



John Eleftheriades with his daughter Maria, who supervises the increasing demand for digital labels

# When the tough get going

**B**eing an entrepreneur in the printing and packaging industries in Cyprus requires a lot of work and dedication – a lifetime of dedication, in fact. And that’s exactly what it took for John Eleftheriades to set up and run the largest packaging printer in the field on the 9,251 sq km island.

The Republic of Cyprus, as it is formally known, faces many challenges. A UN presence still controls the buffer zone between the Cypriot Turkish- and Cypriot Greek-controlled areas, illegal immigration is at an all-time high, the country is highly dependent on imports for its energy supply, and ‘golden passport’ issues have altered business ethics. Yet, facing down all these issues, you can still find an entrepreneurial figure like Eleftheriades.

Founded in 1965, the company Eleftheriades established originally dealt with general printing work. In 1986, J Eleftheriades Offset Printers was set up under his management, and it refocused on printing paper-based packaging for soft drinks, alcohol, food,

Pioneering in printing has become the habit of a lifetime for one Cypriot entrepreneur. **Dominique Huret** visits his factory in Nicosia to find out more

drugs and cosmetics. By 1997, it had expanded its activities into related sectors and a sister firm – Bietik – was set up to print self-adhesive labels.

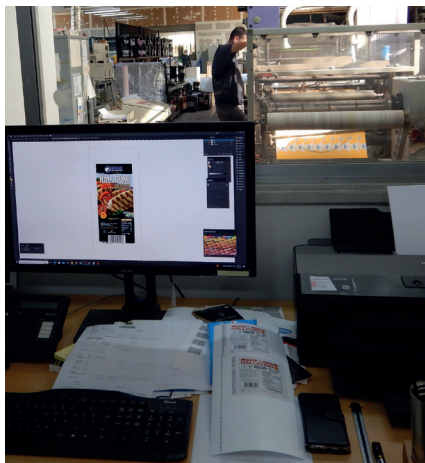
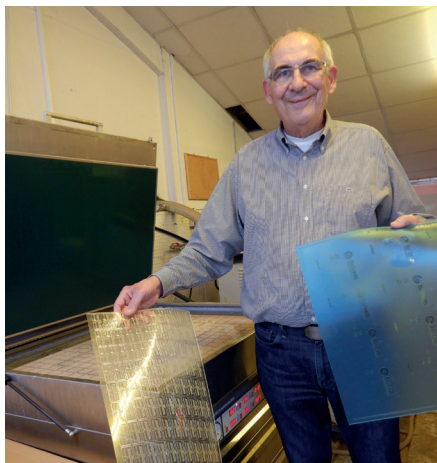
“Since 2001, the company has upgraded its technology through the purchase and installation of high-tech UV flexographic presses to print on materials such as BOPP, OPP and PET for the packaging of food and the labelling of soda and water bottles,” says Eleftheriades. “This technology gave us a competitive advantage to develop in a field where most packaging products are imported into the Cypriot market.”

An early adopter of digital printing, the business invested in one of the first Xeikon toner digital presses in 2003. This gave it continuous printing to a high quality, in addition to the ability to use self-adhesive materials and deliver orders within 24 hours.

“At the time of installation, there wasn’t even a manual on how to use the press!” quips Maria Eleftheriades, the owner’s daughter. “Luckily, Xeikon managers were willing to help. Today, we have a second Xeikon press and I have joined the business to supervise the increasing orders for digital labels. The high demand comes from bakeries (sandwiches and pastries) with a wide range of labels in shorter runs.

“We also produce self-adhesive stickers for traditional halloumi cheese, which, after a long political battle, has earned the EU-registered Protected Designation of Origin.”

The company continues to utilise offset technology for its core source of orders and income, which is where the volume is. But, since 2001, John Eleftheriades has also been convinced by flexo technology, and



## Company profile

**Turnover (for J Eleftheriades Offset Printers and Bietek):** €5 million (\$5.3m)  
**Employees:** 40  
**Equipment:** 45 machines (presses, cutters, creasers, decoration) ranging from Heidelberg and Bobst models to an Omet UV flexo eight-colour press



**Top:** The company employs 40 people in the Nicosia plant. **Above left:** Owner John Eleftheriades says that the company's own flexo plate-making capability enables it to stay up-to-date with the latest computer-to-plate technology. **Above centre:** The company produces self-adhesive labels for traditional halloumi cheese. **Above right:** Offset technology remains the core source of income but flexo technology is gathering pace for the Cypriot firm

specifically UV flexo, which he says delivers outstanding results.

“My first investment was an Italian Omet UV flexo press for €1.3 million [\$1.4m],” he recalls. “I took a serious risk there. But Omet customised the press for us so it was 62cm-wide. We discovered that it was a first for them, too. To this day, we are still the only printer of film labels in Cyprus, making our own flexo plates in-house, which helps us to be fully independent and up-to-date with the latest computer-to-plate technology.”

### Flexibility first and foremost

The variety of presses and equipment on the factory floor is striking, and underlines the entrepreneurial strategy of adjusting orders to suit the most efficient and cost-effective technology for any given application.

Having cornered the market on the island and developed lots of long-term relationships allows the printer to pass on a considerable amount of the soaring electricity prices that it has had to contend with during production.

The geographical position of Cyprus, in the middle of the Mediterranean, makes maritime transport key. The port of Limassol is 60km away from the factory, located south of Nicosia. Almost all of the materials and

films used by J Eleftheriades Offset Printing are imported. Films come from Jindal and Cosmo Films – both in India – paper from MM Austria and Iggesund, and toner and ink from Xeikon or its parent company Flint Group, and from Hubergroup for offset printing.

Asked about the trend towards the replacement of plastics with fibre packaging, Eleftheriades says: “Yes, we’ve witnessed that trend here too, but also the reverse. Interestingly enough, the pharmaceutical sector is sticking to cardboard boxes. In the past, we used to be a partner with MeadWestvaco for printing Coca-Cola boxes for a lot of marketing campaigns, but they switched to lighter cardboard options or lighter plastics wraparound.

“The drinks and food sectors for film labels continue to grow, especially if you remain creative! Among our staff, a few are US-educated and keep proposing special marketing campaigns for labels. This is very successful here. It is essential to have talented staff. Most of our customers are keen to optimise their packaging but don’t realise the important savings that can be made with ink reduction.”

One retailer that Eleftheriades is keeping a very close eye on is Lidl Cyprus, which

recently opened its 19th store on Limassol’s seafront as it continues its rapid expansion. The retailer has introduced a new commitment to ‘improve and reduce packaging responsibly’ on its private-label items, letting consumers know of the improved sustainability of the packaging, while adhering to transparency principles. “We follow what they are doing closely but for the moment they are not our customer, having their printing business sourced elsewhere,” he admits. “Numerous certifications are a prerequisite, so we are adapting our production hall accordingly. It is constant work-in-progress.”

As Eleftheriades ticks towards 60 years in the business, he is set to fulfil his dream of installing another state-of-the-art UV flexo press from Gallus. This, he says, will be a fully automated inline press with foil decoration, stripping and creasing. Only gluing is not included.

“We joke that it is like putting in a pig in one end and getting a ready-made ham sandwich at the other,” he says. “The equipment will arrive in three or four containers from the US. Luckily, the container traffic has improved in recent months and is almost back to normal. I will truly enjoy seeing this press in operation!”