

Label management and the extended supply chain



Ken Moir: "Labelling systems have moved away from being a 'box' to becoming a complete business system offering greater agility and empowering business users to streamline the whole labelling process."

For many years, label design was largely something that was undertaken using a software package installed on a PC. However, today's state-of-the-art web-based printing and labelling solutions can allow companies to maximise value for their own businesses – and their partners – by providing a single, scalable platform to manage all their global labelling and marking management needs. At NiceLabel, we call this new category of solution LMS (label management systems). Initially it was mainly the larger companies that began to deploy this type of technology. Now, based on the compelling deliverables enjoyed by these enterprise-level organisations, we are seeing an increasing number of smaller companies taking on board this type of solution – and across all core vertical sectors.

The silo issue

Within the food & beverage industry, for example, one of the largest global dairy companies is standardising on a NiceLabel LMS. Previously, they relied on a number of

different label printers, and continuous inkjet printers (CIJ) at dairies around the world. Each dairy would undertake its own type of integration with the Manufacturing Execution System (MES). There were also a number of local IT companies providing integration support for connecting the printers to the MES. This resulted in escalating IT costs or sometimes even unplanned downtime.

Some production lines had no integration and the printers were operated standalone with manual data entry. If a user typed in the wrong best-before date, the item would ship to, say, a large supermarket chain and it would be rejected, and would be scrapped because it was perishable.

Lost sales can naturally have a serious effect on a company's profitability. Even if this amounts to just 1% of a company's turnover this could equate to millions of Pounds. So the cost of LMS software is completely irrelevant by comparison.

Therefore, the company decided to move away from relying on many different printing and labelling systems throughout their dairies globally and standardise on one LMS for all its labelling and marking requirements. It initially approached some of its existing providers of labelling and marking solutions to come up with a standardised solution, but this proved not to be forthcoming, largely due to different providers only being able to support their own printing equipment.

Standardised integration

The remedy was for NiceLabel to share the dairy company's vision and develop standardised drivers not just for its labelling requirements but also for its direct

By Ken Moir, VP marketing, NiceLabel.

marking needs. This allowed the company to benefit from having a single unified solution with standardised integration with the MES at each dairy to automate the printing process. The company can now provide all its dairies with this pre-built integration. Also, because it's a single solution – rather than various different methods of integration – the company can provide its own centralised global 24/7 support. This results in significant reductions in IT costs as well as a more consistent, centralised means of support, which results in less unplanned downtime, which helps to secure a fast return on investment (ROI). However, the really big numbers are to be found in less rejected product due to more accurate data entry.

Selling more

Another NiceLabel client within the food & beverage sector is a Belgian bakery company that sells freshly prepared sandwiches in its stores. Because people need to queue to buy their fresh sandwiches during busy periods, the company wanted to find a way to sell sandwiches pre-packed. However, when sandwiches are pre-packed a label must be put on the package in order to comply with allergens and nutrition regulations. With NiceLabel's centralised web printing solution managed at the company's HQ, staff at all its stores can now simply log in, access the solution and print the labels out on-site. This queue-busting advantage means the company now sells more sandwiches.

Extended supply chain

Greater control and collaboration within the extended supply chain is now more important than ever. Take the retail sector,

for example. NiceLabel works with a number of retailers on supplier labelling. In the case of a leading luxury goods retailer, our LMS was initially deployed within a number of regional warehouses, then to several manufacturing sites and has now just been rolled out across the business. The next stage of development for the retailer is to deploy the solution within its branded shops so that labels and tags can be reprinted in store so products don't have to be sent back to the warehouse, which could result in lost sales opportunities.

Brand protection

Also, from a brand consistency and brand protection perspective, the retailer is now able to control suppliers' labelling activity and to be able to stop production overruns by building-in anti-counterfeiting RFID methodology that can be controlled via the web.

[subhead] Quality or regulatory compliance

Any company that relies on a quality management system to remain ISO 9001 compliant should consider LMS as it provides similar quality controls and procedures for the entire labelling process. Highly regulated industries such as life sciences (medical device manufacturers and pharmaceutical) require a centralised, standardised labelling solution and it is critical in order for these companies to remain compliant.

Regulatory requirements are very similar in both the medical device and pharmaceutical sectors. In the US, for example, both are regulated to 21 CFR Part 11, part of the Code of Federal Regulations that establishes the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations on electronic records and electronic signatures (ERES). One of NiceLabel's clients in this area is pharmaceutical manufacturing company Krka, which delivers medications to more than 70 countries worldwide. The company has centralised and standardised its labelling operations with NiceLabel's LMS. The solution has improved Krka's master data management, streamlined compliance and provided a next-generation system to support future growth.

Complete system

Labelling systems have moved away from being a 'box' to becoming a complete business system offering greater agility and empowering business users to streamline the whole labelling process. It's about not relying so much on IT; for example, for making label change requests. We see this need across all industries and among all sizes of company. Companies want universal intelligent labels and the ability to consolidate label variations. They also want to mitigate risk and optimise processes by being able to seamlessly integrate with the ERP's or MES's master data. NiceLabel is dedicated to helping businesses to modernise and achieve significant financial and productivity gains from their labelling process. We call this 'print productivity'. ●

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