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BEST IN CLASS - UK PACKAGING AWARDS

PN celebrates the best packaging projects and companies on the 20th anniversary of the UK Packaging Awards, p21



Packaging in 2026: Pulse of the market

PN speaks to key personalities about expectations for 2026 4



Formulating for the major brands

Enhanced formulating skills fuel Expac's growth 15



Sector readies for UK Packaging Pact

Agreement prioritises material reduction and scaling reuse 14



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Expac sets the standards in mixing for the major brands

Waqas Qureshi visited BRC-accredited Expac in Preston to see how the formulations and full-service co-packing specialist is building on its portfolio of global brand clients and handling cost inflation.

Co-packing expert Expac was established in 1980, and acquired in 2016 by Dr Graham Royle, founder, chairman & chief executive of GRI Group – which specialises in the development, manufacture and distribution of chemical intermediates for personal care, household care, pharmaceutical and industrial applications.

Since then, Expac has enjoyed dramatic growth by a combination of investments in manufacturing technologies, hiring of top level professionals and continuous development of the workforce, networking to an extensive customer base through the GRI Group, and proactive marketing activities.

Today, Expac is a multi-award-winning formulator and manufacturer of an extensive range of personal care, household care and pet care products on behalf of a range of national and international clients, which includes blue chip multinationals through to single brand clients.

Products include both wet and dry hair care, skin care, bath & body and sun care, packed into a variety of bottles, tipples, tubes, tubs, and refill packs.

Between 2016 to 2025, under Royle, Expac saw £7.1m of high technology capital investments, and turnover has multiplied five-fold from £5m to £30m, with the workforce growing from 47 to 161.

According to Royle, next year is scheduled to deliver another increase in turnover, an additional £2.2m of capital investments and the hiring of a further 35 staff.

Expac said it wins and retains clients based on its advanced formulatory and manufacturing technologies and expertise, backed up by deep relationships and a focus on customer support.

The company has expanded to two sites, with additional 3PL logistics support, and is currently seeking a further manufacturing site for continued growth.

It recently won the BCMPA sponsored Contract Manufacturer & Packer of the Year at the UK Packaging Awards, having previously won the title twice.

Formulations

Royle said clients vary in their understanding of the chemistry of the products they may want from Expac.

Large clients often come with a clear brief or with their own formulas (which



Expac wins and retains clients based on its formulatory and manufacturing technologies

Expac tests and recommends improvements to), whereas smaller clients may have an idea of how they want their products to perform but lack the technical expertise to create formulas to achieve it.

Expac's sister company within GRI Group – Libra Speciality Chemicals – is a manufacturer of several ingredients in its products.

“The combination of both blending and reaction technologies in Expac's and Libra's laboratories is quite formidable, with all the cutting-edge analysis machines to identify every ingredient in a formula at molecular level. So, a client can bring a formula to Expac that they wish to replicate, or use as a starting point, and Expac can determine the exact contents of the formula on their behalf. This is one of Expac's key technical USPs,” explained Royle.

Full-service business

He explained that the preference is to supply the customer a full-service: “This features us creating samples of formulas, testing and approving the formulas in our lab, registration of the products, and creating the PIF (Product Information File) for them. We start with the technical end, we do all the production, and we typically do all the sourcing and procurement of chemicals, componentry, and packaging materials on behalf of our clients. And we give customers examples of different bottles, caps, and labels formats, as well as various formulas, colours and fragrances. We give detailed guidance of the performance and

efficacy of the proposed products.”

Tax and cost increases

The tax hikes on business in government budgets over the last 12 months have been fundamentally bad for the manufacturing sector, amongst others, according to Royle.

“Increases in labour rates, NICs, energy, environmental taxes and business rates have proven to be very punishing. The government has increased the national minimum wage (NMW) by more than 10% each year for the last four years, and we often cannot pass that on to clients, and their clients, the retailers, strongly resist price increases to that level.

“The government seems to fail to understand that large increases in the NMW reverberate through the whole payroll in order to maintain appropriate pay differentials amongst our staff.”

He explained that otherwise, you would find that an operator might be paid more than a line leader, a line leader may be paid more than a supervisor, or a QC inspector, etc: “Before you know it, you have increased the payroll through the whole business at rates that are way above inflation – that is extremely hard to absorb.”

He insisted that although the government's increased rate of employers' national insurance did not sound too large on the surface, the threshold at which it is paid was simultaneously reduced: “The combination has the effect of doubling employers NI on much of our payroll.

Once again, we must absorb this.”

He pointed out that the UK also suffers from one of the highest costs of energy in the world.

“We must overcome continually increasing operating costs by growing our turnover to ensure our margin generated always exceeds the increasing overheads of running the business. In other words, every year we have to sell more to make our profit. Many businesses struggle with flat turnover, which may lead to operating losses and possible business failures.”

Legislation's business impact

While recent legislative changes are costly, Expac is a “firm supporter” of the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) for packaging.

“Much of our responsibility to protect the environment and our clients is ensuring that our suppliers are compliant with all the regulations related to their products that we use, whether chemicals or materials – a time-consuming and expensive process.

