

# Global Grip

SOMA Crosses Continents, Connects Mid Web & Wide Web Worlds

Robert Moran

Some may think of it as a newcomer, yet SOMA recently celebrated the 25th anniversary of its entry into flexographic printing press manufacturing.

Since birth, the firm—an FTA member for the past four years—has been systematically expanding its footprint and customer base. Initial focus concentrated on Eastern Europe, where SOMA today ranks as the No. 1 press manufacturer in Poland and enjoys a considerable market share in Russia. Next came Central Europe, the U.K., Africa, Latin America, Japan, South Korea, India, China and now North America—specifically the U.S.

SOMA executives describe their product line as being price sensitive and quality driven while bridging the gap between mid web and wide web printing. Currently, the central impression (CI) drums on its presses range from 23-in. to 60-in. Like its product range, the firm possesses a unique heritage, having helped employees cross over from communist to free market economy. Some on the team say it excels at life-changing experiences.

FLEXO recently made an on-site visit to the firm to learn a bit more about its history, mission, values and commitment to keeping flexography recognized as the print process of choice within the global packaging community. One point of pride: Czech engineering combines with high-tech, state-of-the-art componentry.

## DRIVE & COMMITMENT

Ladislav Verner, CEO and owner, founded (or as they say, privatized) the firm in 1992 and today leads a team that includes his son, Jan Verner as chief designer; and daughter Pavla Kusa, as commercial di-

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*SOMA Commercial Director Pavla Kusa*

rector. SOMA remains in growth mode. It employs 220 people on site at its headquarters in Lanškroun, Czech Republic and has some 900 machines in place throughout the world. The number includes four in the U.S., one of which is operating in Puerto Rico, and more than 15 in Latin America. Its full portfolio encompasses CI flexographic presses, slitter/rewinders, laminators, plate mounters and die cutters. At the center of attention stands the Optima<sup>2</sup> press.

Petr Blasko, marketing manager, bills it as, “sound, sturdy, sensible, smart, consistent and reliable.” He further maintains that the firm “insists that everything possible be done to help customers become market leaders. All machinery is specialized and customized to individual needs. Drive and commitment are in our DNA.”

Efficiency meets capability is what SOMA stresses, according to Pavla. “The engineers and technical team constantly pursue perfect processing of every individual piece.” Emphasis, she says, is continually put on “press stability, via SOMA’s unique ABC (advanced bounce system), short run with the help of its ARUN system (zero-waste job

setting) and simple modular solutions. Operator friendliness is critical in a high-tech environment where automation builds confidence.

“At SOMA, we’re committed to finding an easier way to deliver predictable, consistent and close to perfect results,” she continues. “We want the U.S. market to know we are here and that we are prepared to be a good partner.” Pavla adds that the printers with which her company partners are “real people, each with a unique success strategy, who operate in challenging real-world and real-time environments. We see our role as putting them in a better position to deliver for their customers, keep them loyal and win additional business from existing clients. Plus, we hope to deliver an assist in welcoming new business whenever and wherever possible.”

## U.S. ENTRY

“We joined FTA to network, learn who’s out there, what challenges them, how they strive to become better printers and to forge strategic partnerships that build relationships simply by taking things step by step,” Pavla says. The firm is exhibiting at INFOFLEX 2018—booth 522.

Both she and Petr issue an open invitation to any interested printer: “Test our technology. Bring us your toughest job. Measure speed and changeover time. Evaluate quality. See if we can help you be more competitive.” They insist all concerns come out: short run, consistency, constant impression, registration, dot stability, etc.

Proud of the smaller, more flexible machines SOMA manufactures, the pair recalls development of the Optima<sup>2</sup> started in 2013, and had three primary goals: faster setup, less waste and reduction of plate bounce. The latest press is optimized to run both label stock paper and film packaging materials—products such as in-mold and wraparound labels, shrink sleeves, retort pouches and sachets, as well as paper sacks, cups and plates. Optima<sup>2</sup> carries a maximum printing

speed of 1,640 fpm and is available in configurations with eight or 10 colors and a maximum printing width of nearly 48-in.

