

# Hartness developing greener packaging solutions

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**H**artness International may redefine the conventional look of a six pack of beer, replacing the rectangular cardboard box with a perforated shrink wrap to reduce packaging materials.

The 70-year-old Greenville company also developed a process to use UV-based inks for paperless labels on bottles. Both products are designed to fuel growth in the environmentally friendly, sustainable packaging business.

"We think we've got some game-changing opportunities that we're trying to commercialize right now," said Scott Smith, director of global market development and emerging businesses for Hartness.

The company's R&D efforts haven't missed a beat since the 70-year-old Greenville company was acquired last year by Illinois Tool Works Inc., an international company with revenues topping \$17 billion. If anything, the acquisition brought more opportunities to Hartness. ITW has 895 business units in 54 countries and employs some 59,000 people.

"One thing that the ITW acquisition does is it gives us access to capital," Smith said.

It also gives Hartness an opportunity to manufacture products in Greenville for some of ITW's other companies.

"When it makes sense to build things here, we will do so," said Hartness President Bern McPheely, declining to be more specific.

"We see ourselves growing significantly in the next five years," he said.

What that means for employment, McPheely wouldn't speculate. The company currently employs about 500.

Hartness is now part of a large corporate family with a diverse product mix and a stream of potential partnerships, McPheely said.

"ITW owns 800 companies. Almost 50% of those companies are overseas, so they're helping with our sales and marketing there," he said. "We have more capabilities now within our family that we didn't have before."

ITW, for example, recently acquired a warehouse automation company in Asheville, N.C. called Vertique, a company that represents a growing business segment for Hartness. The two companies will partner.

Hartness does not manufacture packaging. Hartness develops the processes and builds the machines that companies use for that work. Hartness integrates the



*Hartness International President Bern McPheely says operations haven't changed since the once family-owned company was bought by Illinois Tool Works last year. (Photo/Scott Miller)*

entire process for its clients: bottle filling, labeling, capping, inspecting, moving and storing via conveyor belt, shrink wrapping, casing, palletizing, packaging and more. About 85% of the parts to Hartness machines are made in-house, Smith said.

Clients include Coca-Cola, Anheuser-Busch, Gallo Wines, Proctor & Gamble, Nestle and other well-known names. Smith estimated that 40 of the items in your refrigerator were packaged by Hartness equipment.

"We spend a lot of money on R&D," Smith said. "Being a market-drive company, we're always looking for the next thing."

The next thing is environmentally friendly packaging, he said, and the UV-based inks represent a big step toward that.

Unlike applied ceramic labeling commonly used now, these UV-based inks do not spend days cooking in a furnace. The ink is treated instantly by ultraviolet light instead of heat, and it burns off during the recycling process so bottles of many colors can be recycled in the same batch.

Additionally, the use of ink allows companies to manufacture bottles of different colors instantly, McPheely said. Previously, bottle makers had to run a color for five days, 24 hours a day and much of the glass had to be discarded when colors were switched in the manufacturing process, he said.

"We can change (colors) in 20 seconds now," McPheely said.

The UV-based product reduces energy consumption on paperless labeling by as much as 90%, McPheely said. Thomas Creek Brewing Co. of Greenville was the first to use the product on its Up the Creek Extreme IPA high-gravity beer, he said.

"People have been trying to do this for 15 years," McPheely said. ☞