

Small print runs
make HIP the go-to
company for custom
labels and tags.

On-Demand Printing

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Sometimes business is just about going with your gut. Horticultural Identification Products (HIP), a two-year-old company, is an offshoot from L&E Packaging, a tag and label business in the clothing industry. In 2000, when Congress eliminated the barriers that limited imported clothing, L&E looked for another market to expand into. Bob Lovejoy, a 20-year industry veteran, suggested horticulture and L&E took its first steps into the plant business.

Three years ago, L&E was sold to Avery Dennison, which didn't want to go into the horticulture business, so Lovejoy acquired the assets of that portion of the company.

"We're taking known technologies, quantities and ideas and applying them to the horticulture market," Lovejoy says.

Today, HIP, Thomasville, N.C., is a design and printing service for the tag and label business with an equipment mix capable of producing both large and small runs economically and quickly.

The ability to print labels and tags in short runs, and the customization that those small numbers allow, is something the horticulture business has been lacking, according to Lovejoy. Customization is the name of the game for HIP. With production runs as small as a few hundred tags or labels, growers have used HIP materials to co-brand products with their retailers. A familiar name, either in a brand or a garden center, makes a loyal customer.

"That's why most people go to independent garden centers," he says. "They trust



Pot wraps are now available with a die-cut index card.

who they're dealing with and they like the selection. Many progressive growers understand that independent garden centers want to promote their name. That's what's important to their customers."

"Complementing the garden center's name with another name is attractive," he adds. "And you can't do that unless you can handle smaller runs of products."

Product Mix

HIP pot wraps are custom-designed and custom-fit to pots from quart to 3-gallon size. They spruce up nursery pots and, as they are applied at the time of shipment from the grower, are just-in-time solutions for co-branding at retail. The wraps, made of synthetic papers that stand up to the weather, can be printed on the front and back at the same time and can hold more informa-

tion than the average hang tag.

A new feature the pot covers sported at the MANTS show in Baltimore included a diecut removable index card, giving the consumer something to hold onto even after a plant has been placed in a garden. They will be customizable to any shape.

Another product that is turning retailers' heads are lenticular images – images that "move" depending on the angle you look at them. At the moment, lenticular images are too cost-prohibitive to be used as hang tags but are cost effective when used as postcards. They catch the eye, and as on the HIP Web site, can show customers a new variety blooming virtually. "It's a unique way to get someone's attention," Lovejoy says.

With these and other new products on the horizon, HIP is looking into a bright

future. It has entered a relationship with an international horticultural photography company with a library of 100,000 variety-specific images and a staff of horticultural photographers. HIP also is beginning work with a new digital printing press, which requires no set up and can cost-effectively print individual, small signs for a customer.

"We've had a wonderful reception," Lovejoy says.

"Our customers are happy with vendors that bring them fresh ideas, a different way of looking at the business." TGC



For More Information:

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