

Basic, beautiful, and beyond the box

With demand for special packaging on the increase as content owners strive to differentiate their products, a company that has always focused on one-off projects has an edge, as Elizabeth Toppin discovers

Think Pozzoli and you think 'special packaging'. That should be Special, with a capital 'S'. The Italian-based company has built a reputation on being able to provide some of the most creative and stop-you-in-your-tracks packaging for CDs and DVDs. No-one there will deny that, but the company is coming out of its shell (apologies for the unavoidable pun), a bit and telling the industry more about itself and the fact that there is more to Pozzoli than just a pretty face.

"Yes, we are known for being a speciality packaging company," says recently-appointed vice president Martin "Timmy" Treu, "but we don't want our customers to think that we wouldn't make standard packaging for them, or that we would be too expensive. We don't want people to have the notion that they can't approach us because we do only the very specialised products. Standard packaging is part of our core business, even though we pride ourselves on thinking beyond the box."

This isn't to say that the company is moving totally into the mass market, price-is-everything, basic packaging, but they do want to get the message out there that they can look after their customers whatever the packaging requirements. Pozzoli is looking forward to 2008 – its 40th birthday – with an aggressive attitude in terms of manufacturing, marketing and generally communicating the company's message of "Ask us the impossible".

"We can," says Treu, "supply just about anything we are asked for, and we combine in-house expertise, cutting-edge technology and a uniquely Italian flair for



“We combine in-house expertise, cutting-edge technology and a uniquely Italian flair for design”

design in order to develop, manufacture and market state-of-the-art products. It's difficult to define Italian flair, but everyone knows what it is! Our mission is definitely to maintain and retain our position as the most innovative company in the industry."

An impressive customer line-up underlines the company mission, including names like Sony Pictures, Warner Home Video, Universal Pictures, Buena Vista HE, 20th Century Fox, EMI Music, Sony BMG, Universal Music, Warner Music, and Italian publishers such as *Il Sole 24 Ore*, *L'Espresso* and *De Agostini*.

Print to packaging

"Since 1968 we have been creating the best packaging solutions for all the top names of the international music industry," says Treu.

Pozzoli was founded in 1968 in Inzago, Milan

as a print company that specialised, from its inception, in the manufacture of printed parts for the record industry – sleeves and jackets for vinyl discs and J-cards for music cassettes, as well as brochures and other related items.

In 1988, it became the first company in Italy to set up a compact disc department, and soon expanded its CD operations to encompass the entire production process, providing its replication services mainly to the Italian music and multimedia industries. Now it also produces DVDs.

Two years later the company reached another milestone and truly seminal moment in its development: the first special packaging solutions for CDs. At that time Pozzoli was a licensee of AGI and manufactured the Digipak, which was the breakthrough from the standard jewel case, and the first special packaging for CD. "These one-off solutions, with their extreme functionality and elaborate artistic designs, have become Pozzoli's core business," says Treu.

In 1997 Pozzoli left AGI and began to look further afield, opening sales offices in London in the UK (1998) and Frankfurt, Germany (1999). Last year Pozzoli France joined with the opening of a Paris sales office. The Italian market provides 30% of the business, with the other 70% of products going abroad – largely to the countries with the sales offices.

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Timmy Treu

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Production and replication

The brand-new (opened earlier this year) facility offers over 18,000 square metres of space, and houses each step of the Pozzoli process, from R&D through to finished products.

Not surprisingly for a company that began life in the world of printing, much of Pozzoli's special packaging incorporates an almost bewildering variety of print techniques. The production area is well fitted out with the best equipment there is in six-colour offset printing machines for the highest quality finishes. "These are

market overall but not for us," Fiorenzo Bettoni, VP Marketing and Sales, explains. "We are working towards increasing our presence in the DVD sector, but we will make sure to maintain our profile in CD. We do not have plans to increase our replication capacity but going forward we will ensure that we use it all."

Customers for replication are primarily local publishers who want to use Pozzoli as the proverbial 'one stop shop'.

People and products

During the busy season the production department is the biggest and busiest, with temporary workers bringing staff totals up to

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the best for regularity and uniformity in colour," Eros Marini, director of operations, explains, "and 95% of our jobs can be done in one pass on these systems."

Much of the machinery has been specially adapted for Pozzoli's particular uses – for instance, a system designed for enveloper manufacture but used for a patented slip case that, if not shipped flat, can be folded and glued like an envelope.

Ecological issues are taken very seriously here, and waste materials are automatically separated out of manufacturing lines and recycled. "We have very tight controls in keeping with strict ecological rules," says Marini, "and there is one person whose entire job is to keep track of all the recycling and ecological issues."

