved out a strong position in the market. Its 10,000 square meter factory contains six printing machines – two of these are new presses with eight printing units. In recent years, Plásticos Uribe has experienced excellent annual growth and added major new customers to its portfolio.

But new customers also mean new challenges. In 2011, managers at Plásticos Uribe realized that the inks from their previous supplier were not up to the new product standards. Problems with quality were becoming more and more frequent. Looking for a new ink supplier, the manager in Guadalajara decided on Siegwerk. The reasons were obvious, says Ricardo Ramírez. “On top of the product quality, Siegwerk also offered the better overall package.” Not only the inks themselves, but all services and technical support are “extremely valuable and helpful” for Plásticos Uribe. No other supplier could offer such a complete package. The services offered by Siegwerk InHouse were the deciding factor for the flexography specialist’s choice of printing inks.

When Plásticos Uribe switched ink supplier they also invited Siegwerk InHouse to join its printing plant. Siegwerk InHouse started off by providing Plásticos Uribe the basic services of their InHouse product concept: ink preparation, color matching, and inventory management. From the beginning, Siegwerk employees targeted that the presses always had the right ink in the right
quantity, in the right quality, at the right location – and at the right time. Cooperation between the Plásticos Uribe workforce and the Siegwerk InHouse team got off to a tremendous start, says Ricardo Ramírez. “The InHouse team is very well integrated, working hand-in-hand. We benefit from the high technical know-how of the Siegwerk InHouse employees.”

In 2013, two years after switching ink supplier, Plásticos Uribe once more upgraded its capacities and invested in new flexographic presses from a European supplier. The Siegwerk InHouse team added two extra technicians, boosting their on-site staff to four employees. In the following year Siegwerk took a detailed look at the ink room processes with the help of an audit. An ink room audit is one of the standard InHouse services, and a key part of Siegwerk’s philosophy of quality.

The results of the InHouse audit at Plásticos Uribe were clear, revealing weaknesses in the ink room’s performance, organization and tidiness. There was limited information on the stocks of press return ink, for example. Inks were only visually matched and some machines were standing idle, simply because they had no ink. Out of ten areas that were audited, nine showed a need for improvement. The list of measures to be taken contained 30 separate points.

Plásticos Uribe’s management was grateful for the critical analysis provided by Siegwerk InHouse organization and straight away gave the green light for the necessary steps to be taken.

Using the 5S method, the InHouse team carried out a fundamental reorganization of the ink room. Safety, tidiness and cleanliness were made key principles of the ink room’s work. This meant setting up cleaning procedures, installing fire extinguishers, adding eye-washing facilities, displaying emergency phone numbers as well as signs and floor markings. Simple measures quickly brought noticeable improvements: to increase safety, the ink room was fitted with more lighting, and equipped with an internet connection so technicians can use electronic communications to contact other parts of the company.

Siegwerk InHouse also ensured that printing waste was reduced. Plásticos Uribe had been used to throwing away three percent of their print output due to color adjustments. Because ink preparation was done without using formulas, all too often the wrong inks were put in the machines. Technicians would mix colors from memory based on recipes which they had jotted down somewhere. So Siegwerk InHouse introduced common procedures and

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processes for color matching. They created a recipe database, meaning that all recipes are now easy to access and guarantee predictable and consistent color quality. New tools – such as spectrophotometer, hand coater and quality control software – increased the output quality of the InHouse. The results were plain to see: in 2014 Plásticos Uribe produced only 1.7 percent ink-related waste – the lowest measurement ever achieved at the company, and a year-on-year drop of 45 percent.

One key area of improvement was the introduction of standard processes into the ink room. Today there are operating procedures and defined workflows in place for press return management, inventory management, and for quality control. New documentation guarantees the desired results are achieved and ensures better traceability. Furthermore, newly introduced templates help collect data for the creation of Key Performance Indicators. This was another of Plásticos Uribe and Siegwerk’s goals: not simply to make a few adjustments, but to continuously monitor and evaluate the results using KPIs. At the end of 2014, the InHouse team at Plásticos Uribe was bolstered again: they added a new ink room manager and a colleague for all administrative work.

**Range of services increased**

In the meantime, the number of ink room services provided to Plásticos Uribe has grown. While Siegwerk InHouse began simply with the basic services for ink management, over time – and thanks to the printing firm’s overwhelmingly positive experience – the range of services has increased. Today, InHouse in Guadalajara also provides assistance in matters of press support and quality control.

No actions without metrics: today, the KPI system is in place to help Plásticos Uribe quantify and maintain the progress achieved. All of the important operational parameters are measured. The results speak for themselves: in 2015 Plásticos Uribe will reach its target of reducing the press return ink inventory to approx. 4,000 kilograms. For 2016 the target is 3,500 kilograms. They also intend to cut ink-related downtimes from 2 to 1.5 percent in 2016.

The results have left the client feeling intensely positive. As Ricardo Ramírez says: “It is more than your classic customer-supplier relationship – it’s a successful partnership”.

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