TalkingRain Beverage Co., Preston, WA, is currently redesigning the labeling for its Twist line of flavored bottled waters to take better advantage of the unusual shape of its proprietary PET containers.

Supplied by Graham Packaging, this proprietary bottle features an unusual beveled square shape in a lightweight, paneled structure. The bottle’s atypical shape provides TalkingRain with strong branding for its Twist and ActivWater product lines. But the bottle structure also presents packaging challenges for an industry segment dominated by bullet-shaped containers and their rounder counterparts. Both the company’s internal bottling operations and copacking partners had to adjust their bottling operations for optimal filling and labeling of Twist’s bottles.

In-house and contract bottling
In addition to TalkingRain’s own filling operation in Washington State, Twist is bottled at contract bottling operations across the country, including Tampa Bay CoPack in Dade City, FL. Like TalkingRain’s own facility, Tampa Bay CoPack is certified organic and kosher and, more importantly, is optimized to effectively hot-fill the square PET bottles and apply the PETG shrink sleeves supplied by TalkingRain Beverage Co.’s label converter, WS Packaging Group Inc.

“There have been several challenges that we had to overcome,” says TalkingRain senior vp Kevin Klock. From label design to application to filling, TalkingRain found that being different might make your packaging standout but it sure didn’t make production any easier.

To overcome the challenges associated with the proprietary shaped bottle, engineers from WS Packaging worked closely with Tampa Bay CoPack and Tripack LLC, which manufactured the equipment that applies the sleeves.

“This sleeve makes contact with the side of the bottle very quickly versus a label on most round bottles where contact with the surface area of the bottle doesn’t happen until you get a fair way down,” Klock remarks. “We had to really work on how to have the bottles presented to the sleever and how solid of a seam to put on the sleeve. It became a delicate balance between trying to put too hard of a seam on the lay flat, yet have a good enough seam.

“You can’t have this excess of lay flat because it’s a square bottle and you can’t lose the graphic orientation,” he explains. “Yet you’ve got to have enough that you can get that sleeve down over the bottle without hanging up.”

“The Twist sleeve also is not designed to go straight onto the bottle,” adds Nina Morrison, vp of marketing for TalkingRain. “It’s just a little off-center on purpose, but that didn’t help Kevin in the application part of the project.”

To help adjust the shrink sleeves for optimal application, WS Packaging sent engineers to work with TalkingRain’s contract packager. “It’s important to have all the parties working together,” remarks Morrison. “It’s so crucial that everybody’s on the same page.”

Agreeing with Morrison, Klock adds: “It’s really important to make sure everyone agrees as to what it is that’s causing the challenges. I mean, we even used high-speed cameras just to try and see what was truly going on as we struggled to get the initial lay flat.”

While WS Packaging considers TalkingRain to be a high-volume customer, the converter says that this is a service that it provides for all new items. “We have tech service people who attend
Learning from experience

Using what they learned from the original Twist label design, TalkingRain and WS Packaging are now developing the next generation of the package’s design. The new labeling will enable easier facing of the product as three of the panels will be designed as a face panel. “There will be three great front panels,” remarks Morrison. Branding elements such as the Twist logo with its whimsical type treatment of the ‘w’ character envisioned by Jean Pattine Graphic Design will remain.

Taking a shine to bottled water packaging

When it switched from a round, 20-oz commodity hot-fill PET bottle to its proprietary square bottle to help its ActiWate water brand gain shelf appeal, Talking Rain Beverage Co. also moved to PETG shrink sleeves printed with metallic inks at WS Packaging Group Inc.’s facility in Franklin, PA.

“All of the label elements combine with the shape of the new bottle to provide a stronger brand position and presence on the shelf,” says Morrison. “The product displays nicely because the bright metallic inks really pop off the stark-white backdrop of the sleeve. And the square bottle allows for three full facings to showcase the brand, with the nutrition deck on the fourth side.”

While specific sales figures are guarded, Morrison said sales of the relaunched ActiWate are doing very well, with the strongest markets being Florida, the Midwest, Chicago, the Northwest and California. She adds that feedback from buyers has been very positive. “They love it, and think it’s very eye-appealing,” Morrison remarks. “It’s easy to read, the colors are great, and it displays nicely.”

