

GENERAL PRINTERS LTD. (GPL)

THE PERFECT PACKAGE



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Managing director, Ketul Tanna, reveals the secret behind GPL's success within the FMGC sector and its plans for imminent expansion across Africa

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When considering the extraordinary level of social and economic growth that has occurred in Africa over the last ten years it is easy to forget that for decades it suffered from being seen as little more than a poor continent that could only be sustained by the giving of aid. Today the complexion of Africa has changed dramatically thanks to considerable local and international investment.

Founded in 1967, General Printers Ltd (GPL) has witnessed first-hand the evolution of the continent. Boasting three generations of experience and expertise as a family operated printing company in Nairobi, Kenya, GPL has grown to become the leading player in flexible packaging within the Eastern and Central African regions.

“Having established ourselves in these regions,” explains managing director, Ketul Tanna, “we are now focused on becoming much more of a complete African player, an aim we have fully embraced with our new motto of being ‘Africa’s Packaging Professionals’.

It was in the mid-1970s that GPL first began exploring the emerging area of flexible packaging, leading the company to create the world’s first flexible packaging production run on a UV offset web machine in 1978. In 1994, the company made the decision to focus exclusively on gravure printed flexible packaging, a decision that laid the foundations for its position today as a leading provider of cutting edge flexible packaging solutions.

As it looks to cement itself across the continent GPL is focusing its attention on





Five layer extrusion machine in operation

\$5 MILLION

Investment being made towards the building of Africa's first solvent-recovery plant

the core markets of West Africa, Egypt, East Africa and South Africa. “When you join these four regions up they form something of a ‘Y’ axis,” Tanna continues. “Within this axis are the parts of Africa that both ourselves and our multi-national partners see as being the major areas of expansion and growth in the years ahead, and naturally we want to capitalise on that.”

When he is asked about the evolution of GPL from those early, humble days in the late 1960s to its present day position as a market leader Tanna is certain of what it is that has led the company to where it is now in 2013. “Perhaps the biggest contributing factor to our success has been our constant dedication to what we call our ‘Four Ps’: Pride, Professionalism, Performance and Passion. These qualities are central to our corporate culture and form an ethos that runs through our company having been handed down from generation to generation.”

Based in Nairobi’s Industrial Area, GPL’s facility possesses state of the art machinery with a capacity of 10,000 tonnes per annum, which allows it to provide quality, cost-effective packaging solutions that its customers require on a mass scale.



Online quality checks fresh off the press

“Throughout our history,” Tanna highlights, “we have strived to invest in cutting-edge, innovative technology and have shown on numerous occasions that we are not shy when it comes to making bold investments and bringing new ideas to market. Indeed those traits have helped to shape our corporate identity, to separate GPL from its competitors and to create efficient, cost-effective solutions to cater for our clients’ needs.”

GPL’s dedication to innovation continues to this day, with the company currently investing approximately \$5 million in what is the first

solvent-recovery plant of its kind in Africa, the Middle East and Asia. A core part of GPL’s desire to be 100 percent environmentally conscious, the plant allows it to recover and recycle some 98 percent of the solvents used in the printing and laminating process. In addition to immensely reducing the company’s environmental impact this investment is also set to translate into significant cost savings for the business.

As Tanna enthuses, this attitude towards the environment also extends into the company’s corporate social responsibility work. “Our family has been in Kenya now

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Pouching machine in operation

for over 100 years and to celebrate such a milestone we decided to build a school where our forefathers first settled in Western Kenya. The school was built in 2008 and subsequently handed over to the local community at no cost to them whatsoever, and it remains open to this day. We also carried out a similar school building project in India where our forefathers originated from.”

With the company very much embedded within the community in which it operates, and indeed throughout Africa, Tanna’s thoughts are understandably drawn towards what the future holds for GPL. “Consistent GDP growth continues to occur across Africa and one of the consequences of this is that consumers are becoming much more conscious of what they purchase. They are becoming more drawn to attractive, differential packaging and this is helping to spur further growth in the FMGC sector as manufacturers embrace new innovative ideas.”

The investment that GPL has made over the years in new technology and innovation has already begun to bear fruit, with the company now expanding its capacity by some 45 percent in order to meet the demands of its existing customers within the region and its existing export clients.

With its immediate focus revolving around achieving growth in the aforementioned



Fully robotic cylinder engraving plant

African ‘Y’ axis, while of course retaining the core ethos that has defined GPL since day one, Tanna is well aware of what the company’s biggest asset always has and always will be. “Without a doubt it is our people, without whom we couldn’t have achieved all we have as a business. We dedicate a great deal of time towards training our employees and motivating them to be leaner and meaner, and more efficient. This has allowed our business to grow in the way that it has, which in turn allows them to grow as individuals by being part of a company that is entering a very exciting time in its history.” **BE**

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