

# Pinning Down a Championship Promotion

By Kym Conis



The brilliance of foil and the dimension of embossing have long possessed the power of extreme impact. For hundreds of years, they have stood for “timeless, enduring value – the ultimate in exclusivity”. Whether the golden Mask of Agamemnon, the first metal stampings used as currency, or the championship belt of a world famous wrestler, the grandeur and high value created by foil stamping and embossing reign supreme in the arena of print finishing.

These decorative mediums are masterfully showcased in the *Heavyweight Embossing Champion* belt self promotional piece produced by hinderer-muehlich KG (h+m), Germany. Weaving multiple passes of foil (including matte, metallic,

and two-dimensional holographic) with a variety of multi-level embossing techniques, the *Heavyweight Embossing Champion* belt pins down a winning title amongst an international audience.

## Creating a Championship Design

The original concept of the *Heavyweight Embossing Champion* belt was designed and executed for the cover of *Creativ Verpacken* magazine, a German publication with international distribution. Slated for the October 2008 edition – a special issue distributed at the Luxepack Monaco 2008 exhibition – the elaborate six-page foldout cover commanded a presence few others have achieved in the world of publishing.

Rich golds and silvers entwine with glistening chains, jeweled crowns, and 3-dimensional artistry that leap from the page to claim their rightful championship title among the world of print finishing and package design.

Wanting to demonstrate something unique at Luxepack, which attracts the high-end luxury packaging market, Barbara Mühlich, marketing director for h+m, worked with the design agency B 612 GmbH, Germany, on the development of the piece. The agency’s creative talent, combined with Mühlich’s vision and drive, maximized the brilliance of the end result. Further collaboration with h+m Senior Engraving and Hot Stamping Engineer Thomas Lochner, who oversaw production and execution of the piece, ensured the finished piece came to optimum realization.

“The goal of our designs is to inspire creativity towards a wide range of packages and products in the folding carton, label, and trade finishing markets,” said h+m USA General Manager David Bohne “The inspiration in this extreme emboss/deboss design substantiates the heavyweight embossing theme, which is complemented by the extraordinary foil stamping and finishing effects.”

Additionally, the intent of the piece was to emphasize design options with a wide assortment of relief styles – styles such as raised roof, raised with textures, raised with a foiled lip, raised flat with rounded edge, etc. The resulting piece also highlights the advantages compared to cold foiling – the brilliance of the hot foil combined with the texture and embossing relief styles is something that cannot be matched through the cold foil process alone.

“Our general objective is to appeal to designers who have the primary goal of maintaining brand recognition while maximizing the ‘look + feel’ effects,” said Bohne. “We all recognize that the decision to buy a product is heavily influenced by the design elements of foil stamping, embossing, and other ever-evolving specialty effects. By contributing ideas and expertise to the designers, we assist them to achieve the ultimate goal to increase sales.”

Both Luxepack and *Creativ Verpacken* attract an international audience, so the cover design needed to possess a worldwide appeal while at the same time, speak to the needs

of differing market trends. Bohne explained, “For example, our European market tends to require less relief (embossing height) and typically does not vary much from the raised round relief style. For the same reason, we emphasized the design options to inspire a greater realm of creativity.”

On the other hand, the Asian market invests heavily to ‘value-add’ and ‘brand-protect’ its cigarette packaging. The packaging serves as a status symbol and actually can cost more than the cigarettes themselves. The U.S. market tends to lean toward heavy embossing and often a higher emphasis on eye-catching appeal.

With the idea to evolve the foldout magazine cover beyond its initial intent, a modified version was devised and the *Heavyweight Embossing Champion* belt soon took shape into yet another self-promotional opportunity. “We felt the U.S. market would especially identify with the piece,” said Bohne, “and the upcoming Luxepack in New York City and the IADD-FSEA Odyssey in Atlanta were perfect opportunities for us reach that audience.”

One thousand additional cover sheets were printed at the time of the initial magazine cover run with no printing on the backside except the foil stamped names of the die manufacturer (h+m), foil manufacturer (Kurz), and other participating companies. “We asked each of our worldwide subsidiaries to submit a limited number of customers and targeted contacts for a customized limited edition, which would be personalized with the name of each customer in gold foil,” said Bohne. The generic version instead has “2008” stamped in that position. Next, the sheets were diecut into the actual shape of heavyweight championship belts and fitted with silver rivets, just as they were for the magazine cover – a clever idea that demonstrated great attention to detail.

