



# SCREW CAPS FOR WINE

The Bulgarian company Herti JSC manufactures aluminium, plastic and composite closures. Joseph Altham interviewed Zahari Zahariev, Herti's CEO, to find out about Herti's efforts to promote the aluminium screw cap for wine bottles.



**B**ack in 1993, when Herti was established, the company produced only one type of closure. Year by year, as the business grew, Herti added to its range and now offers more than 40 different dimensions of closures. "The aluminium closures are used mainly for spirits and wine," said Mr Zahariev.

Packaging products for alcoholic beverages account for the majority of Herti's revenue, but Herti also makes closures for soft drinks and for the pharmaceutical industry. The headquarters of the company are in the Bulgarian city of Shoumen. Herti's factory is situated nearby in the town of Pliska, 80km from the port of Varna on the Black Sea.

"We have a very good position from a logistics point of view," said Mr Zahariev. Herti's factory in Pliska measures 12,000m<sup>2</sup> in area, and the company continually invests in upgrading its equipment. "In 2007 we invested more than €2 million in new machines," said Mr Zahariev, "and increased the capacity for extra long aluminium closures."

## Composite closures

As well as the aluminium and plastic closures, Herti also offers composite closures – made of both metal and plastic. Mr Zahariev explained that composite closures allow for decorative designs. At the same time they offer Herti's clients extra security benefits, making it hard for counterfeiters to fill a bottle with illegal alcohol.

Vodka producers especially value the decorative possibilities of these composite closures, and the company has recently added to its composite closure range. The Polaris composite closure, an original and refined design, is available in three different sizes: 30mm by 44mm; 30mm by 60mm and 31.5mm by 60mm. Mr Zahariev said that the Polaris closure will be on show in May at the interpack exhibition in Düsseldorf.

## Wine

Herti's closures are widely used by vodka producers. The variety of sizes, shapes and printing possibilities helps vodka manufacturers to create attractive packaging for their many different brands. Herti built up a strong presence in Russia in the 1990s, and in terms of geography Russia is still Herti's single largest market, representing 25 per cent of overall sales. However, the company's aluminium and composite closures are now attracting increasing custom in the European Union.

"Eighty-five per cent of our production is exported," said Mr Zahariev. "The main segment that contributes to the growth of Herti's revenue is aluminium closures for the wine industry." Screw caps, as whisky drinkers know, have been used for spirits for many years. However, it is only in the last decade that aluminium screw caps have started to be widely used for bottles of wine. With screw caps, the consumer can avoid the risks of cork taint or premature oxidation associated with the traditional >



Machine for cutting the liners from coil and inserting them into aluminium or plastic caps.

Optional: vision system for quality inspection.

Output: 8 - 36.000 pcs/hr according to the number of punches

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cork. Within the EU, France and the UK are Herti's main markets. More recently, it has been building up a presence in Germany, driven by the export of closures for wine. As a result, the German market already represents 4.14 per cent of Herti's sales.

### Subsidiaries

Three subsidiaries help Herti sell to its most important markets within the EU. The company has had a base in Romania since 2000, and in 2007 it established subsidiaries in the UK and France. "We still have room to grow through our daughter companies," said Mr Zahariev. 2007 was the year that Bulgaria joined the EU, which Mr Zahariev said has opened up new opportunities for Herti in western Europe. Herti UK operates from warehouses in Liverpool and Bradford, and its aluminium screw caps for wine bottles are sold to major UK retailers.

The office of Herti France is strategically located in the wine-producing Rhône region. The trend for screw caps began with wine from Australia and New Zealand, but in the past few years screw caps have started to become more accepted by French wine producers as well. Showing at exhibitions is helping Herti to win the French over. Last year, Herti took part in the Vinitech exhibition in Bordeaux, and this year its products will be on show in Montpellier. The demand for aluminium closures for wine is growing, and Mr Zahariev said that Herti intends to expand its production capacity over the next two years.

### Quality

It takes time and effort for a Bulgarian company to win the trust of customers in Britain and France. One thing that helped Herti to achieve this, said Mr Zahariev, is the company's consistent reliability and its ability

to deliver on time. The screw caps have to be produced to the highest standards, and Herti's customers have the reassurance that its quality management system is certified to ISO 9001.

In addition, Herti has obtained British Retail Consortium and Institute of Packaging (BRC/IoP) certification for its metal and plastic closures. The ability to deal with a company that has BRC/ IoP certification makes the auditing process simpler, so certification has enabled Herti to realise new opportunities in the UK market. Above all, Herti's closures must support the customer's brand. "The most important priorities," says Mr Zahariev, "are the quality of our products and the satisfaction of our customers." □

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