The press features unwind and rewind systems that are located outside the printing modules. This variable design allows the option of choosing any unwind/rewind configuration and inline upstream or downstream printing and converting units, such as slitting, flying splicing, reverse printing units with turn bars, overprinting, gravure printing units for cold sealing, lacquering and coating units, inline lamination, etc.

## FASTER, WIDER, EFFICIENT

Petr reports that six stages constitute the design and manufacturing process of every press: structure, setup (ARUN fully automatic system for impression, as well as register, Falcon II—automatic impression setting in combination with a semi-automated system for register via Smart Register), job management, recipes, wash-up (Inkstorm) and color setting. Ink Fix is an ink kitchen that consists of a digital scale, touchscreen control panel with mixing software and connection to an online or offline spectrophotometer, gaining real Delta E and L\*a\*b\* values from the print.

He insists, “Optima<sup>2</sup> boasts a broad range of stand-out advancements, inspired by printers.” Of note:

- Bounce reduction is achieved through SOMA’s Advanced Bounce Control system, which consists of several crucial elements in the design of the machine—for example, a single block printing unit frame. All frames are solid and average 5.1-in. thick, with some areas up to 7.9-in. thick. SOMA produces all frames in-house in order to guarantee highest quality
- ARUN zero-meter setup waste system, an off-press automated plate mounter, requires a slightly modified sleeve, which can be



SOMA’s team poses outside its headquarters in recognition of the firm’s 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Photos courtesy of SOMA

# HISTORICAL MILESTONES

**1890-1948:** Lanškroun City Council purchases land and donates it to Schopper-Stodolowski to build a textile factory

**1956-1992:** Tesla, a division of the state-owned electronics company, commences manufacture of slitting and rewinding machines

**1992-1995:** SOMA Engineering is founded for the production of special-purpose machines with initial focus on die cutters and slitter/rewinders for the flexible packaging industry

**1995:** First flexo press—SOMA Flex—with CI drum introduced

**2001:** Planet family of slitter/rewinders includes compact Pluto, and top-of-the-range Venus, Jupiter and Saturn models

**2002:** UV flexo printing press with CI drum launched

**2004:** Solvent-free laminator launched

**2005:** Addition of a new administration and production facility

**2006:** Launch of a dedicated machine designed to print on lay-flat tubing and similar materials

**2007:** SOMA Flex MIDI II 8-color gear-less flexo press

**2008:** SOMA Flex IMPERIA 10-color CI flexo printing press

**2012:** Addition of a modern, 12,900 sq. ft. SOMA Globe Technology Centre brings customers the opportunity to test the latest printing and converting machines in a real print shop environment



SOMA's corporate headquarters in Lanškroun, Czech Republic

**2013:** SOMA Flex Optima introduced at K show

**2014:** Villa Globe training center opened in former private dwelling converted for training purposes and complements the SOMA Globe technology facility



Villa Globe Training Centre

**2015:** Venus III Turret

**2016:** Optima<sup>2</sup>



Live production on the Optima<sup>2</sup>

supplied by several manufacturers including PolyWest, Flint, Rotec and Rossini. Crucial data for register and impression setting are stored in chips in the sleeve. This information is read by the press for fully automated register and impression setting. Total waste for impression and register setting has been reduced to 16.4-ft. or less, which represents the circumference of the CI drum

- SOMA's Ink Cartridge system, a first for CI flexo presses, offers a way to reduce costs on jobs where expensive inks for spot colors, special effects or a metallic look are required. The small reservoir mounts directly to the doctor blade chamber and requires 0.26-g. of ink. Field tests show that on average almost 18 percent of the ink can be saved this way



SOMA's Optima<sup>2</sup>

- Cooling of the cylinder housings at motor side, similar to the cooling of the CI drum, prevents any temperature-caused expansion and, hence, dot gain
- Interdeck dryers swing open by 90 degrees, similar to a door, simplifying cleaning and providing easy accessibility to the substrate and CI drum

## ON THE HORIZON

Success, coupled with ambition, now sees SOMA planning to nearly double production through a \$10 million, three-year reconstruction project to increase assembly hall floor space. Continued emphasis will be placed on value and visibility with attention shining on the Optima<sup>2</sup>, as well as its 10-color and extra-long repeat length—47.2 in. configurations. ■

To learn more about SOMA, visit [www.soma-eng.com](http://www.soma-eng.com).