

Non-Traditional Foam Converter is on a Roll



Pictured left to right: Chris Brand, Executive Vice President and Ken Eaton, President of Jacobs & Thompson Inc.

Leading North American foam converter prospers with world-class manufacturing expertise and a non-traditional approach towards innovation.

By a variety of measures, Toronto based Jacobs and Thompson Inc. (J&T), is one of North America's most successful foam fabricators and distributors; producing millions of foam components used in everything from medical and automotive applications to everyday consumer items.

"Most consumers will never see the 400 million foam gaskets we make for the automotive industry, which accounts for about 33% of our business. Our products prevent the buzz, squeaks, rattles and leaks," says Ken Eaton, President, Jacobs & Thompson Inc.

Since its incorporation in 1955, J&T has grown steadily through acquisitions and ever expanding production capabilities including splitting, slitting, laminating, and die cutting of foam, felts, and tapes, as well as manufacturing and coating pressure sensitive adhesives. "Our growth as a specialty foam converter is based on our core commitment to integrity, engineered solutions, personalized service and just-in-time delivery – every time," adds Eaton.

Innovation vs. Tradition

With over 700 foam converters, fabricators and distributors in North America, J&T is well regarded in the industry for its vertical integration and advanced manufacturing practices. "We often invite fabricators to come and look at our process. They quickly realize the cost difference between the traditional market and where we are," adds Chris Brand, Executive Vice President, Jacobs and Thompson Inc.

In recent years, J&T has become one of the foam industry's most significant advocates of rotary die cutting over traditional punch methods. "Most people believe you can't die cut foam on a rotary – that it's strictly a punch application. They come to our plant and can't believe we produce these things on a rotary die cutter - it goes against traditional practices," notes Brand. From J&T's perspective, rotary die cutting of foam as opposed to traditional flat bed methods, offers a number of distinct advantages including faster turnaround times, tighter tolerances and higher production volumes. "Our manufacturing output increased significantly when we switched over from traditional clicker presses to rotary die cutting. Immediately we were pumping out more parts through the rotary in considerably less time," notes Eaton.



ROTOFLEX

"As we switched over to rotary, we also implemented a number of other manufacturing initiatives. We started producing adhesives, we were splitting the foam, we were buffing the foam; we were doing so many things vertically in our market. As a result, our lead times dropped from 6-8 weeks down to just 3-5 days. The end result of doing this is our inventories dropped from 6 to 1.5 million dollars and our cash flow escalated significantly. Our reputation for producing parts faster resulted in more business being directed our way. With this increased capacity we were able to

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divorce ourselves from lower commodity based items and gain greater return on products at increasingly higher volumes. In less than 4 years our business more than doubled – you just can't realize this type of business growth with a traditional manufacturing approach," continues Brand.

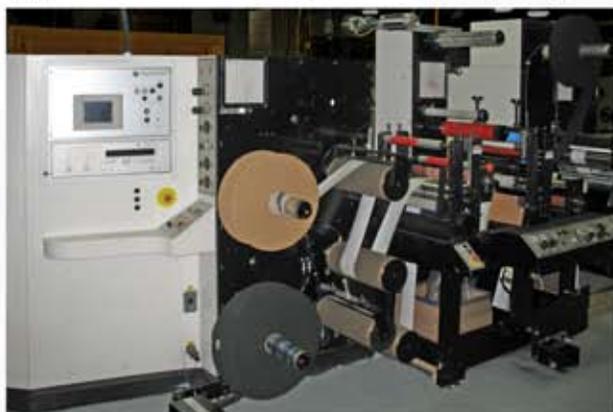


Typical foam application produced on a rotary die cutting machine.

J&T has several die cutting machines in its Toronto facility including two Rotoflex rotary die cutters. "We actually acquired our first Rotoflex through the acquisition of another company. We quickly realized

its advantages and it became the machine of choice to run in our plant. On average, all our machines are running 16 hours a day – doing an exceptional job. We are pleased with the service from Rotoflex and their 'know-how' in terms of engineering. We had built our own machines and purchased from other industry leading manufacturers, but at the end of the day, the Rotoflex die cutter was exactly what we needed to serve the market and grow our business. The decision to buy a second rotary die cutter was easy," adds Brand.

J&T's most recent acquisition was a Rotoflex model DLI-330 (13.25"/337mm) eDrive machine. Rotoflex DLI is a line of robust, high production machines designed for a wide range of applica-



Rotoflex DLI-330 eDrive rotary die cutting, slitting and rewinding machine.

tions and material processing needs including paper, adhesives, plastic films, foams, foils and laminates. Rotoflex offers configurations capable of processing web widths up to 24.25"/610mm.

These die-cutting systems are supported by full electronics packages. With quick set-up features and controls, the operator maintains a full view and has complete control of the three critical functions: die-cutting, slitting and rewinding. Using the latest in electronic web guiding technology, the web is precisely positioned for ultimate die-cutting accuracy and different rewind core size requirements are easily accommodated by the quick-change interchangeable rewind shaft design. With an emphasis on maintaining web control through starts, stops and speed changes, Rotoflex integrates the latest in die station design developments to improve quality and performance.

Rotoflex die cutters can be operated through a touch-screen interface providing complete operator control and critical function feedback. Operators can reduce set-up times and maintain consistent production and quality control by calling up previous setup details from its recipe files. Designed for high accuracy die cutting, slitting and rewinding; these machines provide high through-put and low operating costs.

Many accessories/options are also available (dual die station, sheeter/conveyor and lamination station etc.) based on application requirements. "We actually do what our competitors believe is impossible by cutting as much as 3/4" foam with rotary die cutting. Added features like the air injection dies make it easy to blow out the waste material and reduce the processing time. At the end of the day, our Rotoflex rotary die cutters work to increase our production and improve our margins - for J&T it's just a really good fit," concludes Brand.

Gasket Fabricators Association

J&T is actively involved within the foam converting industry contributing new ideas and best practices. "Most companies are so protective of their production methods -- holding their cards tight to the vest. We do the very opposite and are pleased to make a contribution to organizations such as the Gasket Fabricators Association (GFA)," adds Eaton.

The GFA (www.gasketfab.com) is a trade association of members dedicated to providing custom fabricated components and materials for use in industrial, electronic and medical applications worldwide. Its membership is composed of the foremost companies in the industry and includes many specialized fabricators. Expected to draw over 500 attendees and hundreds of exhibitors, the GFA's Gasket & Converting Expo scheduled for April 1-3, 2008, is the only trade show devoted exclusively to the gasket and converting industry.

"J&T has a business history which was forged by building strong relationships of trust and confidence with our suppliers and customers. We've shown several other fabricators how we've changed our business model and we have worked with them to adopt some of these same practices. The synergy this type of partnership generates is significant. At the end of the day – it's this type of non-traditional thinking towards new technologies, ideas and innovations that keeps us growing," concludes Brand.



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