

LITHO LABELS' RELEVANCY IN A DIGITAL WORLD



PLANTS WITH BOTH SOLUTIONS ARE ABLE TO PROVIDE MORE DIVERSE PRINTING OPTIONS TO THEIR CUSTOMERS.

**BY REBECCA RENDON
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When digital printing innovation was introduced to the corrugated industry many admitted to thinking that it would replace litho labeling all together. As time goes on, plants are finding that digital print isn't the slam dunk replacement for litho printing that many thought it would be. Instead, these are proving to be complementary processes that expand capabilities for box plants.

Jerry Frisch, owner of Wasatch Container, explains that he was one of those people who, at one point, thought digital printing would eliminate the need for labelers. "I went to the AICC digital packaging seminar last year and so many of us came away from that thinking digital printing would take label business off the map, but what I learned was that digital printing is just another method of printing. It's not an 'either or.' Labels will always be the 'go-to' for those high-quality graphics, but digital is enhancing the ability to graphically print quickly. Digital printing is helping to grow our e-commerce business and produce a box that someone is excited to open."



Litho labels are an ideal solution for larger quantities and a desire for higher quality graphics.

“Labels will always be the ‘go-to’ for those high-quality graphics, but digital is enhancing the ability to graphically print quickly,” says Jerry Frisch of Wasatch Container.

Frisch goes on to say that using the two solutions helps to diversify his product offering to customers.

“Digital printing brings a lot of versatility to the market. It allows you to bring different options to your customers and open doors that labeling does not,” says Gabriel Perez, Plant Manager at Bay Cities. Bay Cities was one of the first independents to get into digital printing several years ago when it purchased an HP Scitex FB700 as a way to expand its printing capabilities and offer customers more “flavor and styles.”

“Some customers don’t want mass quantities, they want fewer quantities with more variety,” adds Perez, explaining that customers want the option to promote things differently, depending on the market segment and the customer base.

After purchasing two additional digital printers, the latest being a Barberan Jetmaster 1750, they are true believers in the versatility that digital printing offers their customers. However, when walking the plant floor, you will still see their “workhorse,” an Automatan 7780 labeler. When asked about their use of both, Perez explains that “although digital print has its benefits, there is certainly still and always will be a need for labelers.”

“There’s certain criteria that will lead you down the path to choose one method or the other, there are pros to both though,” says Seamues Ramos, Operations Manager at Wasatch Container. “These print methods are equally valuable tools in your toolbox,” says Dennis Tackmier, Product Manager for Automatan, as he explains the differences between the two.

Differentiating Factors

Quality, quantity and the skill of the operator are some of the common factors that are taken into consideration when deciding which is the right choice for a plant or job.

Quality has been a point that many agree on. “Digital print, though very good, still doesn’t achieve the level of quality that labeling can. If you’re looking for a nice, shiny, photo quality finish, labels are the way to go,” says Tackmier.

Quantities also play a role in determining the breakeven point of digital printing vs labeling. “For lower quantities with multiple outputs, digital printing makes sense. Whereas, higher quantities and a desire for higher quality graphics, would lead you to labels instead,” he says.

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Cost is another factor that differentiates the two methods. The cost of ink, storing and maintaining ink and maintenance costs are some reasons that customers have chosen to stick with labeling. The upfront costs of purchasing a digital printer are much higher than labelers, and the labor costs can also be higher due to the skill needed to operate the printer. “We’ve had several integrated customers tell us that they are using labelers instead of digital printers because of the trouble they have in finding employees with the expertise needed to run them,” says Tackmier. “Oftentimes labeling is a more reasonable solution

for smaller plants that can’t afford to invest millions for a digital printer.”

Aside from quality, quantities and costs, plants may choose to run one machine or the other to achieve higher throughput and better flow through their facility.

What we know for certain is that there are applications that make sense for both methods of printing. “A year ago, we had customers saying they were not going to do any more labeling but all of those customers have come back and now see the value to both,” Tackmier says. “We have seen no customers move exclusively to digital printing, which is a key indicator

that there is still a need for labeling.”

Although digital printers offer the versatility and fast speed to market, the industry is realizing that there is still a need for labelers and that plants with both printing solutions are able to provide better options to their customers and diversify their printing capabilities. ■



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