

Subject:
Etikettenfabrik
Erhard Küchler GmbH,
Esslingen am Neckar,
Germany

Profile:

Etikettenfabrik Küchler is one of the leading label manufacturers in Germany, whose core competences are adhesive labels in all conceivable shapes, colours and materials.

Challenge:

Increase the durability and simplify platemaking for their Codimag VIVA 420 presses in waterless UV.

Solution:

Verico Technology's Zahara NWL chemistry-free plates for waterless narrow web label printing

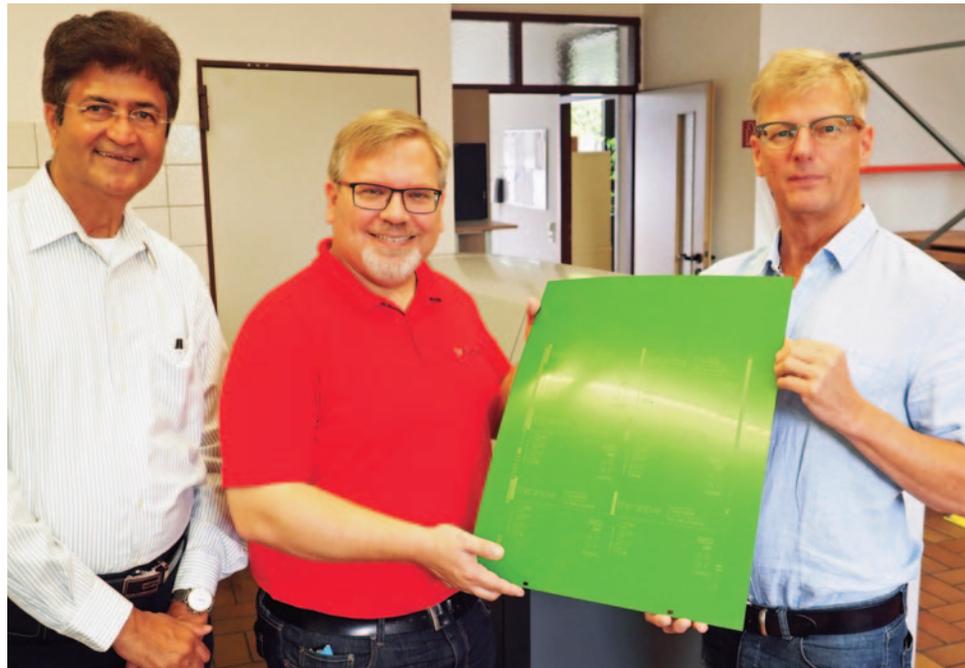
Results:

- Fast, easy changeover to using Zahara NWL
- Simple, chemistry-free platemaking
- Durability increase
- Excellent on-press performance
- Enthusiastic approval of press operators
- Higher quality of printed output

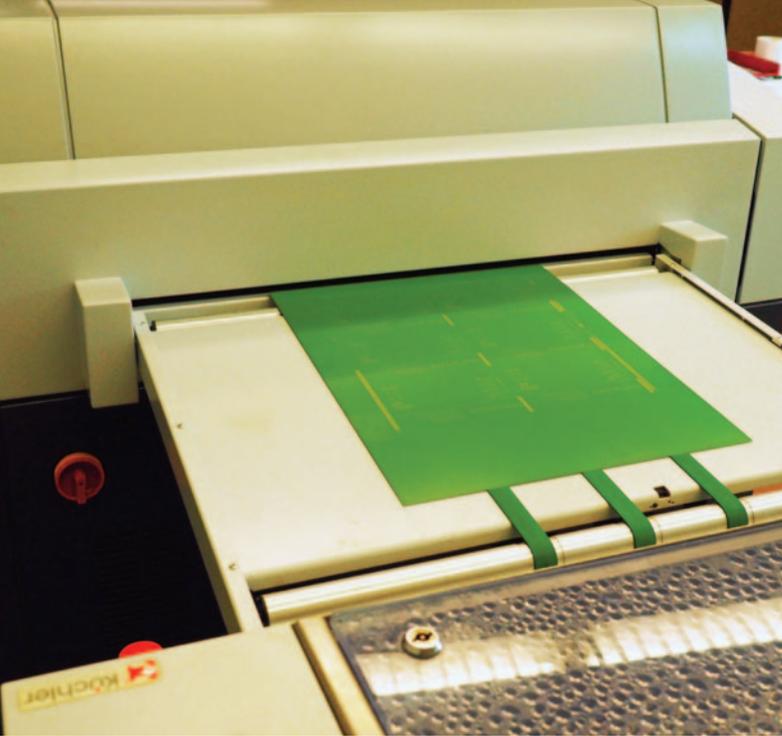
Etikettenfabrik Küchler opts for the predictable and durable waterless plate

Dirk Handler is an inventive entrepreneur who lives for self-adhesive labels. He runs Etikettenfabrik Erhard Küchler GmbH in Esslingen am Neckar (near Stuttgart), a family-owned company with 44 employees that covers the full range of such products. According to Handler, even though the company doesn't publicize, the Esslingen experts are more than happy to take on difficult tasks. In the autumn of 2018 all offset output at Küchler was switched to Verico Zahara NWL plates. A significant change it might have been—but difficult, it wasn't.

