



INNOVATION WHITEPAPER

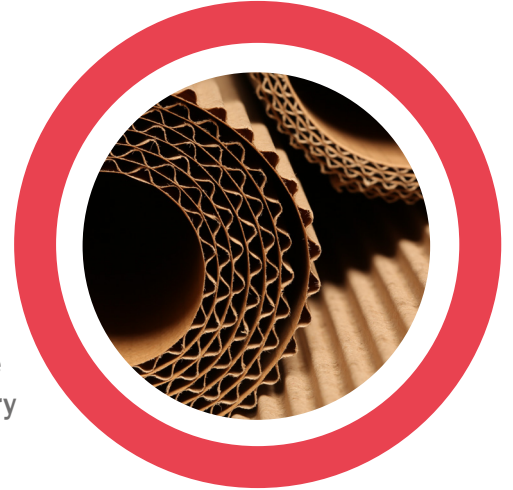
## Flint Group Packaging Inks

Hexacode: Meeting The Challenges of  
Today's Paper & Board Print Market

**Flint**Group / Packaging Inks

## HexaCode: Meeting The Challenges of Today's Paper & Board Print Market

As a leader in the supply of printing inks and coatings for the global packaging industry, Flint Group Packaging Inks understands current key trends and challenges faced by package printers and converters. While we know that the fundamental role of packaging is to protect and preserve goods, we also believe that the role of packaging and the industry are changing.



### 2021 – a defining year of change

Before the advent of the global Covid-19 pandemic, the packaging printing industry faced a number of key trends that were driving the operational strategies of businesses. First and foremost, the competitive intensity of the global retailing market meant brands were seeking continuous range refreshes, seasonal promotions and stock-keeping unit (SKU) proliferation to capture the attention of busy shoppers. Their ultimate aim was to drive sales and capture market share. In turn, this resulted in demand for fast turnaround, high quality, short run work for printers. However, they, in contrast, were seeking to optimise productivity and efficiency. Flexographic printing, along with digital printing for sampling and bespoke jobs, was deemed the technology of choice to meet these competing demands in many corrugated, paper and flexible plastic packaging applications.

The retail industry was changing. Conventional brick and mortar stores were under pressure from online shopping. Multiple store brands had closed unable to compete with the price pressure and service model offered by e-commerce. For fast moving consumer goods (FMCG), it was apparent that margin compression

was creating pressure, and this was being passed up the supply chain to the packaging converter.

Discussions were emerging on how all this would affect packaging design. Would shelf stand-out remain a key requirement for brands if online became the primary purchasing channel? E-commerce was undoubtedly accelerating. Those converters invested in secondary packaging production – corrugated boxes and returnable packaging systems – were seeing a steady increase in demand as more sophisticated omnichannel retailing solutions emerged.

Consumer preferences were also changing. Brands were no longer seeking to simply deliver a product, but a true brand experience. Consumers were delighted by innovative personalised products – delivered by new web to print digital models – and seeking convenience, health and affordability that matched their 24/7 'always on' lifestyles. Again, SKU proliferation was being driven to new heights by brands endeavouring to meet these evolving demands.



Finally, consumer, media and government scrutiny of leading brands and retailers, along with their packaging supply chains, was at the forefront of public attention. From prolific development of single use plastics to marine litter and landfill waste, the packaging industry and its clients were under intense pressure to improve their environmental performance. With activists and non-government organisations (NGOs) seeking change, the industry was seeking new packaging formats, innovation in design and rethinking brand strategies in order to satisfy the needs of the modern consumer with respect to the environment.

Then along came Covid-19; an unprecedented period of change that saw people, businesses and economies slow down and, in some cases, shut down.

During the peak of the virus in many countries, brands were forced to rationalise SKUs – reducing their ranges to cope with critically challenged supply chains. Shelves emptied as panic buying ensued and brands focused their efforts on simply making products available, rather than worrying about what was to come next in their marketing efforts.



Printers struggled with unprecedented demand volatility. Suppliers who were focused on packaging for cosmetics and toiletries, along with automotive applications, saw sales drop away. Those involved in food and drink, hygiene, pharmaceutical and medical packaging, experienced volume spikes and a conflict between the need for high volumes of repeat work and trying to deliver quickly.

On a positive note, the corrugated packaging sector saw a significant uplift as retailers moved online. The plastic packaging sector also felt less environmental pressure and partially renewed acceptance of the format as consumers now cared more about hygiene, availability and safety. The previous focus on sustainability seemed to be on pause.

The industry as we had come to know it had changed overnight and the entire supply chain needed to adapt.





