



BY ANDREW JOSEPH, FEATURES EDITOR

# Pulling the Strings

Ontario bagmaker betting on a bright future for the Old World packaging mainstay

For the long-time global packaging industry veteran Günther Huettlin, the best packaging ideas come with strings attached. And as far as the well-travelled founder and owner of Belleville, Ont.-based drawstring bags producer **GH Günther Huettlin Manufacturing Inc.** is concerned, it's just a matter of time before the North American packaging industry starts seeing things his way.

"There are up to 20 million drawstring bags, made in various sizes and decorated with high-tech print, being converted every year in our Belleville plant already," says Huettlin. "It is strange to me that in the North American market, the use of drawstring packaging is still minimal, whereas over in Europe, the drawstring package is a real phenomenon."

Back in the year 2000, Huettlin decided to use his vast, 40-years-plus of experience in the printing and packaging industries to launch the Belleville operation as a co-packer and third-party manufacturer for various packaged consumer goods companies—most notably **Procter & Gamble's** beauty-products business.

Along the way, the up-and-coming company developed a relatively rare in-house expertise in the drawstring-bag packaging format, which Huettlin believes has a promising future in the virtually untapped North American marketplace.

## NICHE OPPORTUNITY

"The drawstring bags could be a nice niche market in North America," Huettlin told *Canadian Packaging* on a recent visit to the 70,000-square-foot Belleville facility, which also houses a 40,000-square-foot warehouse. "Definitely, the market is currently behind in comparison to Europe, where drawstring bags are popular for hygienic products such as cotton balls and make-up pads ... and they are being increasingly used in the fresh baked-goods industry."

"In Switzerland, a country with a population of just over seven million, the two leading retailers buy over three million drawstring bags per month for fresh in-store baked products," states Huettlin, also the owner of a German-based company, just north of Munich, specializing in the manufacture of polyethylene gloves inserted inside packages of hair-coloring solutions—annually producing up to 60 million pairs.

"Needless to say, we hope that the market in North America can be strongly developed in several directions," says Huettlin, "offering consumers a convenient packaging solution."

One of GH Manufacturing's major clients, Elmwood Park, N.J.-based paper napkins producer **Marcal Paper Mills, Inc.**, is reportedly a very satisfied end-user of the so-called *Draw and Store* bags made at the Belleville plant, featuring the convenient drawstring resealing feature that helps consumers keep their storage cabinets neat and tidy.



A roll of pre-printed polyethylene film is fed through a Hettler Maschinen FK2000 machine to produce drawstring bags for the U.S.-based paper-napkins manufacturer Marcal Paper Mills.



Upscale European beauty products currently using drawstring bags.

The reusable napkin bags are made in four sizes—with respective holding capacity of 180, 250, 400 and 1,000 individual napkins—on the recently-installed, fully-automatic **FK2000** line supplied by German machinery manufacturer **Hettler Maschinen GmbH**.

In operation, this machine unspools rolls of polyethylene film and then splits and gus-

sets the plastic wrap before welding the cuff area, where the strings are inserted and quickly knotted together, at speeds of up to 90 bags per minute.

Huettlin points out that the reclosable drawstring bag facilitates very hygienic storage of the unused product, and it easily lends itself to be reused for various household chores, such as collecting laundry.

Employing 38 full-time workers, the Belleville facility—sitting on 36 acres of fenced-in private property—manufactures the drawstring bags on a two-shift, five-days-a-week schedule. Because the plant's co-packing business fluctuates widely throughout the year, GH Manufacturing often hires up to 60 additional temporary workers during peak production.

## QUALITY OUTPUT

The plant's logistics and distribution operations are greatly enhanced with the solely-owned, on-site **Canadian National** rail connection, according to Huettlin, as well as a 50,000-square-foot secured concrete pad serving as a trailer parking lot.

"Quality and efficiency are very important to GH Manufacturing," asserts Huettlin. "Our facility and co-packing operation are regularly audited by P&G, and on our last audit, in October of 2005, we scored 93 per cent."

"Our quality assurance system is very well-accepted by most companies, and we believe it to be at least on the same level as the ISO standards," Huettlin says, adding that the plant is also registered for full compliance with the **U.S.FDA (Food and Drug Administration)** guidelines and the widely-

embraced *GMP (Good Manufacturing Practices)* protocol.

"We do a lot of contract packaging for femcare (feminine care) and beauty supplies, with P&G being our main customer for contract packaging," Huettlin relates.

To keep the contract packaging side of its business growing, GH Manufacturing has carried out extensive equipment installations at the Belleville facility, including:

- **Optima Machinery Corporation's** semi-automatic **Bagstar** bag-sealing machine, which folds, seals and trims excess plastic from the manually-loaded polyethylene bags of napkins;
- The **MBB2** case-sealer from Oshawa, Ont.-based **Dependable Marking Systems Ltd.**, used for taping shut corrugated boxes packed with bags coming off the *Bagstar* machine;
- Two **MPS 6110** ribbon bag-sealers from Toronto-based **Emplex Systems Inc.**, which produce continuous hermetic seals on the bags using etched *Teflon* bands;
- A fully-automatic, German-made **Kalfass Universa 400 Standard** shrinkwrapping machine, supplied by Montreal-based **Doverco Inc.**, as well



Belleville plant workers pack the Always brand of femcare products with MPS 6110 ribbon bag-sealers.

as the **Carrera 500M** flowwrapping machine from **Ilapak, Inc.**

"Over the past five years, we gained much experience in many contract packaging applications, including DRPs (display-ready pallets), sample packaging, club-packs, shrinkwrapping, flowwrapping, repackaging, labeling and product assembly," sums up Huettlin, adding he is now looking for a North American supplier of high-quality printed film comparable in quality, service and price to the company's current, European-based supplier. □

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