



# Fortis Solutions Group expands operations, enters new markets and invests in technology

Following his acquisition of Labels Unlimited, John Wynne has brought together strategically located companies east of the Mississippi. Investments at the original business (now known as Fortis Solutions Group) have made it a major player in digital labels which now account for 55 percent of jobs and 25 percent of revenue at its largest location in Virginia Beach, Va.



**Industry sector:** Labels & Packaging

**Business name:** Fortis Solutions Group

**Headquarters:** Virginia Beach, Virginia, USA

**Interviewees:** John Wynne, CEO; Ken Hubel, chief sales and marketing officer; Ken Pizzuco, COO

**HP equipment:** 2 x HP Indigo WS6600 Digital Presses, 2 x HP Indigo WS6000 Digital Presses

**Website:** fortissolutionsgroup.com



## Challenge

"Digital printing enables us to work more efficiently and deliver savings to customers through affordable short-runs which also allows our customers to reduce their inventory levels and obsolescence risk. Printing labels digitally also enables our customers to rapidly respond to changing consumer demand by allowing for frequent design changes and the proliferation of targeted SKUs to help them grow their market share."

John Wynne, CEO, Fortis Solutions Group



## Going digital by acquisition

Fortis Solutions Group had a strategic plan to respond to requests from customers in the Midwest to have facilities nearer to them to reduce the transit time and costs associated with deliveries. With its purchase of A&M Label in 2014, the company acquired its fourth digital press, an HP Indigo WS6600 Digital Press.

As demand for shorter runs, faster turnarounds and added value features like variable data content, microtext, metallic effects and special colors increased, so did Fortis Solutions Group's requirement for additional digital capacity.

"The purchase of A&M Label gave us another digital press and a strategic manufacturing triangle of Virginia Beach, Detroit and Memphis from which we could service the South, the Midwest and the East Coast," says Wynne.

Impressed with the HP Indigo presses' ease of use, seven-color option, substrate versatility, established technology, throughput and print quality, Fortis Solutions replaced the legacy HP Indigo WS4500 Digital Press with two HP Indigo WS6000 Digital Presses and one HP Indigo WS6600 in its Virginia Beach facility.

## Solution

"Integrating digitally printed products with those printed on our flexo presses has been achievable thanks to the color matching possible with the HP Indigo digital presses. It's also given us the ability to match brand colors and win new business."

Ken Hubel, chief sales and marketing officer, Fortis Solutions Group



## Effective substrate use

The need for additional digital capacity grew significantly since Wynne's acquisition of the company in 2010 evidenced by new HP Indigo digital press purchases in 2011, 2012 and 2013 at the Virginia Beach location.

"While we diversified our client base with the A&M Label purchase that took us into the automotive, transport and logistics and contract packaging markets, the 2015 acquisitions of Kopco Graphics and Color Craft Label broadened the customer base even further, grew our presence in the Memphis market and extended our manufacturing locations to Ohio and Florida," says Wynne.

With increased diversity came the need for tighter process management and streamlined workflows. The HP Indigo digital presses' inline primers are contributing to those goals. The inline primer enables stocks that are run on the company's narrow-web flexo presses to be used on the HP Indigo digital presses.

"About 75 percent of our labels are printed on paper. We've found the inline coater and Enhanced Productivity Mode (EPM) to be valuable tools that add to our productivity and profitability," says Ken Pizzuco, COO, Fortis Solutions Group. "We don't have to stock unique substrates for digital printing but can use the same as on the flexo presses. This is particularly good for customers who want five million feet of labels one month and five thousand the next because we can use the same substrate."

## Result

"Generally, runs of 10,000 feet or less will be printed digitally. Our average digital run is about 2,200 feet, but we've recently done a 200,000 foot job comprising 17 SKUs. We look at all the factors of each job and then decide what will be the most beneficial way for the customer to print it."

Ken Pizzuco, COO, Fortis Solutions Group



## Exercising the digital advantage

"How we think about color and substrates has changed since our digital presses were installed," says Hubel. "For example, if we're doing a job that's previously been printed conventionally, we'll match the digital to the flexo. However, if it's a new job, we'll set the digital color first and match it on the flexo press."

Fortis Solutions' color matching and substrate expertise was further demonstrated when it used the HP Indigo WS6600 Digital Press to land a customer it had been seeking for a long time.

"It's a fairly large cosmetics company but we'd never had work from them because their labels used foil and its brand colors are very difficult to reproduce," explains Hubel. "We asked if we could try printing some digital samples and they agreed."

"Since we have limited foiling equipment, we had to find another way to achieve the effect while the prepress team went to work on the special color," he continues. "When we showed the company the result, they were amazed. We had reverse printed the labels onto metallic stock achieving the brand color by mixing HP Indigo ElectroInk Violet with Cyan and Black and delivered labels with pin-sharp register and crisp, clean text and detail."

"That company is now one of our customers."