

# COMPANIES TO WATCH

COMPANIES TO WATCH IS A SPECIAL FEATURE OF LABEL & NARROW WEB THAT FOCUSES ON A SELECT GROUP OF CONVERTERS WHO ARE MAKING NOTEWORTHY CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE HEALTH OF THE INDUSTRY.

THIS IS NOT A RANKING OF ANY KIND, NOR IS IT MEANT TO BE ALL-INCLUSIVE. IF THESE COMPANIES SHARE ANYTHING IN COMMON, IT IS THAT THEY ARE EXPERIENCING GROWTH, PRODUCING HIGH QUALITY WORK, AND USING THE LATEST TECHNOLOGY TO BETTER SERVE THEIR CUSTOMERS.

FOR 2015, WE PRESENT:

FORTIS SOLUTIONS GROUP • GREAT LAKES LABEL • INLAND  
ELC ETIQUETTES • STROUSE CORPORATION • FLESH CO • ADHÉPRINT

## FORTIS SOLUTIONS GROUP

2505 Hawkeye Court, Virginia Beach, VA 23452 USA  
[www.fortissolutionsgroup.com](http://www.fortissolutionsgroup.com)



Fortis Solutions Group has been a company to watch since its owner, John Wynne, Jr., emerged in the label industry in 2010 with his purchase of Labels Unlimited, a label converter in Virginia Beach, VA, USA. In early 2015, Labels Unlimited acquired Wixom, MI-based A&M Label, a move that led the companies to rebrand, together, as Fortis Solutions Group.

According to Wynne, who also serves as the company's CEO, the rebranding initiative united the company internally while speaking to the value it brings to customers. "We wanted to redevelop our go-to-market strategies, which would include a new website and marketing collateral. We chose Fortis, which means 'strong' in Latin, and Solutions, meaning 'proactive, value-added providers,' with Group referring to our being a multi-site and multi-faceted operation."

In keeping in line with the business philosophy of multi-faceted strengths among several sites, in June 2015, Fortis Solutions Group acquired Kopco Graphics and Color Craft Label, expanding the company's growth opportunities and its ability to serve its customers nationwide. Following these latest acquisitions, the company now has 235



One of Fortis Solutions Group's four HP Indigo digital label presses.

employees at multiple manufacturing sites ranging in size from 16,000 to 37,500 square feet.

Wynne says, "We have expanded from a single site to one of the country's largest label converters, with manufacturing and sales locations in Wixom, MI, West Chester, OH, Memphis, TN and Virginia Beach, VA. And we'll continue to seek additional acquisition opportunities in attractive markets and geographic locations."



Fortis Solutions Group's Nilpeter flexo press

With such a strong geographic presence, Fortis Solutions Group ships products to the Bahamas, Canada and every state in the US. The company has a dedicated sales team that is regionally and industry-focused, and complements the efforts of its various broker partners. "We're focused on new business-generating activities while ensuring the continued success of our current customer base," Wynne says. "Fortis seeks to continuously offer value to its customers by bringing proactive, innovative ideas to bear that take cost out of the supply chain and increase our customers' market share."

All told, the company has more than 20 flexographic presses, a combination of Nilpeter and Mark Andy machinery. Fortis also has four HP Indigo digital presses. Over the past few years, the company has invested heavily in new presses, Esko prepress and proofing software, High Definition flexo platemaking and a new EFI Radius ERP system.

With expertise in variable data printing, Fortis Solutions Group has become one of the largest HP Indigo label and packaging printers in the US. "We've adopted workflows that enable us to align with our customers' go-to-market strategies along with changing consumer demands," says Wynne. "These workflows minimize inventory obsolescence and allow quick leads times within a nimble production environment – we can seamlessly switch SKUs between our digital and flexographic technology."

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

For Fortis, digital labels account for 55% of jobs and 25% of revenue at its largest location in Virginia Beach. Wynne is noticing an increase in demand for shorter run lengths and lead times, while the number of absolute SKUs proliferates. Fortis is focused on driving cost out of its operations to ensure fast delivery of a competitively-priced, custom-made, quality product. He says, "Rather than a transactional relationship, we continue to differentiate ourselves in the marketplace by partnering with multiple facets of our customers' organization including innovation teams, brand managers, marketing departments, procurement and manufacturing. We are known for our quick turnaround time, outstanding customer service and quality control," Wynne says.

"With four HP Indigo presses and over 20 flexo presses, we excel at both short and long-run printing, ensuring best-in-class color management across the different platforms."

While historically focused on the food and beverage markets, Fortis Solutions Group now has substantial business in the automotive, household, and transport and logistics industries as well. The company primarily produces multi-color pressure sensitive labels and has a growing flexible packaging division. Wynne sees additional growth in the health and beauty market, as well as considerable opportunity to leverage its ISO and quality certifications into the durables sector.

With increased diversity comes the need for tighter process management and streamlined workflows. The HP Indigo digital presses' inline primers are contributing to those goals, according to Ken Pizzuco, Fortis Solutions Group's COO. "The inline primer enables stocks that are run on our narrow web flexo presses to be used on the HP Indigo digital presses," he says. "About 75% 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. 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."

With its rapid growth, Fortis Solutions Group is well on its way to becoming a top 10 company within the North American labels and packaging space. Wynne emphasizes there are tremendous growth opportunities nationwide by Fortis continuing to acquire outstanding companies and leveraging differentiated sales strategies to capture additional market share. At the same time, he says, the company will continue to evaluate and invest in new product lines such as shrink sleeves, folding cartons and other new technologies which could benefit its customer base. – *Steve Katz*