



A SUCCESSFUL MERGER

Bimo Italia SpA, a manufacture of polypropylene film for flexible packaging, is today a part of the world-renowned Irplast group. Barbara Rossi talks to marketing director Mr Pierse and managing director Mr Cosi to find out more about the company.



The merger between Bimo Italia SpA and Irplast took place in February 2011 – although previously Bimo Italia had already been a 100 per cent subsidiary of Irplast. After the merger it became a fully autonomous business unit (Bimo BOPP Division).

Bimo BOPP manufactures polypropylene (PP) film for flexible packaging and technical applications at its two production sites in Atessa, in the Italian region of Abruzzo. Irplast, on the other hand, operates from Empoli, near Florence, where it manufactures self-adhesive tapes, labels, sleeves and tamper-evident devices.

The objective of the merger was to create a synergy of services and staff between the two entities in order to increase their effectiveness. This was followed by a restructuring process with the banks, including debt restructuring, favourable interest rates and further lines of credit, which has also strengthened the group.

In fact, based on the results of the first quarter of this year, the group is expecting a 2011 turnover growth of 30 per cent compared to last year. For 2011 Irplast is forecasting a turnover of €130 million, of which €85 million will be derived from the Bimo BOPP division.

Core products

Bimo manufactures film and roll fed labels for the food and beverage sectors as well as film for adhesive tapes. The latter products are for both internal use (Irplast then transforms this film into printed adhesive tapes) and for external sales. In addition to this, the division is also active in supplying the tobacco industry. The business in this latter sector has grown continuously over the past ten years and Bimo has recently patented a very low heat sealing film, for the application of Clear Overwrap, suitable for the high-speed packaging of cigarette packs. In this field Bimo directly supplies tobacco multinationals.

The Bimo division has three stretching lines, of which two employ traditional sequential orientation, while the third uses unique SOL (simultaneous orientation line) technology. The new products discussed earlier belong to the first two lines, while the third line manufactures special products for the tobacco industry and retractable labels. However, the R&D department is currently working on developing new SOL technology-based products for other sectors, whose needs could be fulfilled by the mechanical and optical characteristics obtainable through SOL technology. ▷



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From an environmental viewpoint, the company is actively engaged in lowering its energy and water consumption and in creating lighter packaging. Over the past three years it has taken concrete steps to reuse its film production waste using a plant constructed by its own technicians.

Restructuring

The Bimo film division has been developing its flexible packaging range, after a period of crisis in 2009 when the industry had seen a reduction in overall film production. The recovery process started in 2010 when the company's polypropylene volume production reached 34,000 tonnes and, judging by the results of the first quarter of 2011, this year the company hopes to return to full production capacity at 40,000 tonnes.

This has also been possible thanks to the above-mentioned restructuring process, which has re-established the company's position on the European flexible packaging market (achieved thanks to Bimo's long history, reputation and the high quality and reliability of its products) and a new commercial network. This new organisation means that Bimo can now directly and indirectly supply large clients, such as multinationals. It holds various certifications, such as AIB (American Institute of Bakers), BRC (British Retail Council), ISO 9001 and ISO 14001. The company has deliberately chosen to operate in a niche market so as to differentiate itself from companies in emerging markets in terms of product quality and service.

Expanding the range

In the past 12 months Bimo has developed several new products in order to complete its range. The first family of Low SIT products is suited to high-speed packaging machines, such as for the bakery industry, thanks

to its low-heat sealing, transparent and metallised versions. The second is an anti-fog film to be used for fruit and vegetable packaging. Also, after 10 years, Bimo has successfully reintroduced the production of white coextruded film.

The increase in production volumes over the past year has been possible thanks to the introduction of these new products, as well as to the new commercial network which has allowed it to provide clients with a bespoke service. Bimo supplies its products to printers and converters who now have an additional technical and commercial service at their disposal. In fact, they can now be assisted by Bimo engineers to in the development of customised products through their own R&D facilities.

Global supplier

About 70 per cent of Bimo's production is for export, with distribution divided fairly equally among the five main markets: France, Spain, Germany, UK and Benelux. Tobacco packaging materials mainly go to Europe (including eastern Europe) but also reach the South American and Asian markets.

The products it manufactures directly for Irplast are mainly used for its adhesive labels, sleeves, anti-tampering devices and tapes to be sold to large beverage, food and cosmetic manufacturers. Irplast is aiming to expand its production of labels and related accessories, and take full advantage of existing patents through improved collaboration with supply chain partners. Its newly organised internal R&D department is working on further developing its anti-tampering devices for packaging, envelopes, food and medicines. The division is planning to increase volumes through organic expansion, consolidating its position in Europe. □

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