

MPS: The 'New' Kid on the Block

Drawing on decades of experience from a seasoned executive team, Multi Packaging Solutions in a year has become a player to be reckoned with, quickly producing memorable packages for music, movies and videogames for major content owners.
By Darren Lock

The company behind some of the most eye-catching packaging projects of the moment is Multi Packaging Solutions (MPS), a relative corporate newcomer in the media packaging industry, but whose management, creative and sales team has decades of experience in the business. Founded in 2005, MPS is the vision of Marc Shore, who most recently served as chairman of Shorewood Packaging, which his father founded in 1967 and was acquired in 2000 by International Paper.

MPS received financial backing from New York-based Bear Stearns Merchant Banking, which provided office space for MPS until recently when it moved into its own midtown Manhattan headquarters.

MPS already has provided commercial printing and packaging solutions for many industries, such as pharmaceuticals and advertising, but also the familiar home entertainment market.

The company's overall annual turnover is estimated to be in excess of US\$275 million. As the result of several packaging and printing company acquisitions, MPS boasts ten production facilities throughout the US, giving it a wide range of manufacturing equipment and print technology that enable customers the



ability to print on all substrates including paper, paperboard, plastics, foil, films and labels.

Client-wise, Multi Packaging Solutions customers include Electronic Arts, EMI, Koch Entertainment, Paramount Home Entertainment, Rhino Records, Sony/BMG, Take Two Interactive, Universal Home Entertainment, and Universal Music Group. Marc Shore, the CEO of the new company, attracted from Shorewood and AGI, as well as other packaging companies a team of seasoned industry professionals. Second-in-command Dennis Kaltman, MPS executive vice president of operations, has more than 16 years of packaging experience and also worked at International Paper and Shorewood before joining MPS in August 2005. His grandfather, Marty Kaltman, had founded media packaging pioneer Queens Group, which was acquired by Shorewood in October 1998.

The creative director of the company is Dan Davis, who most recently worked at Shorewood as its director of design, and before that was senior designer at Ivy Hill for 21 years.

With such a seasoned team in place, it is no surprise that in a short period of time MPS has seen itself being responsible for a number of high-profile and innovative packaging concepts, the most notable being the CD packaging for Tool's *10,000 Days*, Janet Jackson's *Autumn Leaves*, whose special release featured a rigid box and booklet on foil paper; the *Coach* Series 1 DVD packaging that had a simulated leather cover and the recent *Grease* movie reissue that featured eye-catching deluxe packaging.

The packaging for the Tool CD shows a level of sophistication never before seen in a standard CD package, the case comprising of a stiff card wraparound sleeve that contains the CD. What makes the package particularly unique are its two stereoscopic lenses, which flip up allowing the

viewer to view the stereoscopic artwork contained within the booklet, giving a pseudo three-dimensional effect. The concept came from the band's guitarist, Adam Jones, while the artwork was created by long-time Tool collaborator Alex Grey. The 3D modelling is credited to Ray Zone. *10,000 Days* won an Alex Award this past summer.

The design process

So how does the company approach a new project? Shore guides *MediaPack* through the design process and gives an insight to how his company works through a concept.

"The process of creating a special package varies," he notes. "There are instances where MPS initiates the ideas, and others come from the studios. MPS is more likely to provide

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structural and material concepts than graphic design. Both graphic and structural designs are submitted to the creative departments at the record labels, movie studios, and games publishers, which, in turn, present the concepts to their respective marketing teams. Marketing then submits the winning package to the operations group who figure out the costs of the project. Once the costs have been approved the package is ready to go into production. There is definitely quite a bit of contact with the studio during the pre-production and production processes."

Using unique materials

For the recently released, limited-edition DVD boxed set for *Coach*, the popular TV comedy series about an American college football coach, both the studio and MPS quickly rejected the notion of using a standard Amaray case or a paperboard box. Instead an eye-

Marc Shore received financial backing from Bear Stearns Merchant Banking for his new packaging company

Tool's *1,000 Days* standard CD release for Sony/Zomba was a die-cut deluxe package executed by MPS and fitted with special lens



MPS has already worked on DVD packages for some major Hollywood movies

THE MPS TEAM: WHERE THEY CAME FROM

When Marc Shore set up his new company, a handful of media packaging industry veterans jumped at the ground-floor opportunity filling the executive ranks. Here's a snapshot view of their backgrounds:

- Dennis Kaltman, MPS executive vice president of operations. Ex-International Paper/Shorewood Packaging; Queens Group. 16 years media packaging experience.
- William Hogan, MPS chief financial officer. Most recently Computer Associates International, but previously with International Paper Europe/Shorewood Packaging. 10 years media packaging experience.
- Mario Augusta, MPS vice president, sales. Ex-AGI Media; Shorewood/Queens Group. 30 years media packaging experience.
- Doug Brown, MPS vice president, sales. Ex-Shorewood; 19 years of media packaging experience.
- Brit Davis, MPS vice president, sales. Ex-Shorewood; Warner Bros. Records; Geffen Records; EMI Recorded Music. 17 years of creative development and production experience.
- Dan Davis, MPS creative director. Ex-Shorewood; Ivy Hill. 21+ years experience in structural design for the entertainment industry.
- Paula Doherty, MPS vice president, sales. Ex-AGI. 17 years media packaging experience.
- Ken Glinert, MPS vice president, sales. Ex-Shorewood. 16-1/2 years in media packaging and golf markets.
- Barry Bridwell, senior vice president, manufacturing. Ex-International Paper/Shorewood Packaging; Queens Group. 30 years media packaging experience.
- Chuck Vincent, VP Sales. Ex-Shorewood. 30+ years experience in the printing and packaging industry.