Etikettenfabrik Küchler has been operating for 55 years, having been founded in 1964 by Dirk Handler's grandfather Erhard Küchler. Currently, it runs a single shift and is almost exclusively a producer of self-adhesive labels. It first moved into offset around ten years ago with Codimag presses and their simple but smart prin-



Haroon Reshamvala (Sales Manager Verico Technology, l.) and Günter Schmid (Plate Application Specialist Verico Technology, r.) present the Verico ZAHARA NWL Plate together with Dirk Handler, CEO of Etikettenfabrik Küchler, Esslingen/Germany.



The Heidelberg Suprasetter and the Verico Zahara NWL plate.

ting concept: no roller changes, variable length blanket and short ink trains with no ink keys. “This offered an easy way in for the flexo-trained Küchler-Team”, explains Dirk Handler. The second Codimag Viva Aniflo 420 arrived in 2015 and at the beginning of 2019 a third line was added. These presses are complemented by a range of other machines including a Codimag letterpress line.

Leap forward in quality through waterless offset

The Esslingen company's equipment is configured so that virtually all jobs can be produced inline even when several passes have to be combined. The second of Küchler's Aniflo 420 presses to arrive has five offset units, a UV letterpress unit and a flexo coater; the first is capable of up to six offset passes as well as flexo, hot foil and relief embossing, whilst the latest addition has five offset units and a flexo coater. This press features an enhanced substrate transport unit that, depending upon the printing length, allows printing speeds to be increased by up to 30 percent.

„Reliability is important and that's what we have with the Zahara plate.“

The move into waterless offset around a decade ago brought Küchler “enormous gains in terms of print quality and register” recalls Dirk Handler. As an example of what he's talking about he points to a job featuring blocks of reversed-out text exhibiting extremely precise register despite being five color. Offset has further strengthened the company's market position but the complexity and quality demands of labels keep increasing.

The move into offset also brought the choice of the Heidelberg Suprasetter as the setter right from the start, and this is now also available from Verico Technology as the 'HD-Pro W'. For almost a year now Küchler has exclusively relied on Verico Zahara NWL plates. Dirk Handler explains that the reason behind the switch was the durability issues with the previous plate. Now, with the Verico Zahara NWL, production can once again rely on a durable plate. For long-run print jobs in particular, the reliability of performance over the run is important, comments the boss. It is this that allows you to estimate accurately and to expose, for example, the right number of replacement plates for a 40,000 impression job.



With the Verico Zahara NWL, production at Etikettenfabrik Küchler can rely on a durable plate.

Dirk Handler: "Reliability is important and that's what we have with the Zahara plate."

Straightforward switch

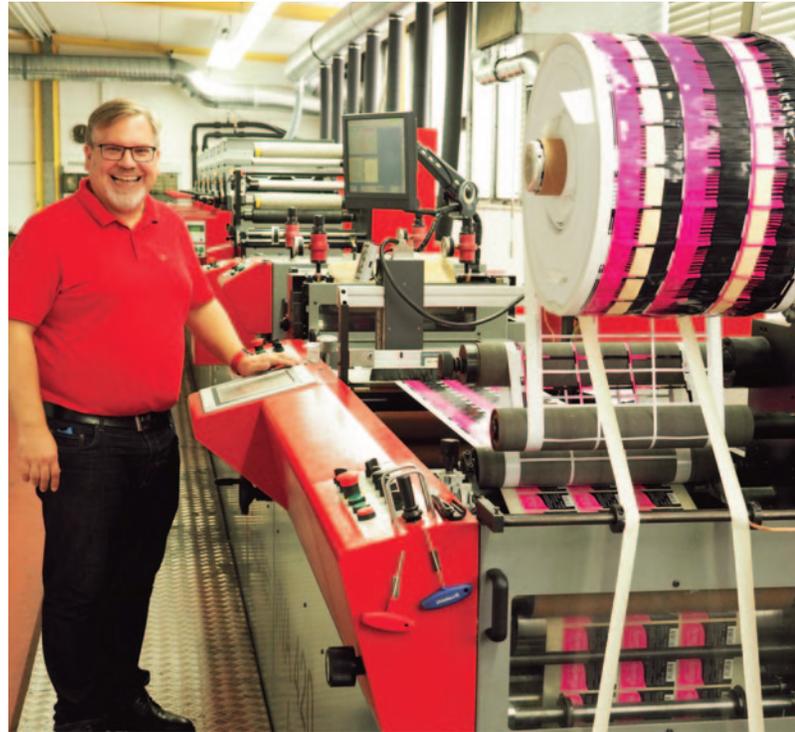
The switch to the Verico Zahara NWL was straightforward. Günter Schmid, Verico Technology Europe's application specialist, was on hand for the changes to the settings on the setter and also for the reconfiguration of the processor, which now simply operates as a 'washer' using pure water. Günter Schmid: "Initially, we reconfigured the processor as a hybrid device, enabling the customer to start using our plates, which are simply washed in pure water, right away; but with the option to add chemicals if needed." This allowed Küchler to alternate between plate types for several weeks until all the stocks of its previous plate had been used up.

