

FLEXO

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THE FLEXOGRAPHIC TECHNOLOGY SOURCE

2021 EXCELLENCE IN FLEXOGRAPHY AWARDS

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For companies in all different industries, the ongoing COVID-19 climate has initiated changes and adjustments, making everyone find new ways of performing familiar practices.

The same was true for FTA's 2021 Excellence in Flexography Awards, which for the first time in its 62-year history, was judged virtually.

Despite the challenges of judging a print awards competition in a virtual environment, it was a success. For an overview of how it was done, take a look at page 40. And of course, don't forget to see all the winners, and why they were chosen by the judges, beginning on page 47.

As usual, this issue also covers the FTA Sustainability Excellence Awards, and details the careers of the 2021 FTA Hall of Fame inductee and FTA President's Award recipients. Congratulations to this year's winners!



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FATHOM OPTICS, RHEONICS, HYBRID SOFTWARE PREVAIL IN 2021 FTA TECHNICAL INNOVATION AWARDS COMPETITION

At press time, FTA announced the selection of three individual firms to be presented with 2021 Technical Innovation Awards. Honors were bestowed on Tuesday, May 11, in the Association's Virtual Conference Center, the site of FORUM & INFOFLEX 2021. The announcements came as part of the Awards Presentation.

What makes FTA's Technical Innovation Award so prestigious? Recipients are deemed by a panel of industry experts to have the potential power to change package printing and converting's future for the better, thanks to newly developed tools, equipment, instruments, processes and practices, specifically designed to enhance flexographic printing.

This year marks the Silver Anniversary of the Technical Innovation Award. In the past 25 years, 37 products, made by 29 firms, received the accolade. Seven repeat winners populate the list and this year will add an eighth. Of that number, three took the honor three times and one topped the repeat winner list, appearing four times (see page 14).

Members of the Silver Anniversary class are:

- » Fathom Optics, for its Light Field Technology Software (in the Prepress/Graphics category)

- » Rheonics, for its RPS InkSight Viscosity Control System (in the Prepress/Pressroom category)
- » And the repeat winner—Hybrid Software, for its Intelligent Flexo CLOUDFLOW Module (in the Prepress/Graphics category)

Full reports on the development, introduction, acceptance and benefits associated with implementation of the award-winning technologies will be conveyed in a collection of technical articles set to appear on FLEXO's pages in July.

Brief synopses of the 2021 Technical Innovation Award recipients, as outlined by entrants, follow.

FILES, NOT FOILS

Fathom Optics has developed software that creates two different interference screens that, when separated by a clear layer, create moiré-like distortions that appear to add the illusion of motion or physical depth to 2D print. Lauding its development, the firm said, "For the first time, flexo presses have been given the ability to print beyond the two-dimensional limitations previously imposed on printing presses without the use of special materials."

"Think of it kind of like lenticular, but with no lenses," developers explained. "And it's easier to design with. If you can

place a spot color, you can add motion to your design." Its message to printers is, "Stand out in today's increasingly competitive retail environment."

Fathom's Light Field Technology, originally developed for digital 3D displays,



Fathom Optics Light Shield Technology adds the illusion of motion or physical depth to a 2D print.
PHOTOS COURTESY OF FATHOM OPTICS

currently works with offset and roll-to-roll narrow to mid web flexographic printing. Light Field effects fit into existing pre-press workflows and presses can run at full speed. After printing a fingerprint pattern to calibrate the process to a press, printers can run the job like any similar label job. “Once the design has been completed, the Fathom Light Field Engine is used to turn flat design into a moving work of art.”

Algorithmic technology leverages existing press innovations to add depth, motion and chromatic effects to a wide range of print applications including prime labels, shrink sleeves and product authentication. Software helps incorporate motion effects in PDF and AI designs.

Fathom maintained, “This is market disruptive technology that will reduce the number of print stations required for label embellishment and it will eliminate the need for costly materials that must be purchased outside and added on press.” Any number of effects, in either horizontal or vertical orientation, can be done with just two print stations and one can be the existing black station. Opportunity is calling: “Engage shoppers to interact with the products and result in increased sales because images move as they walk by the packaging.”

MEASURE, TRACK, CONTROL

Rheonics RPS InkSight Predictive Tracking Controller and SRV viscometers enable tight viscosity control throughout the print job, due to the system’s ability to autonomously maintain viscosity within extremely narrow limits. Developers promised, “Printers can achieve unmatched color accuracy and quality with the RPS InkSight system and ColorLock software, designed in collaboration with printers, for printers.”



SRV sensors, like the one pictured, serve as the foundation on which the RPS InkSight Viscosity Control System is built.

PHOTO COURTESY OF RHEONICS

Benefits delivered were listed out like this: “Achieve best in class print quality, dramatically reduce setup time and optimize use of pigments and solvents. Improve productivity and efficiency through complete automation of color control on press... Reduce solvent emissions, achieve better operator safety, automate operations, make data-driven decisions and reduce printing costs.”