catching design that resembled a football team's playbook with a simulated leather football skin, complete with laces. The package was designed by MPS as a mini-binder playbook, which was manufactured in Asia, with sleeves that contain the four DVDs. "The *Coach* DVD package is just an example of the kind of ingenuity that our company can deliver for content owners," said Paula Doherty, vice president of sales.

Indeed, but how did this packaging concept come about? Shore explains, "Normally when Multi Packaging Solutions receives a title to work on, we come up with interesting materials and solutions to present to the customer. For example, it was our idea to use the football leatherette material for the *Coach* packaging. In fact, in this case Multi Packaging Solutions designed the entire package inclusive of the graphics. Universal, the studio behind the release, made some

graphic changes to our original submission and changed the logo colour."

When using the football-like leatherette or the *Grease* jackets' simulated black leather and satin, raw materials are tested extensively to meet strict manufacturability and durability standards. The downsides to using special materials are longer lead-times, manual assembly and cost, when compared to standard DVD or CD cases.

However, MPS puts more emphasis on packaging design. As Shore puts it succinctly, "I do not necessarily feel that material costs affect design. Good design is good design. It also goes beyond creating something that's interesting. We want to create something that hasn't been seen before, a package that's unique."

This forward thinking and passion for design is again evident on MPS's recent *Grease* package. This movie has appeared on DVD before, so how do you breathe life into a title that fans already own? The company came up with two designs

that mirrored the story line of the *Grease* movie itself. The first was a miniature pink satin jacket as favoured by the Pink Ladies in the movie, and the second was a tiny miniature black leather jacket, complete with zips and studs, as favoured by John Travolta's character.

Not only do these packages have the "wow factor," but because there are two different sleeves to choose from, the diehard collector is likely to buy both versions. So it turns out that this is an inspired packaging concept and clever piece of marketing rolled into one.

But how practical are these special packaging ideas? While it might be one thing to test raw materials for durability and manufacturability, surely coming up with something as complicated as the *Grease* package makes it almost impossible to pack?

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MPS works closely with replicators and studio operations to make sure that the discs easily loaded into the packaging. The company is mindful of any issues surrounding its packaging concepts and designs for both auto-loading and hand packaging systems. But obviously the more complicated the packaging concept, the more likely it is that the product is hand-packed. Shore comments, "Sometimes the packaging we design is not necessarily more expensive than standard packaging, but is a better solution. But our immediate goal is to please our customer aesthetically, functionally and from a cost perspective. And if we can achieve then we feel very comfortable and happy with the results. All this special packaging is being designed to drive sales and bring interest to the market. Our aim is to come up with great aesthetics that can drive sales."

So what has feedback been like? Responds Shore: "Our innovative packaging designs have won industry, media and fan acclaim. We don't get any public feedback, the best feedback they can give us is if they've bought the product in the packaging we've designed, which pleases our client," enthuses Shore, "Multi Packaging Solutions was awarded first place in the 2006 Alex Awards for Best CD Package for our Tool CD stereoscopic packaging. The package was also recognised for its fan appeal by *The New York Times*." Indeed, the newspaper said in its review of the CD, "Tool's *10,000 Days* is purely a CD, though it is a pretty elaborate one. Along with those 77 minutes of music, you get a wraparound hard cover case; the booklet is printed stereoscopically, with lenses built into the cover."

This is the kind of CD that makes a \$9.99 digital download seem like a rip-off." Fans have also been vociferous in praising the company's packaging concepts. One Amazon.com customer, writing about the recently re-mastered *Grease* DVD, despite owning a previous edition commented, "I felt guilty about double-dipping but the cute leather jacket was an irresistible gimmick." So there you go, clear evidence that innovative packaging is not only a weapon against the onslaught of digital downloads, but a useful sales tool for breathing life into DVD re-issues.

So what does the future hold for Multi Packaging Solutions? The company has a number of high-profile projects in the pipeline for the music, home entertainment and games market that will be released in the latter part of 2006. Shore adds, "The future for Multi Packaging Solutions is determined by our customers' needs – for technology, creativity, quality and service. Capital investments as well as potential acquisitions will be grounded in these considerations."

Considering that Multi Packaging Solutions has only been in operation for just over a year but has already managed to make an impact on the entertainment media packaging industry and also be an award-winner, it certainly has a lot to live up to in the coming year. But we suspect that if the past 12 months is the benchmark, MPS will be wowing us with some more interesting and effective concepts to tempt the consumer. ●



MPS quickly has made inroads into the games, music and DVD markets