

CMCS's three decades of success

Venerable UK firm CMCS has been producing innovative media packaging for 30 years. Managing director Adam Teskey speaks to Darren Lock about why packaging is still relevant in the 21st century, despite fall-offs in CD and DVD demand

The CMCS Group has been involved in media packaging for 30 years, and the evolution of the music industry has caused the company to purposely refocus its packaging strategy.

Gone are the glory days of having a printing factory right next door to the EMI pressing plant in Swindon, England, able to turnaround same day runs, and instead the company is concentrating on the specialist packaging market.

Speaking to Adam Teskey, one of the five current directors of the company, one could sense that this was a company that existed purely to innovate. Teskey himself is a veteran of the packaging industry, cutting his teeth at the Tinsley Robor Group, becoming production manager of Tinsley Robor Labels and latterly works and production manager of TR Displayprint before moving over to CMCS in 1992, where he helped set up that very print shop outside EMI's manufacturing plant in Swindon. In 2002, he became MD of CMCS and celebrates his fifth year in the role in February. The group has five directors: Adam Teskey, Derek Cameron, Barry Cameron, John

Hersey-Walker (chairman) and his son Nik Hersey-Walker.

The CMCS group is split into five companies: CMCS Print specialises in print and packaging solutions, while CMCS Sales deals with the commercial side of the business and are based at the headquarters in Dartford, Kent. Also on site at Dartford is digital design company, RD2 Media. Peacock Marketing and Design is based in London and started off as a design company for the music industry designing album sleeves before evolving into working on TV campaigns and point-of-sale campaigns and street posters. They were responsible for the Live8 advertising campaign and now specialise in animation for TV advertising. SMC (Software Manufacturing Corporation) is based in Northampton, UK, and concentrates on small-scale CD replication for exhibitions and small projects.

The key to innovation at CMCS is simple: passion. "We still have to be totally passionate about we do. That's where our mindset comes from, and we get a kick out of our records actually being on the shelves," explains Teskey.

"Anyone can be an MD, but you have to surround yourselves with people with a passion and it is fantastic to have a team that is always excited about coming up with new ideas."

CMCS was founded purely to meet the needs of the record industry in the mid-1970s and specialised in cardboard packaging for vinyl albums.

How has the decline of vinyl affected the company? "We still do 7-, 10- and 12-inch vinyl printing and that marketplace has grown for us because less people are doing the print and we've picked up more of the work. We still do the majority of EMI and Virgin's vinyl printing," explains Teskey. "Our roots are still hers and we still use some of that original printing kit. A lot of people got out of it and concentrated on the CD format and the obvious thing was to get out of vinyl, but our roots have always been in vinyl and we've kept an interest in it. The vinyl market is still healthy and I think the kids are still interested in it and the history of music. In the past two or three years, there has been an increase of interest in vinyl in certain genres of music and the majors are prepared to spend the money on it. We recently did the packaging for Badly Drawn Boy and it is a stunning piece of vinyl packaging. We do a lot of it and we are doing a lot of gatefolds and rigid gatefolds and many of the major record labels are prepared to spend more money and make sure that the packaging is done well."

While vinyl packaging is seeing a small resurgence and CMCS has exploited other companies' reluctance to serve the market, Teskey didn't seem too hopeful about the future of the compact disc, which he sees as trailing off and this has caused the company to refocus its strategy and concentrate on specialist media packaging.

"The volume of music print we are doing now has dropped compared to five years ago, and that's why I've made a conscious decision to refocus the group towards more towards special packaging for multimedia and music. We don't do much other commercial work; the rest is for the music industry, home entertainment industry or gaming industry. But then the strategy was to fine-tune that and purely concentrate on the more specialist side



CMCS MD Adam Teskey (at right) with company director Nik Hersey-Walker (left) and head of design Dean Phillips

CMCS's ActPac is an environmentally friendly disc tray made from tapioca starch, which is biodegradable and carbon neutral



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of packaging and cut our cloth to suit the size of the marketplace. There is a big split between downloads or the stack-them-high, sell-them-low CD market and we are in the middle.” This means that the company does very little booklet and inlay work, though the company still has a very large back catalogue of material still available for reprint.

CMCS has invested heavily in equipment and the talent to produce packaging that is sometimes outside of the norm. “We have our speciality. We’ve invested in different equipment, and you invest in different skill sets and in a different mentality – the R&D, the CAD/CAM (computer aided design conversion) and you have to buy in specialist skills and adopt a different mental outlook to those who produce booklets and inlay work. We can distil our ethos to three words: innovation, innovation, innovation because we have to bring something unique to the marketplace,” says Teskey.

