

Perfect Packages

Oliver helps to ensure patient safety by delivering high-quality packaging to the healthcare industry. *By Alan Dorich*



When patients undergo surgery, have a medical issue, or need medication, they do it with the idea that the tools, devices and medication has been produced in a sterile, and clean environment. As a

medical packaging manufacturer, Oliver Healthcare Packaging plays an important part in this process, Director of Global Supply Chain Adam Vincent says.

Based in Grand Rapids, Mich., Oliver provides flexible, sterile packaging for products used in the medical device, pharmaceutical, biologics, and drugs/device markets. The company started operations in 1890 as a wood trimmer and saw manufacturer.

"We then moved into bread slicing equipment and food packaging," Vincent explains, adding that the company then added printing and labeling technology. "That's how we got into the flexible packaging industry, and adhesive coating technology."

In the 1960s, Oliver partnered with DuPont™ to develop adhesive coating technology for sterilizable medical device applications, using DuPont Tyvek®. "With our coating added, we have a superior packaging solution that can stand up under the most rigorous testing, sterilization, distribution and storage requirements," Vincent says.



In 2008, Oliver merged with Tolas Healthcare Packaging Corp., unifying as Oliver-Tolas Healthcare Packaging. But the company took its current name, Oliver Healthcare Packaging, earlier this year, when it again acquired Mangar Medical Packaging.

Today, Oliver's products include roll stock, die-cut lids, pouches, and backer or mounting cards. The company focuses primarily on packaging for Class II and III medical devices and pharmaceutical devices, which must be sterile and manufactured in clean environments for use in the human body. "Devices we provide packaging for

includes cardiac catheterization systems, implantable devices, orthopedic tools and components, and much more," Vincent says.

The company serves clients such as Johnson & Johnson, Beckton Dickinson and Abbott, with operations in the Americas, Europe and Asia. "We have manufacturing facilities and office locations around the globe to serve our customers," Vincent says.

BUILDING A TEAM

A longtime veteran of the supply chain world, Vincent joined Oliver after working in the footwear industry. "A lot of the same prin-

ciples in supply chain remain the same, including the need to provide exceptional customer service and develop creative ways to help customers compete,” he asserts.

During his tenure at Oliver, Vincent has focused on recruiting talented supply chain professionals, buyers and planners to the team, people who not only have business and financial acumen, but also have a passion for doing the right thing. “Bringing in top talent has been important to us, and in my opinion, the expertise we have here is a true differentiator for Oliver,” he says.

Because of the unique ownership structure at Oliver, which is a privately held company, Vincent and his team are able to make long-term investments in raw material supplies when they anticipate a significant amount of risk for the customer. For example, the team recently saw a material supplier

experience supply issues.

“The lead times for this particular product were moving out significantly,” he recalls, noting that the team predicted a potential shortage in the material. “Anticipating what was about to happen, we were able to make an investment in that particular material.”

Because his team took proactive measures, Oliver continued to supply its customers without any delays or shortages, unlike other manufacturers. “Our investment buffered customers from that experience,” he says.

Vincent’s team also gets creative to help customers cut cost and meet production timelines, utilizing programs like managed inventory. “Whether it’s a consignment program or a make-and-hold program in a warehouse location near our customers, programs like this have not only helped us to reduce lead times

and increase our reliability, but it has also balanced production and level load our factories,” he says.

Oliver focuses on reinvesting in its business, which has included increasing the clean room space in all facilities around the world. “We’re also investing in different technologies for web cleaning,” Vincent says, noting that these will reduce the amount of particulate added during the manufacturing process.

Additionally, the company has purchased vision and auto-detect systems. “We’re replacing inefficient manual inspection with an automated process,” he says. “Not only does that help us keep any non-conforming product within our four walls, but we can also take whatever actions are needed to protect our manufacturing processes.”

Oliver is currently building a brand new, 68,000 square-foot facility in Suzhou, China, just outside of Shanghai. The greenfield project will be finished by the end of the year. “It’s going to be a first-class operation as we continue to grow and serve our customers in the Asian market,” Vincent states.

A LONG PATH

Oliver is cautious when choosing suppliers. “It’s a difficult path to become an approved supplier for Oliver,” Vincent admits. “There are many who want to get into supplying medical device companies, but it isn’t easy.

“We might like their product, their innovative approach and want to bring them on board, but they’re really starting at ground zero when becoming a qualified supplier in our space,” he says. The company starts



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by conducting an audit of each vendor's quality system.

"On top of that, we do a pretty comprehensive engineering audit to make sure controls are in place for detection and prevention from a manufacturing standpoint," Vincent says. "Inevitably, those audits generate findings that our suppliers need to answer prior to becoming an approved supplier."

The true test for the supplier, he notes, comes when something goes wrong. "It's really at that point where we understand how committed they are to being a supplier to our industry and to Oliver," Vincent says.

Oliver looks at how the supplier contains the event, determines when something went wrong, and if they can prevent the issue from happening again.

"That's when we find out who permanent suppliers are and who we might need to coach," he says, noting that Oliver provides corrective action training programs to suppliers.

A NEW FRONTIER

Vincent is proud of Oliver and how it conducts business around the world. "We understand how important what we do every day is and connect patient safety back to

our daily work here," he says.

"As I look across our supply chain team and the progress we've made, I feel a tremendous amount of pride," he says. "It makes me incredibly happy to see the work the team does day in and day out to help customers succeed."

Oliver is focused on expanding its footprint in Asia, and globally. "We may be challenged to find the right suppliers that not only meet our quality standards, but are local to customers in any given market," he says. "It will be a new frontier for Oliver as we continue to build out and develop packaging for these growing markets." 🌐