Making Your Own Panels

The New, Dry Lamination Business Eliminates a Demountable Problem—Big Inventories

By Ann Bean
Vinyl Converters, Inc.
Grandview, MO

“A new idea whose time has come...” vinyl wall fabrics and films coated with hot melt pressure sensitive adhesive and silicone treated release paper... that’s the key to the new, dry lamination business,” said a large west coast contractor recently.

“We make our own demountable partition panels using the precoated vinyl and machine applying it to board with a dry laminating machine. We realized that to stay competitive, we needed to streamline our operation and speed up productivity.

Now we are flexible. We can run as many or as few panels as we need, any color or pattern that we need, as we need them. We’ve decreased our inventory; there’s no old or slow moving items in stock tying up money.”

Hot melt, pressure sensitive adhesives are innovating the laminating art. Replacing the old solvent based adhesives in the coating of vinyl, the hot melts possess superior tack and shear strength. They are specifically formulated to resist plasticizer migration... an old lamination bugaboo.

What is needed for dry lamination?
A comparatively small investment in a dry laminator is the initial consideration. The new laminators available are engineered to machine apply tough, modern vinyl film from 6 mil in thickness up to heavy supported vinyl to any rigid substrate.

A semi-skilled crew can feed board up to 80 linear feet per minute through the machine and custom produce vinyl faced panels on demand.

“Since our laminator is compact and on casters, we take it right to the job site and laminate our demountable partition panels there,” a Dallas contractor stated. “Its size allows us
to roll it in and out of elevators or lifts and take it from floor to floor as the job progresses.

That way we can eliminate the damage so often incurred by carting the finished panels from warehouse to the job. When we were buying prefinished panels from the factory, we really had damage problems.

Sometimes, we would buy a truck load lot to save money, only to find 20 of the panels damaged in transit; and subsequent handling would damage them further. All of this waste is reduced significantly by on-the-job laminating.”

**Key: Flexibility**

Flexibility is the key to the success of the dry lamination process. Contractors across the country have discovered that the ability to offer architects and owners a wide selection of vinyl films and fabrics is important in landing the job. The only inventory involved is blank gypsum boards . . . usable on any job.

“Getting in and out with stepped up production protects our profits. Let’s face it. The old saying ‘time is money’ was never more true than it is these days. We’ve really saved on labor costs by going to the dry process. Our dry laminating machine can be run by one man; a three man crew can produce 800 panels a day.

When we’re really rolling on a big job, we put on a five man crew with a forklift and run full production of 2,000 panels a day.”

In an effort to expand their business base, a number of dry laminator machine owners are laminating panels for other drywall and interior contractors, developers, home builders and small manufacturers. They are changing their approach and going after business that would ordinarily be overlooked.

“We’ve been enjoying a nice profit in the door market lately, too,” a Kansas City businessman said. “The woodgrains in pressure sensitive vinyls are tough and laminate to inexpensive doors like a dream. In today’s tight market, it pays to diversify . . . to have every iron in the fire. **Continued on next page**
When there’s a slump in one area, another takes up the slack. That’s the way it’s been with doors. They’re a good, steady source of income. The customer is important to us, and we want him to think of us as a can-do contractor.

If he wants a demountable partition in periwinkle blue or marigold yellow, we can do. If he wants a dozen oak doors or one walnut door, we can do. Our dry laminating capability makes us flexible and competitive.”

Replacing Fast

The innovation of dry lamination with hot melt, pressure sensitive vinyls seems to be rapidly taking the place of older methods for several very good reasons:

(1) Flexibility . . . a wider selection of textures, colors, corks, woodgrains are available, (2) Cost reduction . . . large, unbalanced inventories are unnecessary, (3) Factory cost differentials are eliminated, (4) Scheduling and delivery difficulties are eliminated, (5) Labor is saved on set ups and color changes, (6) Labor is saved because clean-up time is eliminated, (7) Any rigid substrate such as sheet rock, metal panels and doors can be dry laminated, (8) Precoated vinyl film can be re-applied over most existing vinyl wallcoverings, (9) The new dry laminators are simple to operate, (10) Dry laminators are portable and require only 110 volt power.

Survival is the name of the game these days. By taking advantage of the new technology offered by dry lamination and benefiting from its economies, the creative contractor is able to go after a wider market. By reducing operating costs and speeding up production, he not only survives . . . but prospers.