Dirk Handler says that the decision to go for the Verico Zahara plate was of course also driven by the printed results that it delivers besides its durability ("a decisive factor"). The screen rulings were top and the quality of the Verico Zahara NWL can be seen from the printed results. Werner Herzog, the Technical Director at Etikettenfabrik Küchler, is also pleased with the insensitivity of the waterless UV plates to scratching. Before the offset switch, nobody in production had any idea how easy it would be, recalls the label expert. To begin with everybody was ultra-careful.

Platemaking and plate changing are processes that must function simply, quickly and smoothly in a company structured in the way that Küchler is. If you are printing wine labels, for example, you can find that there are seven or eight different versions on a 200 metre length of label substrate. You're changing plates more than printing.

The demands of adhesives

However, the particular challenge of label printing jobs does not always lie in the way they are broken up or in their combination of different printing and finishing



Dirk Handler, CEO of Etikettenfabrik Küchler, alongside one of his three Codimag Viva Aniflo 420 narrow web presses.

steps. Dirk Handler regards his substrates as 'three-dimensional' on account of their adhesive layer. It is the adhesive factor that on the one hand limits the range of possible substrates because not all are obtainable in coated form in the small batches that are sometimes necessary. What's more, the adhesive quite often poses a challenge all of its own. For example, special precautions need to be taken in the production process in areas such as

stripping when handling the aggressive adhesives needed to get labels to stick to tyres or sacks. Here it's not just the experience but the design skills of Dirk Handler and his team that are needed. This is undoubtedly a USP of the company: "We're happy to handle difficult pressure-sensitive adhesives and we do so successfully time after time", is how Dirk Handler pithily sums things up.

A problem-free area

Küchler deliberately chooses to work with numerous substrate suppliers in order not to miss out on any developments. Even with



The Verico ZAHARA NWL, used in one of the Codimag Viva Aniflo 420 narrow web presses.

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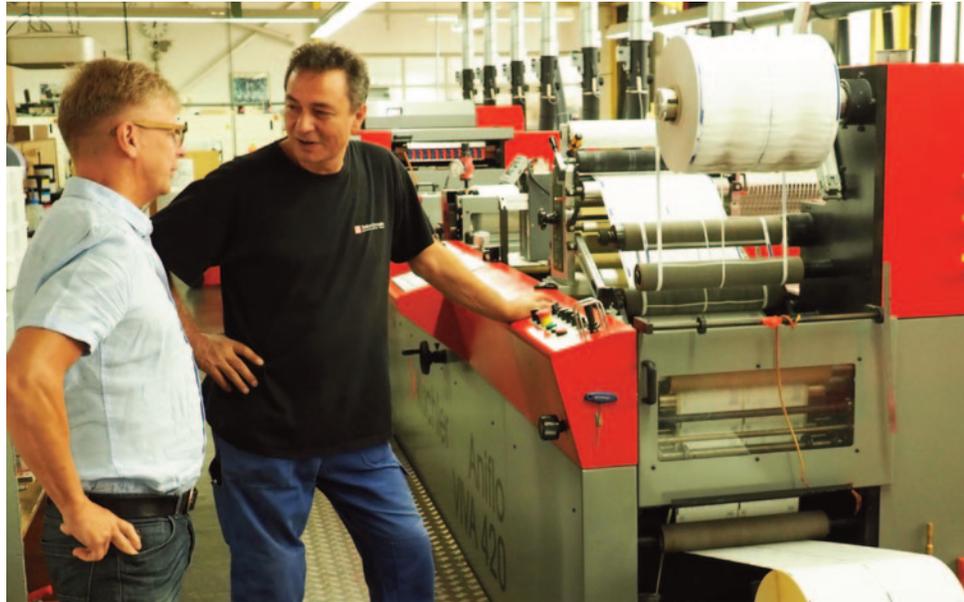
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Günter Schmid, Verico Technology Europe's application specialist (l.) is always on hand for his customers. But since completing the switch to the Verico Zahara NWL, platemaking and the plates themselves have become „completely problem and maintenance-free“ at Etikettenfabrik Küchler.

ink for label production there's always movement in the market and a need for research, discussions with suppliers and in-house tests. Things are quite different with plates. Since completing the switch to the Verico Zahara NWL, platemaking and the plates themselves have become so “completely problem and maintenance-free” during routine production, comments Dirk Handler, that one rarely has to think about them. The elimination of chemicals from the process has made its contribution, so that now nothing but clear water is used — and re-used — simplifying the process further. ■

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Zahara plates are manufactured in the U.S.A.

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