Improving Coding Flexibility

Condiments, dipping sauces, syrups and salad dressings are essential to the restaurant experience. The consumer's ability to add flavors to drinks and foods such as ice cream, sandwiches and salads is now regular practice in quick-service restaurants. Golden State Foods, with headquarters in Irvine, Calif., sets the standard for creating and manufacturing quality liquid products — such as condiments, salad dressings and flavored syrups — for the quick-service restaurant industry. The company produces and ships more than 20 million cases of liquid products annually, with many coming from the company's facility in Conyers, Ga.

At the Conyers plant, Golden State Foods' Liquid Products Division conducts research and development for new products, which the company then manufactures, packages and ships to quick-service restaurants worldwide. Golden State Foods offers customized packaging solutions to meet specific coding needs required by its customers or shipping regulations. In 2008, the company turned to Videojet Technologies, Inc. for a variable data printing solution that would enable customization of plain corrugated boxes as needed instead of storing many types of preprinted boxes.

Seeking Flexibility

Corrugated boxes used as secondary packaging for Golden State Foods feature information about the product, such as the ingredient list, expiration date or lot code. Some customers also require their company logo or country of origin information. Additional information is required for products that are exported out of the United States, such as an importer's number or other languages besides English. With so much variable content, Golden State Foods needed flexibility in its labeling process to meet specific requirements and be open to customer changes.

"We recognized that our customers might change their package size, ingredient list

or information requirements, such as the format for the expiration date," notes Dick Robinson, materials manager for Golden State Foods, Liquids, Conyers, Ga. "We needed to streamline the coding process and avoid storing boxes with preprinted information."

Previously, workers at Golden State Foods applied labels to boxes by hand. This meant labels were printed and applied before boxes were filled. In some cases, extra boxes were labeled and not used, so they needed to be stored until the customer required another shipment of the same product.

To eliminate storage hassles and hand-labeling, Golden State Foods purchased two Videojet® 2330 large character ink jet printers. The company intended to test the printers on a single packaging line for a year, but the benefits were so immediate that Golden State Foods began installing printers on additional lines within three months and now operates 12 printers on six production lines.

Streamlined Solution

The printers enable Golden State Foods to purchase plain corrugated boxes, which are less expensive than preprinted boxes and can be used for all shipments. The packaging engineer sets up the information to be coded on a desktop computer and then loads it onto the printers. The printers are installed on a conveyor line to code filled boxes as they come down the line. The line has one printer on each side, enabling Golden State Foods to code both sides of the boxes. The printers are networked so employees only need to change information on one of the two printers — both will print the same data.

To set up the printer, personnel working on the lines simply enter the product's SKU number, and the printer is automatically configured to print the information required for that specific item. This process reduces errors that can sometimes occur with manual operator entry.

In addition, the printers provide the flexibility to meet customer changes. They can code characters as large as 2.75 inches (70 mm), and the size of the characters can be scaled to meet customers' varying requirements or fit more information into a specific location on a box.

"If a customer wants to change how a code or logo looks, or add a word like 'New' to the box for six weeks, we can do that immediately," Robinson says. "It's been great to tell the customers that we can meet their request on the very next production run because it's just that easy to make printer changes."

The unique self-maintenance system on the printer eliminates wasted ink and downtime because operators don't need to stop a line to prime, purge and clean the printhead. The self-maintenance system is non-contact, so it avoids printhead damage that can occur during periodic maintenance required on other ink jet printers. Golden State Foods found that the printers run smoothly and efficiently, enabling the company to print approximately four boxes per minute per line while minimizing operator intervention.

The printer recycles ink used for automatic printhead maintenance and uses it for printing after filtration. Robinson appreciates that the ink is not wasted and estimates that Golden State Foods can print on thousands of boxes from each can of ink. Plus, the cans are easy to install, and all of the Videojet printers at Golden State Foods require the same type of ink, eliminating the possibility of installing the wrong type of fluid in a printer.

Professional Codes

Golden State Foods also found the printers have aided in the company's own marketing efforts. When the product development team pitches a new product to a customer, it can quickly mock up a box with the customer's logo and product information.

"Everything we code with the Videojet printers looks crisp, clear and professional," Robinson says. "We are capable of production runs as small as 25 cases or that run for five straight shifts. Changeover from one product to another takes less than a minute, and we can rely on the code quality of the printers throughout the entire process. If the codes weren't clear, we would not be able to ship the product, which would lead to the need for rework and added expense and time."

The Videojet 2330 printers enabled Golden State Foods to streamline its corrugated coding process, avoid errors that can lead to unplanned downtime and eliminate the need to store extra boxes. As a result, Robinson says the company can spend more time focusing on its core competency — making quality condiments.

For more information, go to www.videoget.com [1].

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