To add the finishing touch, the replica belts were accompanied by functional black cords and shipped directly to each customer. This allowed h+m to present a complete package – one that not only impressed but also, provided a bit of spirited fun as it was sported about at tradeshow and around the office.

“The design of the *Heavyweight Embossing Champion* belt demonstrates the diverse stylistic applications that are



possible through the finishing processes of foil stamping and embossing,” Bohne concluded. “From classic-modern styles to experimental contemporary graphics, these finishing processes are visually distinctive, creating enduring value and brand identity that distinguish a product from others on the shelf.”

### **Constructing a Championship Belt**

To produce a championship piece, communication from concept through to production was essential – paying close attention to every detail. Designed in Germany and executed on a Foil Commander FSA 1060 at the Gietz facility in Switzerland, communication with the press operator was equally important.

Produced one-up on a 14pt. C2S 28"x40" stock, the sheets were printed in five special colors and aqueous coated on a Heidelberg Speedmaster. A unique blend of gold and silver foils was utilized on each image to create a brilliance of richness and depth. The images were further complemented by multi-level embossing of varying depths and glistening textured patterns, creating a grandeur befitting the ultimate heavyweight embossing champion.

Tight registration, fast running speeds (7,800 sph), and high stamping pressure requirements were challenges easily met through a combination of the artistry and precision of the h+m CNC programmers, operators, and chief engraving engineers, as well as the high performance capabilities of the Gietz Commander press. “Our diemaking and quality control steps are tightly controlled to assure optimum performance of the resulting dies,” said Bohne.

In the first stamping/embossing pass, the copy “The Ultimate”, “Champion”, “Blocking” and “Stamping” were register embossed to ink with raised round edges. At the same time, the background of the copy was debossed flat. All of the brass foil stamping, embossing, sculptured, and textured dies were CNC-engraved by h+m. All the hot stamping foils were provided by Kurz.

In the second pass, the background gold of all three images was flat stamped with Luxor 428 HC matte gold metallic foil and the borders of each image combination stamped and embossed. A large 9"x18" die was required to produce all three areas in one pass. The ornamental design in each image and the heavy linked chains were combination stamped and embossed in the third pass with Luxor 385 HC utilizing both raised round and textured embossing effects.

The silver elements were combination stamped and embossed with Luxor 376 GTS Premium foil in the fourth pass,

which included the text “Foil”, “Power”, “Hot”, “Force”, “Heavyweight Embossing”, and the stars. Again, to demonstrate a variety of embossing effects, raised roof embossing was utilized to create the “Heavyweight” text and the stars and raised flat embossing was utilized on the text “Embossing”, while the remaining silver elements demonstrated raised round.

In the fifth pass, the man, the ornamental elements of the crown, and the text “Creativ Verpacken” were register embossed to print utilizing a multi-level sculptured die with a raised round effect. Finally, the holes for the rivets were diecut and the rivets inserted into place.

For the additional 1,000 belts that would be utilized as promotional pieces, the belts were diecut into the shape of the belt. To customize the pieces, the printed year (2008) was left off the center and a customer’s name flat stamped in its place. Additionally, a gold two-dimensional holographic foil was utilized on some of the belts to create even greater movement and luster. Finally, contact information for the participating companies was flat stamped on the backside of the pieces in a black pigment foil.

### **Championship Praise**

A brilliant success, the *Heavyweight Embossing Champion* belt created a stunning, eye-catching magazine cover that received high praise around the world. “The feedback to both the magazine cover and the distributed belts was phenomenal,” said Bohne. “It was very gratifying to receive the many nice compliments about the interesting and varied design, more so than in any previous promotional pieces we have distributed.” Nearly everyone in the U.S. market who received a customized belt contacted the h+m USA office in Charlotte to express appreciation, commending the organization for the impressive design and execution showcased on the piece. Echoing this praise, the h+m belt not only won a gold award in the 2008 Foil & Specialty Effects Association (FSEA) Gold Leaf Awards competition but also, it was honored with an ‘Honorable Mention’ for its supreme creativity, artistry, and execution.

As a final footnote to the success of the belt, the motto ‘Hot Stamping Die Manufacturing Meets Design’ evolved for h+m – a testament to the superior craftsmanship and design demonstrated by the *Heavyweight Embossing Champion* promotional piece. From their enduring value to their distinct power to differentiate a product, foil stamping and embossing are dubbed reigning champions for impact, value, shelf-appeal, and brand identity – pinning down a winning title of international recognition. ■