## The lessons

While it may be argued that normality will return once the pandemic is over and consumers will return to their old lifestyle habits, many believe that brands have learned a more controlled range of products delivered well, may be preferable in terms of cost efficiency in the future. So, what does this mean for today's packaging printer?

It's clear that success in packaging printing in 'the new normal' is about being agile, while maintaining quality and efficiency to minimise costs. It's about being able to respond to swings in volumes, job frequency and short lead-times, while at the same time driving quality upwards to enable customers to stand out in the even more competitive marketplace. Those printers that are investing in technology and innovation, with the aim to drive down the total cost of print, will be the ultimate winners in what is a globally consolidating industry.

Sustainability is also back on the agenda. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic the availability of packaged goods has been extremely important – consumers haven't been thinking so much about what these goods have been packaged in – as much as thinking about the products themselves. However, printed packaging supply chains are slowly making headline news as key NGOs seek to relight the environmental agenda. Furthermore, brands are more conscious than ever about the impact their products and packaging can have on the environment at every point in their life cycle, from manufacture to post-consumer use.





## Meeting trends with technology

Recognising the challenges of the packaging sector in 2021 and beyond, Flint Group Packaging Inks has been investing in significant research and development to bring about state of the art ink and coating technologies to support its package printing customers. Focusing on the paper and board market, Flint Group Packaging Inks has developed the HexaCode range of next generation water-based inks.

Designed to deliver superior print quality and high colour strength to meet the demands of the 21st century retail environment head on, HexaCode is the new benchmark for water-based ink formulation. Suitable for a wide range of applications including pre and post-print corrugated, as well as industrial bags, sacks, shopping bags and gift wrap, the range offers proven cost savings and operational efficiency gains, so important to today's packaging printing environment.

Paul Winstanley, Sr. Director of Technology and Innovation at Flint Group Packaging Inks, said: "We know our customers need to drive efficiency into their operations to respond to the variable nature of today's marketplace. The new HexaCode range is a best in class ink technology that boosts product safety, print quality and press productivity, all while reducing the total cost of print."

Part of the AQUACode portfolio of ink and coating solutions for paper and board applications, HexaCode has been specifically developed to deliver outstanding converting performance for printers. By increasing the efficiency of plate and anilox cleaning alongside faster conversion speeds, printers are able to drive down their costs of production.


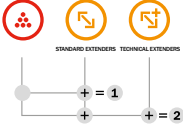
Winstanley continued: "With HexaCode, printers can reduce the number of press stops, improve their set up times, as well as boost press stability. In customer trials, we've observed improved coverage and mileage and in the post-print corrugated market, an additional benefit was identified in reduced board crush."

**The new HexaCode range is a best in class ink technology that boosts product safety, print quality and press productivity, all while reducing the total cost of print.**

Paul Winstanley, Sr. Director of Technology and Innovation  
Flint Group Packaging Inks

## Building Block Technology:

HexaCode is available with our Building Block Technology designed for your flexibility and efficiency.

	<b>Available with our Building Block Technology designed for your flexibility and efficiency!</b>
	<p><b>1 Standard Ink:</b> Economical, standard artwork providing regular properties</p> <p><b>2 Performance Ink:</b> High quality graphics providing specific performance</p>

Comprising a range of standard and optional bases plus standard, technical and single extenders, HexaCode delivers superb coverage with clean print and excellent tonal quality to create outstanding on-pack graphic performance.

“What we’ve done with HexaCode is future-proofed the product to ensure printers have the right technology in play, if a dramatic situation like Covid-19 should ever happen again. By using HexaCode, they free up time to focus on the converting process as right first time performance is the norm. It optimises press performance, runs at excellent speeds and is great for inline die cutting, offering further efficiencies.”

The HexaCode range is compliant with a range of global regulatory requirements, including food packaging. It is safe and easy to use, with excellent pH and viscosity ideal for many paper and packaging weights.

“HexaCode has been designed to support the significant step up in print quality now demanded in the global paper and board market, as it extends to replace traditional plastic packaging applications including flexible packaging that have traditionally offered stand out graphics. HexaCode also further underlines our commitment to sustainability as an ink provider. Our sustainability vision is to support packaging markets with responsibly built products and sustainable solutions designed for circular economies. HexaCode drives out waste and cost, and enables our packaging converter customers to be the agile, flexible suppliers they seek to be, without compromise.”

Achieving benchmark standards in colour and graphic excellence, alongside supporting low maintenance efficient press operation, HexaCode is changing the game for printers enabling them to meet the needs of today’s challenging marketplace.

**To find out more please visit**  
**[www.flintgroup.com](http://www.flintgroup.com)**

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