“Unfortunately, the EU is a bureaucratic machine and has a tendency to create overlapping regulations that effectively cover the same thing. Take the regulations related to palm-based ingredients, for example. The EU has created RSPO, NDPE, REACH and EUDR regulations, which could easily be combined into one format, instead of the multiple and expensive versions.”

Review of 2025 and outlook for 2026

Royle insists that industry in the UK, and across Europe, is struggling with inflated costs and cheap imports, primarily from Asia.

“Everybody is taxed heavily and there are many European regulations that are meant to be market-protecting but have proven to be quite the opposite, such as the example with palm-based products.”

Royle said the strategy is to cut through the difficulties, accept the “many taxes”, and continue to grow the business by winning more home-grown market share and by “reshoring” more manufacturing back to the UK – by technical abilities and efficient manufacturing processes.

“Next year and onwards will not get any easier for British manufacturers, so we must adapt to the costs, regulations, and cheap imports by investing in ourselves and producing ever better technologies and exciting products. We will maintain our long-term vision and stay positive and proactive.” ■



Celebrating our 20th anniversary



Welcome to the UK Packaging Awards supplement – this year we celebrated the 20th edition of these prestigious awards.

The winners were revealed in October at a fantastic black-tie gala dinner at the Hilton Park Lane, London, marking two decades of packaging excellence, and the evening was hosted by the excellent TV comedian Paul Sinha.

These awards are part of the packaging

supply chain's DNA – so well established have they become – the benchmark for the packaging industry.

And it is truly an honour to be staging the event every year.

The last 12 months has seen the phased roll-out of key legislative changes - the wheels are definitely in motion – and the packaging sector is adapting to this.

In this section, you'll get to read about the winning entries from this year's programme and understand why the judges made their decisions.

The standard of entries was high, with our

judging panel again enthused by the levels of creativity and innovation in the market.

Thank you to everyone who entered this year's awards and congratulations to all our winners and highly commends.

A special thanks also to our sponsors – without their support, we would not have had a fantastic awards programme and night to enjoy.

I hope you gain some insight into these winning entries, and I encourage you to consider entering next year.

*Waqas Qureshi, editor,
Packaging News*

CO-MANUFACTURER & PACKER OF THE YEAR

SHORTLIST

- Expac (Preston)
- PrismeLogistics (UK)
- Rain Nutrience
- WePack



WINNER

Expac (Preston)

Judges said Expac saw a 35% increase in turnover last year, winning new contracts and upgrading processes: "This, coupled with a focus on innovation and sustainability principles, makes them a force to be reckoned with." One judge said: "Impressive growth in a highly competitive market. Quality team has more than doubled and achieves good accreditation standards Integrated sustainability in a convincing manner. Demonstrating innovation."



EXPAC

www.expac.co.uk

Multi-award Winning Contract Manufacturer of Personal Care, Skin Care, Household Care & Pet Care Products

Founded in 1980, Expac brings over 40 years of expertise in formulating and manufacturing globally recognised toiletries, cosmetics, and household products. Trusted for flexibility, quality, and service, we create everything from **powders and gels to oils, waxes, salts, balms, and alcohol-based formulations.**

Our 80,000 sq. ft. facility features multiple production lines, **filling from 10ml to 5 litres in bottles, tubes, jars, pouches, jerry cans, and more.** Additionally, our hand assembly area and gift packing lines enable us to support a wide range of contract packing needs.



Scan to discover
more about our
range of services



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ENTREPRENEURIAL BUSINESS OF THE YEAR OF THE YEAR

SHORTLIST

- Aegg
- Zeus Packaging



WINNER

Aegg

Aegg has grown from a loss-making business turning over £6.1m in 2018 to sales of £23.7m and EBITDA of £3.7m in 2024. Growth is forecast to continue throughout 2025. It says excellent customer service, industry knowledge and flexibility, has built loyalty with clients. Supporting Aegg's growth, £5m has been invested to open a Suffolk head office, two expansive warehouses, a manufacturing unit and the acquisition of over 30 vehicle units for the in-house transport team. The operations in Suffolk, particularly near Felixstowe docks, have led to the relocation of its teams to Eye, enhancing day-to-day operations, and assisting in continued expansion. Judges said: "The company has grown from a loss-making business to sales of £23m in 2024, and are sharply focussed and have established a strong market position with niche items."

EXPAC

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Expac is a British manufacturer of personal care, household care and pet care products. We have developed a reputation through demonstration for flexibility, quality and outstanding service, complemented with a personal touch for the customer and the brand.

Established in 1980, Expac has a long history in the Manufacturing and Contract Packing industry. As a result, we offer our clients expert knowledge and insights to help them leverage the competitive advantage in the chosen market sector.

With a wealth of product, formulation, and packaging expertise across our portfolio, Expac have the ability to manufacture a range of products from liquids, creams, balms and oils to powders, perfumes and salts and fill a broad range of packaging formats from 5ml to 5lt using our wide range of manufacturing lines. This flexibility gives Expac a solution for every brand, no matter the enquiry or requirement.

www.expac.co.uk