

# Gold in our hands

**Dutch trading company Hildering is changing its name to reflect a global outlook – and calling on can makers to innovate more, as Evert van der Weg discovers**

A name change is not done lightly in the world of can making. Many marques have venerable histories and often the brand survives long after the company has folded. Hildering Emballagebedrijf in Ijmuiden, the Netherlands, began in 1958, and is now rebranding itself as Hildering Industrial Packaging in order to fully represent its international base.

Johan Hildering started his one-man business supplying finplate cans to Dutch medium-size and smaller producers of paint and chemical products. Today the company has grown into an internationally operating company, trading cans throughout Europe. Recently the company built a new building, in an industrial area close to the North Sea.

Most of the customers of Hildering Emballagebedrijf operate in the general line market, supplying paints. Other customers are active in lacquers, either for the industrial sector or car and furniture lacquers. Chemical products, automotive or wood stain products are also represented.

Johan's son Jos Hildering is the current managing director. "At the time my father started our company, he saw the need for an intermediate link between can makers and can fillers," Hildering says. "There were many small paint companies in those days, and there was a large variety in can sizes with not much standardisation. It made sense that someone would keep many can sizes in stock and be able to supply small quantities to customers.

"We have a wide and complete range of empty metal cans in stock and we are able to supply them with very short lead times. We now see ourselves more as a full-service packaging supplier for the paint and chemical industry," he notes. "However, our core business is still the supply of finplate cans. Also, large users of cans do need smaller quantities of special cans occasionally, and they often want them quickly."

As well as being a supplier, the company has several suppliers itself, he explains. "Our supplier is Impress for finplate cans, and has been from the time when the Dutch part still was called Thomassen & Drijver-Verblifa. In fact, we are one of the biggest customers Impress has in the Netherlands for paint and chemical cans."

## Standardisation

In the 1950s, there were a lot of small producers of paints, coatings and varnishes. There were many end uses for both domestic and industrial applications as well. In the decades that followed, companies such as Sikkens (now part of AkzoNobel), ICI and BASF acquired medium-size paint producers and integrated them, keeping some of the brands alive.



As a result, the can market for paints and chemical products was not standardised in volumes, diameters, types of closures etc. There were also many different specifications from country to country.

Under pressure from multinational companies such as AkzoNobel, which wanted to rationalise its paint filling operations throughout Europe, standardisation

started. Impress, a major supplier for paint cans, introduced its E-Range (European Range), allowing for process simplification and quicker supply. It also generates cost savings throughout the chain. Hildering Emballagebedrijf is following these developments whenever appropriate. Hildering notes, "That does not mean we will easily say no to a customer. In principle we have it all, or we will make sure we get it."

## Protact protection

Hildering agrees with packaging innovations that have entered the can making arena, partly as a result of European REACH (Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals) legislation. This includes Corus' Protact-laminated steel, which protects the steel base from the water-based paints and coatings using a thin layer of PET. "Water and finplate are enemies. I hear marketing people saying, 'finplate corrodes' and it is very difficult to counter that perception. Protact material does the job, so I am a strong supporter of the Protact application," he says.

Another development that needs more promotion is can shaping, he points out. "Visibility, striking shapes make the real difference on the shelves. We have gold in our hands with the combination of excellent printing on finplate and the potential of can shaping."

Another positive for finplate cans is their inherent strength, Hildering believes. Mixing machines for paints have become an important instrument in paint shops, and require packages that retain their shape – which is where plastic cans have a problem. "The tops of metal paint cans

and lids are so sturdy that even after closing and opening them many times, cans are still perfectly airtight. This is an important selling point," he notes.

**Innovations**

Hildering believes in innovative packages for the paint and chemical industry and has invested in a modest R&D department at the company. "We try to exploit all the can making industry innovation – both the ones dreamed up by paint companies' marketing departments and those developed in-house," he says.

"Apart from Protact and can shaping, I see Impress' digital printing capability as an important asset for our marketing efforts for tinplate cans. We enable brand owners to market their products in full colour packages. We also have given our own brand name – Hildering Colour Cans – to the digital printing programme.

The cans are marketed under the slogan: 'Small batches, great looks'. Full colour printing is now possible and customers can market test runs of new products.

"Some of our own developments are important innovations for the industry," Hildering says. "Our solution for the two-components lacquers and paints is the Hildering two-components locking ring. The plastic locking ring connecting the two cans that contain the two components is very practical. It enables simple mixing of the components free of dust, airtight and hands-free.

"We are also proud of the Hildering Colorantsaver, a plastic pouring spout for the top of a paint can. The patented shape allows for easy pouring without spillage of paint," he says. The next development is due to be released this spring, but confidentiality prevented Hildering from talking about it.

**Packaging needs**

The company is a strong advocate of yet more packaging

innovations for the paint and chemical industry. "We need more innovations if we want to keep the market share for tinplate packages at the current level," warns Hildering. "There are serious threats, in particular from plastic packaging and even from paper-board packaging in the Netherlands – we must do better than we do now."

He notes that the can making industry is quite conservative. "I often have the feeling that can makers have the attitude of, 'we have a machine line to make cans that is not very flexible, and in principle we can only use innovations if they fit into our machine line', in particular when the quantities are not huge," he says. "I understand that they want to maximise the use of their existing equipment, but this attitude is not good enough. They should better respond to market demands and be more creative."

Hildering also says the supply chain should work closely together. "My dream is that some pricing efforts from both the tinplate supplier and the can maker would enable the industry to reach out to market segments that we cannot serve now because of the price level of cans. I know certain end user areas would love to employ high quality cans as a package, but they cannot afford to do that at the current price level.

"I sincerely believe we have gold in our hands with our metal packages, particularly when you look at the important issue of packaging sustainability. Tinplate is the recycling champion. It is important for all of us that we keep innovating our cans in order to keep pace with the market." □

