

PRESS RELEASE

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St. Gallen, 29 May 2008

How Steinemann Technology invented UV varnishing in print and media production almost 35 years ago

The first prototype of a machine for the UV varnishing of print products was developed jointly by Steinemann Technology and Hamilton (UK) Ltd. in 1974 / The finishing of record covers marked the birth of today's growth market of high-end print finishing.

The Steinemann Technology company of St. Gallen/Switzerland was the world's leading manufacturer of sanding systems for the panel industry and painting lines for the furniture industry when, in 1974, a customer from Great Britain approached the company with a special request: he wanted to be able to finish record sleeves with UV varnish for his customers – record companies like DECCA. That was the origin of the fascinating growth market of high-end print finishing, in which the subsequently established Graphic Division of Steinemann Technology is still the world market leader today with its high-performance systems.

"In early 1974, our customer Tinsley Robor Ltd. asked us whether we could supply them with a machine for 'coating' cardboard materials with UV varnish, like the ones used for wood panels. Just two or three days later, we presented them with the prototype of a corresponding machine that we and the experts of the Steinemann Technology company from Switzerland had promptly developed in our workshop on the basis of our common, long-standing expertise in UV varnishing in the wood industry," recalls Ian Hamilton of Hamilton (UK) Ltd. – based in Maidenhead/England and Steinemann Technology's agent for the UK and Ireland at the time. The British chemical company Macpherson, in turn, developed a special acrylic varnish specifically for this application as a substitute for the polyester varnish customarily used for wood.

The innovative machine was ultimately named the UVIMAT-126 and shipped to Tinsley Robor just a short time later. In the course of the following years, it applied UV varnish to countless covers for the records of leading pop and rock stars, such as the Beatles or the Rolling Stones. Today, those covers are prized as precious rarities in record collections around the world. Within a month, the second UVIMAT from Steinemann Technology was delivered to another British company, Garrod & Lofthouse, where it likewise varnished record covers. In those days, Tinsley Robor and Garrod & Lofthouse produced an estimated 70% of all the record covers manufactured in the UK. The new UVIMAT machines brought about some radical changes – after all, both companies were able to cut their costs by roughly 50% compared to the previously customary laminating of record covers, while at the same time boosting the production speed almost tenfold.

"So, UV varnishing in the graphic arts and media industry first saw the light of day in the British record industry," says Hamilton, looking back – although neither he nor his partners at Steinemann Technology in Switzerland could possibly have guessed at that time just what fascinating developments their invention would see in the decades to come.

"The decisive challenge was first of all to cut the level of varnish application customary in the wood-processing industry at the time to about 4 to 6 g/m². In addition, the machine had to be capable of reliably processing cardboard materials with weights upwards of 200 g/m²," says Ernst Sturzenegger, outlining the crucial aspects of the development work. At that time, he was actively involved in the pioneering efforts at Steinemann Technology as a mechanical engineer. "And finally, the machine had to guarantee high productivity." This, in turn, was initially achieved by means of a 'double stream concept', which permitted production capacities in the region of 15,000 sheets per hour. These performance features of the UVIMAT were nothing less than revolutionary in those days.

Since that time, the Graphic Division of Steinemann Technology, which was ultimately established in 1976, has focused entirely on constantly improving the technology for UV varnishing of print products, patenting a host of trend-

setting technical innovations. As a result, it is to this day the undisputed technological and market leader in high-end print finishing.

Hamilton: "The next milestone was the invention of the 'Air Knife', which was patented in the late 70s and enabled gripper-free processing of thin substrates for the first time. It used air pressure to prevent the sheets from sticking to the varnishing roller during varnishing – and that was a major technical challenge in those days." The COLIBRI varnishing machine finally came onto the market as the successor to the UVIMAT in 1991. And with the HIBIS 104 high-speed rotary screen and flexo printing machine – the flagship in the portfolio of UV varnishing systems from Steinemann Technology – the Swiss company today has not only the constantly improved COLIBRI, but additionally the most powerful and innovative system for high-end finishing in the graphic arts and media industry. "Since our first UVIMAT, we've seen some truly fascinating developments in this market that we would certainly never have dreamed of at the time," sums up Hamilton who, for reasons of age, will be giving up his agency for Steinemann Technology at drupa and going into retirement. At the same time, the agency will be transferred to M-Partners Ltd. of Hackbridge, Surrey, who already took up their activities in parallel a few months ago.

About Steinemann Technology AG

Made in Switzerland, successful worldwide. Steinemann Technology AG is an innovative, globally operating company with headquarters in St. Gallen, Switzerland, and subsidiaries in China, Malaysia, Brazil and the USA. With its varnishing and laminating machines for the graphic arts industry, the Graphic Division of Steinemann Technology is known worldwide as a leading manufacturer of systems and solutions for the print finishing industry. In addition, the Steinemann Sanding Division with its innovative sanding systems is the worldwide market leader in the panel industry. In these exciting markets, the leader in technology offers its customers technically and economically groundbreaking systems, solutions and services – from machines for maximum productivity, all the way to reliable maintenance and spare parts services.

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