Built on the same physics used to control NASA Mars entry guidance, Rheonics noted, “InkSight is a highly accurate multi-station ink viscosity control system.” It consists of three elements:

- » SRV sensors serve as the foundation upon which a robust, operator-friendly control system is built. They deliver the same readings from beginning to end of long jobs, and do not need calibration or special cleaning procedures between jobs
- » Rheonics Predictive Tracking Controller predicts and compensates for evaporation before the ink change
- » RPS InkSight ColorLock software keeps track of every process variable during a printrun. The print data is stored on the system and made available to the machine PLC and factory data acquisition systems. Bi-directional communication between machine, job servers and RPS InkSight makes loading and running jobs easy. Plant managers, quality personnel and production supervisors get powerful print job reports to better evaluate performance on job dashboards

Engineers explained, “InkSight fundamentally changes the nature of the flexo printing process, from initial job setup all the way to jobs that, once delivered, secure a clear path to repeat business... It can produce a change in the very culture of the flexo industry by adding job-length consistency, accuracy and efficiency.”

SMART PLATES

Plates can now be produced faster than ever, thanks to new functionality that intelligently applies screening modifications to post-ripped files. With Hybrid Software’s Intelligent Flexo module, users can identify problem areas in the images which require intervention, before printing on the press, to save time and valuable resources.

Hybrid Intelligent Flexo works with screens from any existing third-party RIP, as long as it can generate TIFF or LEN output. This includes RIPs from Esko, Kodak and, of course, HYBRID CLOUDFLOW. Everything hinges on application of mathematical algorithms to 1-bit screened imager files. Developers emphasized the following: Technicians can improve ink transfer, boost density, eliminate pinholes, prevent dirt in highlights, reduce the washboard effect for corrugated and diminish the unwanted border look around small type.

Talking to how it works, the R&D team said, “Intelligent Flexo applies patterns to control distribution, transfer and density in a repeatable and consistent way. It identifies different zones (by x/y coordinates and the width/height) with diverse graphical



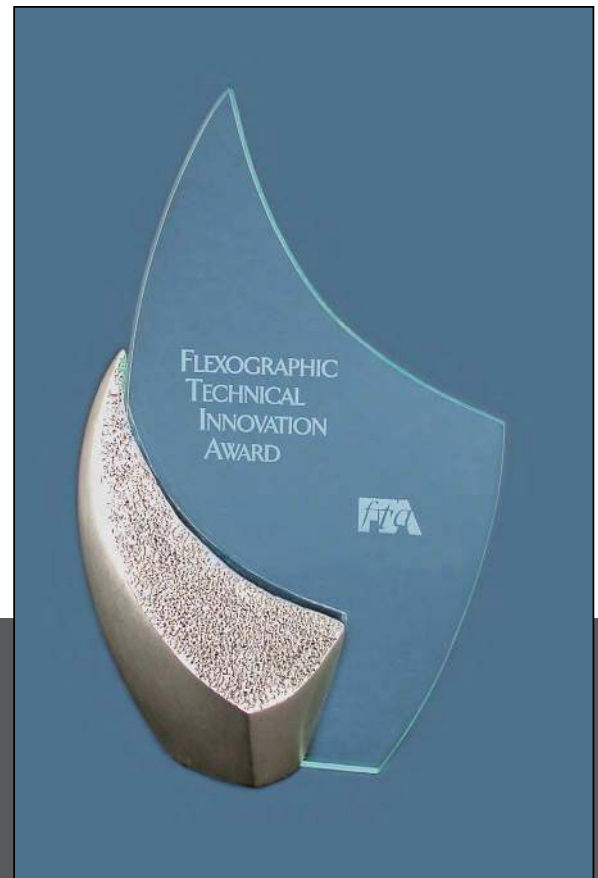
Intelligent Flexo applies patterns to control distribution, transfer and density in a repeatable and consistent way. It can reduce washboard effects and eliminate pinholes.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF HYBRID SOFTWARE



objects in the artwork that warrant intervention. These zones are isolated and specific adaptations are applied to generate effects to help overcome issues that are inherent with the flexo process. These include: flat solids, rasterized screens, text, borders and bar codes.”

Hybrid stated, “Users can coordinate information from the workflows to correctly determine which parts of the TIFFs are to be patterned. This gives the printer the flexibility to use Intelligent Flexo exactly how it wants.” ■



Recipients of the Technical Innovation Award are deemed by a panel of industry experts to have the potential power to change flexography’s future for the better. They include innovative technologies that utilize the flexographic process or have been designed specifically to enhance flexographic printing.

Those selected to receive this esteemed award gain global recognition and exposure:

25 YEARS OF TECHNICAL INNOVATION AWARD WINNERS

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| 1996 Fit Group | 2006 Mark Andy Inc | 2015 Nuova GIDUE |
| 1997 Aquaflex/Webtron | 2007 AV Flexologic bv /InkSpec | 2016 Flint Group, MacDermid, Flexomaid |
| 1998 DuPont Products/Barco Graphics, Professional Computer Corp | 2008 Omet | 2017 Mark Andy, Flint Group, Esko |
| 1999 MacDermid Inc | 2009 Kodak | 2018 Hamillroad Software, Eaglewood Technologies |
| 2000 Comco International Inc | 2010 Bobst Group/Fischer & Krecke GmbH | 2019 Koenig & Bauer, PCMC, Esko |
| 2001 PCMC | 2011 MacDermid, Mark Andy | 2020 Hybrid Software, Miraclon Corp, Paper Converting Machine Co |
| 2002 Arpeco Engineering | 2012 No recipients | |
| 2003 DuPont Imaging Technologies | 2013 Berry Plastics, GMG, Mark Andy | |
| 2004 Creo | 2014 All Printing Resources Inc and SpotOn! Press, Esko | |
| 2005 Windmoeller & Hoelscher | | |

All company names were current at the time the award was received.