The new labels will be printed at WS Packaging on a Comco press on PETG stock from Klöckner Pentaplast. “Protecting the brand’s identity and image is always top of mind,” says Smith. “You must have uniform label shrink in order to avoid distorting the graphics. Given the rectangular shape of the bottle, there literally was no room to fudge.”

“We’ve been using Klockner PVC and PETG for years and we have had some good experiences with them,” Smith adds. “This is a good clear film, and it shrinks very nicely.”

Like earlier label versions, the new labels will be printed without registration marks. The lack of a registration mark can present yet another challenge when applying sleeves to bottles.

The benefits of local support

Tampa Bay CoPack is very familiar with the challenge of applying unregistered film to square bottles. “The square bottle created some unique challenges in being able to orient the label properly on the container,” recalls Scot Ballantyne, president of Tampa Bay Copack. The challenges were so great that the first sleeve applicator installed on the line was not able to overcome those challenges.

“I went down and saw the frustration Scot was having and some of the problems he was having with the quality of the equipment provided,” recalls Tom Linz, president at Tripack. “He had bought competitive systems and was struggling with them; they were imported machines. I said, ‘Well, I can help you but I can’t help you with that equipment.’”

Ballantyne decided that the best way to ensure proper application of the Twist shrink sleeves was to reinvest in the bottling line, and purchase a new sleeve applicator from Tripack—a HSA-220 sleeve applicator with an Allen-Bradley/Rockwell Automation Inc. servo-drive.

“What’s unique about our equipment is our ability to design the equipment specific to applications that are somewhat challenging,” remarks Linz. “All of us compete over the bullet-looking, round, cylindrical container. If you can’t do that, you can’t be in the business. But through our mandrel design and the way we deliver film through the applicator, we’ve been able to develop a system that allows the sleeve-application machine to be able to utilize the folds that are in the film.”

While the technology was an important factor in the equipment purchase decision, perhaps the most compelling factor was the level of service a U.S. manufacturer would be able to provide because of its location. Ballantyne especially liked that Tripack was based in Ohio, only few states from Florida.

Integration into the existing line

The HSA-220 Sleeve Applicator was installed in a hot-fill bottling line that operates at speeds from 150 to 250 containers/min.

To bottle Twist, Tampa Bay CoPack first uses an A-B-C Packaging Machine Corp. Model 108 sweep-off bulk depalletizer that moves the bottles from the pallets onto a bulk table accumulation area. From there, the bottles move to a single filler and into the bottle rinser before entering the 40-head U.S. Bottler Machinery Co. Inc. filler, where they are filled at 182 deg F with water treated by a Feldmeier Equipment Inc. pasteurizer and Osmonic Health Care reverse-osmosis system.

Sterilized 28-mm caps supplied by Rexam PLC are placed onto the filled bottles by an Alcoa (now Closure Systems Intl Inc.) Model 212-8 8-head capper.

Filled and capped bottles then travel on a lay-Continued on page 30
down conveyor into a cooling tunnel, where they are sprayed with water. Air knives dry the bottles exiting the tunnel. After they are dried, the bottles enter the Tripack HSA-220 sleeve applicator, which applies the sleeves and shrinks them onto the bottles as they pass through an integrated shrink tunnel.

Sleeved bottles receive date and lot-codes imaged by a Videojet Technologies Inc. printer.

For unitization, Tampa Bay Copack is currently using a Hartness Intl Inc. drop-pack with an Arpac Group 115 TW-28 shrink wrapper and SWF Companies Model GMA1T4 Traymatic.

The copacker has plans to purchase a Polypack Inc. shrink wrapper by the end of the year, which will give them the option of using full-registered, unsupported shrink film in addition to the ability to pack small multipacks on trays.

Pallet loaded with product are built using an Intelligrated Inc. Alvey Series 600 palletizer.

Worldwide ambitions

Now that TalkingRain has perfected the process for filling and applying shrink sleeves to its Twist product at both its internal and copacking facilities and is currently refreshing the Twist labeling, the beverage company has plans to expand Twist distribution worldwide. It’s keeping the packaging jobs in the U.S. though. “Our copackers are effective at bottling our products,” Klock remarks. “We would export.”

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