Replication is still part of the business, and provides about 20% of total turnover, with capacity of about 100,000 per day. "CD may be declining as a

nearly 300 (as opposed to about 230 normally). However, says Bettoni, "Our R&D department is the busiest department in the normal year. We created 920 new products in 2006, and more than that this year."

That is 920 instances of work on new special projects, in addition to any standard packaging work the company has done. In total, Pozzoli manufactured 60 million packages in 2006. Still, no matter how busy things get, the company prefers to up staffing levels than outsource.



Fiorenzo Bettoni



Gianfranco Vicini with some of the many R&D projects

“However busy it gets, even if there is some outsourcing, work for our major clients is kept in-house so that we have the tightest level of control,” Bettoni explains. “In this business, we can’t say no. One big change recently is that customers don’t want to keep stock any more. It is no longer ‘just-in-time’ production – it needs to be even faster than that! Customers want their products instantly.”

“Our people make the whole difference – it’s people and state-of-art-technology that make all this happen,” says Bettoni. “Staff training is very important as the technology moves on; we like our team to keep informed so that we can constantly present new ideas and designs.”

New ideas and designs, and a bewildering array of techniques.

Gianfranco Vicini, head of Pozzoli’s R&D division, is contagiously enthusiastic about the company’s products and the techniques used in making them, with terms like “goffering”, “singer stitch”, “rainbow lamination”, and “electrostatic flocking” – a fraction of the design elements that go into the packaging.

“Speciality and customised packaging is Pozzoli’s core business,” he says. “Our team of highly qualified experts applies their creativity to cutting-edge materials and special packaging processes. Pozzoli does more than merely transform ideas into reality – we develop and enrich those ideas in an ongoing dialogue with our clients.”

Like the production department, R&D has the latest and best equipment, including software whereby design prototypes can be viewed in virtual 3D; advanced CAD-CAM systems are used to design and build mock-ups, which are then put through their paces by dedicated testing machinery. Just three of the many examples on display were a specially shaped *Chainsaw Massacre*; a flocked *Sissi* box set; and a *Da Vinci Code* box set complete with replica cryptex.

Strategy: speed and quality

Like so many other companies in this sector of the optical media industry, Pozzoli has seen the numbers of units decreasing while the desire for special packaging increases. “This trend highlights a growing demand for outstanding and original packaging, both in the music and in the home video sectors,” says Bettoni. “The demand for very special customised packaging is growing at an unbelievable rate.”

The company’s strategy has always been to deliver quality, and that is still high on the agenda going forward. However, says Bettoni, there is another key element to keeping customers happy and keeping their business – speed. “In order to expand our client base, we have to provide our customers with a good service. Everyone says this but I believe that often the best way to win customers is to be fast.” That

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Pozzoli's headquarters near Milan

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doesn't mean just fast in terms of production, Bettoni emphasises, but in everything.

"You have to be fast at every process stage. You have to respond to enquiries immediately or they may go somewhere else. When they ask for a quotation, that needs to be delivered quickly or they will ask your competitors."

Speed does not mean losing sight of the company's byword of innovation, however, in standard packaging as well as special projects. "We have 17 patent families registered," says Bettoni. This is another way in which Pozzoli is set apart; according to Bettoni, Italy is virtually in last place when it comes to European countries and how many patents are registered there.

Patents might be a sore point, as a German court recently dismissed an action brought by Pozzoli against a company in that country. The issue there was the use of a multi-disc concept of overlapping carriers that Pozzoli viewed as too similar to its own Twintray. Not so, says Bettoni. "We believe in patents even if they are not always upheld in the courts, though it is strange that a patent office in one country can register a patent

but a judge in the same country does not recognise it."

Pozzoli will continue to develop new ideas and register them, he says. "For some customers it is important. The patent itself may not be that vital but it makes the vendor seem more solid and reliable that they have gone through the legal processes of registering patents."

In any case, he adds candidly, the dismissal of the action appeared to make no difference. "We saw no decrease in sales, which shows that people like our product. It is not just us, it is the market that decides these issues. Last year we sold over 100 million Twintrays."

Pozzoli has not missed the opportunity to use its Italian flair on hi-def packaging, with cases for both HD DVD and Blu-ray Disc. These went through a huge number of

configurations that involved a great deal of customer feedback. The final product features rounded corners and a distinctive egg-shaped disc holder with the Pozzoli Push Tray.

Looking ahead

What Pozzoli sees as setting it apart are creativity and quality – along with speedy responses to clients. Moving into 2008, says Bettoni, the company plans to utilise its full replication capacity as well as its packaging capabilities, and increase its presence in the DVD sector. Pozzoli will also continue to grow its core business of special packaging while getting out the message that the company can do more. Communication is also important, and while this may not have appeared to be the highest priority in the past, Pozzoli's plan is definitely to up its profile in the industry.●

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