

New Opportunities

Markem-Imaje is capitalising on its expertise in coding and marking while finding new chances to grow and expand within the printing industry.

Images by Didier Jordan

Having spent most of his professional career with Hewlett-Packard in many different positions and countries, Vincent Vanderpoel was recruited by Dover Corporation to become CEO for Markem-Imaje in late 2013. Vincent was drawn by the chance to head up and take ultimate responsibility for an organisation. “One of the things that attracted me to Markem-Imaje was that there were a lot of similarities with what I was doing at HP, the biggest one being that it is a business that has a large component aftermarket business and services for consumables.

“Also, the nature of the company suited me personally very well; it has a very similar code of conduct, respect for people, and there’s a great emphasis on accountability, which comes with being a publicly listed company. There’s also a great emphasis on being a good corporate citizen, which attracted me a lot. And

the last thing is the multinational nature of the company; we’re present in 32 countries and I’ve always enjoyed working in a multicultural and multinational environment.”

While still in his first year at Markem-Imaje, Vincent has identified numerous future trends and opportunities for the business to focus on. “The first opportunity would be improving security of products and improving brand stability. For example, anti-diversion and anti-counterfeiting are big issues not only in emerging countries but across the world. This means we need to have much more sophisticated capabilities to trace and track products, and we need to have more product information and coding information on products. We’re working, for example, with a partner in the US, Advanced DNA, where we’re able to track and trace products in a very sophisticated manner. This is a trend I see in the market where we need to play a big role.

“The second major trend I see is using packaging as a way to make brands more attractive. It’s not just the marking for coding and traceability, but the ability for brand owners to communicate directly with consumers through their labels. This is also one of the reasons we acquired a company that is in the labelling/printing business. I think that’s an opportunity for Markem-Imaje to explore and it’s a very important part of our future expansion plans.

“Lastly, I believe there are opportunities for digital printing to become a disruptive technology to improve production efficiency. If you look at the label printing market, going beyond marking and coding, it is still largely analogue. I believe digital printing technology could prove a significant opportunity for equipment manufacturers and brand owners to improve the production flow to work on things like reduction of inventory, to be able to do late-stage customisation in the manufacturing process. All of these >



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things are not possible with purely analogue technology. So that's another area where I see a big upside and a big opportunity for Markem-Imaje in the coming years. This business is still very much in its infancy. There are clearly big players moving in here, but given that most of the printing in that space is still analogue, it offers Markem-Imaje a huge opportunity."

Vincent notes that while he operates within a very high-tech industry, it historically hasn't been a very innovative one. "The rate of innovation is not as large as what you would see in the consumer industry, for example. I think that is changing and that has a lot to do with the move from analogue to digital. Markem-Imaje is clearly a leader in marking and coding, but we're also very committed to innovating more broadly. We have to recognise that the needs of our customers are different in different segments. It is very difficult to find one solution for everybody, so we've created dedicated teams in the organisation to focus on different submarkets: food, beverage, extrusion, pharma. Each of these have their different requirements and all of them need to feed our R&D organisation to innovate for specific needs in those specific areas.

"We have three R&D centres around the world, which are centres of excellence around the different technologies that we have. In addition to that, we recently acquired two companies in the high-resolution printing space, so those are additional technologies that we have. Where we are today, if you look at the competitive space, the company has the broadest set of technologies on offer. We enforce the point I made earlier about specific needs in sub-segments, so it's really critical that we understand what our customers really want, which can differ in different spaces and different countries."

Vincent is making innovation a key focus for Markem-Imaje across all the markets it operates within

while expanding the company's expertise in new areas. "In our core marking and coding business, we need to innovate, do things better, improve workflow on manufacturing lines on pure coding and marking. That would include a much deeper use of software, but that's in our pure core business that we've built over many years.

"With the acquisition of a company called CSAT, which we did in the beginning of the year, we have also entered into the digital-labelling printing space, and that's where I expect the biggest changes in the coming years since we should be able to compete much more broadly than in pure marking and coding. I think that offers a huge growth opportunity for Markem-Imaje on top of our pure marking and coding business, which is the bread and butter of our business today."

Markem-Imaje is a company that invests in its people for the long term and Vincent is proud to be part of an organisation that places great efforts into developing its staff. "Markem-Imaje is very committed to developing its workforce globally, so apart from pure technical support and training that we do for our workforce, we have a number of training programs that we run globally.

"Another part that is absolutely critical is hiring the right people, especially when we get into new adjacent markets; we would like to get people with experience in different markets and different geographies. If you look at our workforce today, we have subsidiaries in 32 countries, which probably means 60-plus nationalities, so a very diverse workforce. I think that's one of the biggest strengths of Markem-Imaje."

Whether it's a relationship with suppliers or in the field of R&D, Vincent maintains a single philosophy towards partnerships, which is aligned to that of Markem-Imaje. "I firmly believe that companies should not try



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to invent everything themselves. I think they really need to focus, when it comes to R&D, on what they do best, where they add real value, where they invent or produce something that differentiates them in the marketplace. In addition to that, in order to improve time to market and improve costs, I'm a very firm believer in strategic partnerships. They can take the form of a purely supplier-buyer relationship. We prefer, in many cases, single suppliers because it allows us to work with them long term."

Although fairly new to his role, Vincent has high hopes for the future of Markem-Imaje. He sees a two-pronged approach of focusing on the company's core competencies while expanding into new fields of expertise. "As I said, we're a firm believer that in our core space there is a lot of innovation we can bring to the market in the coming years to grow that business to do more and specifically tailor our solutions to specific sectors and specific customers.

"The second part is in these new adjacent growing spaces such as the digital labelling/printing space. That is still very much in its infancy when it comes to the digitalisation of that business. As I mentioned, the vast majority there are analogue, so that offers us, in addition to our core market, a huge growth opportunity in the years to come." •