

Words **Simon Creasey**

ME & MY...

Boomerang Boomer 6

This Korean-built folder-gluer has helped Lexon cut out costly and time-consuming processes and support its web-to-pack platform

Since it was founded, 50 or so years ago Newport-based Lexon Group has continuously evolved its business offer. The company started out providing vinyl tax disc holders to the motor industry in addition to key fobs.

"It was really a small family operation that was hot foiling key fobs and producing these various vinyl type interior stickers for the inside of car windscreens and it just grew and grew," explains Dominic Hartley, the company's commercial director. "Then it became a silkscreen printer and a litho printer and over the last 50 years it's developed into a £6m-turnover, 60-odd staff, print, point-of-sale, packaging and large-format organisation. So it's really a jack of all trades."

Lexon's expansion into other print sectors wasn't a deliberate strategy, it simply grew organically off the back of customer demand. "Customers were getting a decent service having their vinyls printed and then they would say: 'while you're at it can you do some leaflets' and then it was 'can you do roll-up banners for an exhibition for us' and it just kept growing from there."

One sector Lexon has branched out into in more recent years is packaging. Hartley says the company was producing point-of-sale work for a brewery client and one day the brewery asked if Lexon could produce some decorative cartons for them to put glasses in. So the company started producing cartons, putting the glasses inside and shipping them directly into supermarkets for the brewer who was so impressed with the results it became a repeat order for Lexon – Hartley says he has a warehouse full of glasses at the moment.

It was this order that launched the business into the packaging sector and it began churning out cartonboard and folding boxboard work for other clients. In the early days the company would print the cartons, die-cut or laser-cut them and then the items would be hand glued or pushed through a couple of old

Moll folder-gluer machines that Lexon invested in a few years back.

But due to the continued growth in orders for packs Hartley realised this approach was no longer sustainable, nor was sending work out to be finished elsewhere, which was costly, time-consuming and also the company had less control over quality. Lexon was also gearing up to develop a 'web-to-pack' online carton portal to capitalise on growing demand.

"Potential clients will be able to choose a type of carton, put the dimensions in and order it online, but to offer that sort of facility you need to be able to offer every type of carton gluing and we were a bit limited with the Moll in what we could do," says Hartley. "So we realised that we needed to really boost our folder-gluer department, but we haven't got a lot of space in our factory. We've got an extension on an extension on an extension and footprint was a big thing for us."

This presented a significant problem because folder-gluer machines are renowned for being sizeable. "Every folder-gluer out there is massive – they're nine metres long or more and we just didn't have that room. In

"We can keep everything in-house, which is cheaper, it gives us better control and it's better for the environment" **Dominic Hartley**

addition, we would basically need somebody loading the machine at one end and one or two people packing at the other end."

Hartley says Lexon looked at the specs for a number of folder-gluer machines from the leading manufacturers and quickly realised they would not fit in the factory. At this point he says the company was "resigned" to sticking with the Molls and potentially upgrading to a newer model as "they don't have massive footprints", but then Hartley stumbled across a machine with an intriguing name.

"We heard about the Boomerang Boomer folder-gluer and iPack Solutions [the UK distributor for the machine] arranged for us to go and look at one in action at a company north of

Newport-based Lexon Group was founded around 50 years ago and started off primarily serving the automotive industry with vinyl stickers and key fobs. However, today the company provides a wide range of printed collateral – from point-of-sale through to packaging – to a variety of different customers from its factory, where it employs more than 60 people.

Lexon runs a Komori Impremia IS29 B2 LED UV sheetfed inkjet press – it was the first of its kind in Europe when it was installed in 2017 – and a Highcon Eudid III laser cutting and creasing system. It also has conventional B2 presses, screen printing equipment, and a range of other small- and large-format digital equipment. The firm generates annual sales of around £6m and intends to launch a web-to-pack online portal in the new year to further grow its packaging offer.

Why it was bought...

The company was outsourcing some packaging work or doing it by hand, which was time-consuming and costly. As it was gearing up to launch a new web-to-pack online portal it knew that it needed a new folder gluer so all of this work could be done in-house.

How has it performed...

Dominic Hartley, the company's commercial director says the Boomerang "does what it says on the tin – we've been really impressed by it".

London. We spent a couple of hours watching the machine run and talking to the operators and it was great."

He says that ironically the company had installed the Korean made folder-gluer next to an old Moll that they had upgraded from and had never used again "so it was a nice indication of what would probably happen to us," adds Hartley.

In addition to its speed, quality and ease of use, another key attraction was the machine's small footprint – it is essentially shaped like a Boomerang, hence the name. "The flat sheets go down one side and then it returns to you. So one operator is able to load the machine and pack," says Hartley.

Lexon has configured its £150,000 device with an additional three-line hot gluing system and took delivery of the machine, which was shipped from Korea, in June this year after a slight delivery delay due to the blockage on the Suez Canal caused by the Ever Given container ship. Besides the delivery hitch Hartley says installation was a "piece of cake" and after some initial training the company was fully up and running on it in a couple of days. "The operators that were put on it were used to folder-gluing thanks to the Moll so it wasn't as if they were completely blind," he says, adding "iPack have been amazing throughout."

Hartley says that the only teething problem the company encountered with the machine



SPECIFICATIONS

Speed 20–250 metres per minute

Carton material 200–800gsm

Footprint 6.9x1.2m

Cost £150,000 (for the specification chosen by Lexon, with the additional three-line hot gluing system)

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surrounded the glue they used for the very first job on the Boomerang. “We used the same glue that we use on the Moll and it either set too quickly or didn’t set fast enough and it wasn’t quite right. So we rang up [iPack] and got some advice and they told us to use a different glue and it’s been gluing perfect ever since. We’ve gone from the smallest carton we can produce to the largest carton, and we’ve gone from the thinnest stock to corrugated, and so far it’s done them all – nothing has beaten us yet... touch wood. It’s only been a few months, but

we haven’t had any breaks and nothing has gone faulty.”

The company has retained its old Moll machines and still uses them as one is set up to do a specific regular folding job and the other Moll is being used to do envelope gluing – another area Lexon has branched out into.

Meanwhile, the Boomerang is kept busy doing a wide range of jobs on a daily basis – from seed boxes made from corrugated board through to cosmetic cartons. When the new web-to-pack business launches Hartley envisages the machine running around the clock producing packaging and if there is ever any down time he thinks there are other jobs that could be done on the Boomerang.

“If we needed to crease 60,000, six page, A5s on 400 gram we’d never be able to put it into a folder, so we would need to crease them and then hand fold them. But we can run the job with this folder-gluer – with obviously no glue – and just use it as a folder.”

HARTLEY

“Nothing has beaten us yet... touch wood”

The versatility of the Boomerang is just one of the numerous benefits Hartley says it offers the business. “Previously we were outsourcing some carton work to different parts of the country and if we had a very large glueing job we would outsource that as well, but now we don’t need to outsource anything. We can keep everything in-house, which is cheaper, it gives us better control and it’s better for the environment.”

That’s why he wouldn’t hesitate to recommend the machine to anyone considering buying a Boomerang. “There’s no question about that,” says Hartley. “We’re only a few months in, but it’s built solidly, we have had no issues with it and it does what it says on the tin, so I would definitely recommend it to other people.” **P**