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Rand-Whitney Continues Its Innovation, EVOLution

by Len Prazych

Over the last 15-20 years, the Northeast U.S. has experienced a mass exodus of manufacturers. This is nothing new. Producers of consumer durables have been fleeing to the Southeast U.S., Mexico, Asia, and other low cost areas for years and continue to do so. Many of the plastics and furniture manufacturers started this migration back in the 90s, but it remains today and has become a way of life in the Northeast. As the number of manufacturers continues to shrink, the corrugated box industry in New England has been deeply affected. The area has seen massive packaging company consolidations where the market dictates that the strongest and those best positioned for a competitive future will survive.

Rand-Whitney Container, however, has not only survived but has adapted and is growing dramatically, both organically and through acquisition. Over the course of the last 10 years, they have acquired eight companies and invested heavily in their operations.

Rand-Whitney is part of the Kraft Group, a privately owned New England based company, that has exten-

sive holdings in paper trading, paper manufacturing and packaging.

Since its founding in 1938, Rand-Whitney has strategically grown by adapting to the changing climate.

Today, they are thriving in a highly competitive market with fewer customers by navigating the waters with key investments, opportunistic acquisitions, and as Nick Smith, Rand-Whitney's President notes, with "killer customer service."

Referring to the early 2000s, Smith stated, "We decided that we were not going to be strategically competitive five years from now unless we started investing. You can't

rely on technology from 10, 15 or 20 years ago. The Evol was part of our decision."

Invest To Grow

One recent investment was the purchase of an Evol, manufactured by Mitsubishi Heavy Industries (MHI). It is a versatile, efficient, high-speed flexo folder-gluer designed to meet the ever-changing demands of the corrugated converting industry. It boasts fast setups, quick ink changing and consistent stacking.



Nick Smith, left, President of Rand-Whitney Container, with Dick Dargan, Vice President of Manufacturing, at the company's Worcester, Massachusetts, plant.

“In our market, a truly square box is a critical requirement with the rapid increase in customers with automatic box erectors, so that was one of the key factors in our decision,” says Smith.

Rand-Whitney is so satisfied with the performance of the Evol that Smith said the company will likely be adding another high speed flexo which could potentially be another Evol, by early 2019, along with a new diecutter. In alignment with its “invest to grow” philosophy, the company is adding a 45,000-square-foot expansion to its existing 165,000-square-foot Worcester facility.



MHI's Evol is a high-speed flexo folder-gluer that boasts fast set ups, quick ink changing and consistent stacking.

The company recently opened a brand new 120,000-square-foot sheet plant in Dover, New Hampshire, and had a ribbon cutting last month for the renovation and expansion of its Rhode Island based operation, where it added 65,000-square-feet to its existing 80,000-square-foot facility. They have invested more money in the last five years on new buildings and equipment than most other independents do in their existence, which from Smith's perspective is giving

Rand-Whitney the ability to remain consistently competitive.

An Investment In Digital And Beyond

Like any other company positioned for the future, Rand-Whitney Container is thinking digitally. It recently invested in a Durst digital printer and is starting a new company called **buyboxes.com**, which will allow consumers to buy custom boxes online by creating their own graphics and receive the finished product within just a few days by the simple click of mouse.

“The Durst is a great machine,” says Smith. “It is a perfect fit for small businesses and for a market where we believe there is a large demand. It allows our cus-



tomers extremely quick high quality short run production at affordable prices and with zero start up tooling costs.”

The rationale for the investment falls within Rand-Whitney's philosophical wheelhouse and according to Smith, it is a mistake not to invest in new equipment now, given the current “cheapness” of money. Unlike other companies who will not look any different five years from now because they will not make the investments to stay competitive, Rand-Whitney is continuing to invest, innovate and evolve.