So how does a project come into existence at CMCS? There seems to be a tripartite methodology involved in the creation of new projects. Very often the company might have an idea in development that it can pitch to a record company. Equally sometimes the record company might have a specific concept in

mind and ask CMCS if they can accommodate it. The third way is that CMCS might happen to work with the designer and the artist.

This happened recently with the Robbie Williams *Rudebox* album concept where the company worked closely with the designer Tom Hingston, who was looking at doing something with a tactile surface, and they came up with a high-rise spot UV varnish to give the package an eye-catching shine and the feel Hingston was looking for.

There have also been times when the company has worked directly with the artist when putting together a packaging concept. In the example of David Gilmour’s *On an Island* special CD packaging, the Pink Floyd guitarist was actively involved with the final look of the special edition of the album and even signed off the final proofs himself.

But coming up with a new look or innovative design is often restricted by budgetary constraints, but no idea or concept is ever wasted at CMCS. What might be once too expensive to market or unwanted by the record or movie company is often refined or repurposed for a smaller budget. One example of this is the Digital Book package that the company developed that has enough tray space to hold 34 discs.

However, CMCS hasn’t found a market for such a product but holds it on the backburner just in case an application presents itself.

Another project the company was recently involved with is the Act-Pac, an environmentally friendly disc tray made from tapioca starch, which is biodegradable and carbon neutral. This new tray was created on licence from design group MODO and has been used in the CD release of *Rhythms Del Mundo*, which was released in aid of the Artists Project Earth, which gives support to disaster relief and climate change awareness. So it was important that the whole pack was environmentally friendly down to the vegetable-based inks using in printing. Of course, using a new material for a CD tray is fraught with technical issues and CMCS had to overcome the problem of getting the Act-Pac tray sticking to the card by developing a special adhesive. “There was a lot of R&D that went into that pack,” adds Teskey. “But it was a nice project and one where a number of different companies worked together to bring it to market.”

The latest innovation from CMCS, developed with Nexpak, is the Ultri-Pac, which is a three-disc tray that fits into the same dimensions as a double-disc tray. This item has been brought to market in an attempt to cut down on the amount of packaging required for multi-disc sets. The increased popularity and proliferation of TV series DVD boxed sets means that CMCS is in a unique position to offer a packaging solution that is more economical over standard two-disc trays.

“For the DVD producer this is going to drastically reduce the cost of packaging and we are marketing this by saying that you can have a special pack, but we can make it cheaper for you

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A huge music archive presents enormous reissue opportunities

(Continued from page 33) and have a slipcase," explains Teskey. "I might be cutting off my own nose to spite my face, but if we don't do it, you can bet someone else will. And these packs still feel substantial and give the buyer a sense that they've got something for their money."

In terms of packaging work, the DVD market seems to have reached a plateau for CMCS as orders have dropped slightly from its peak two years ago. Teskey believes that there is often a reluctance for DVD producers to adopt special packaging, relying on the tried-and-tested standard Amaray-style case. In terms of the next-generation DVD movie formats, CMCS is cautious and waiting for a clear market winner before developing specialist packs for Blu-ray or HD DVD.

So what about the future? Is CMCS threatened by digital downloads and a possible future where entertainment media is electronically delivered and has no need for packaging? "It is hopefully a long way off, but we have to maximise our place in the marketplace and we have to be opportunistic, rather than wasting resources in markets we are not in. It is much easier to sell to an existing client than to a new one. It is an old adage, but it is true," says Teskey.

It's not just digital downloads and the state of the music industry that is bothering Teskey. He believes that there are issues across the whole of the manufacturing business that is leading to a current industrial depression in the UK.

"Manufacturing in this country has problems as a whole," he explains. "Luckily, we already export half of our turnover to Europe and even though we are a British manufacturer, we can do

it. That's the good thing being located in Dartford. The issue is that the buyer has more choice and the marketplace has changed, and we need to figure out how we can grow what we've got. So we have to stay intuitive to what the market requires. I do feel for British manufacturing as a whole, but we can't stop it happening. The solution is to keep your unique selling point, keep coming up with the best products, keep good relationships with your clients, stay as competitive as possible, keep your overheads as low as possible and if you have to cut your cloth, cut your cloth.

"There's no room for big dinosaur companies in this business anymore. The marketplace is becoming constrictive. The volumes are down. We know the competition has got bigger and more geographically spread. I certainly see the majors have an aversion to manufacturing but this could be cyclical. In terms of the music industry, it has to get creative and it is not just about the packaging. They have a big archive to exploit and they need to capitalise on what they've got.

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The Ultra-Pac was designed to cut down on the amount of packaging required for multi-disc sets