Transtar Autobody Technologies

At a glance

Profile:
Manufacturer and distributor of specialty automotive coatings, sealants and more for the autobody aftermarket

Business Problems:
- Manual processes and hand-labeling system
- Decreased productivity
- Increased labor time
- Difficulty tracking errors

Goals:
- Increase productivity
- Reduce labor costs
- Reduce errors
- Improve customer service

Solution:
- Intermec PM4i, PX6i Smart Printers
- ToolWorx SmartPack™ software
- PCM/Image-Tek Applicators

Results:
- Productivity increase by 40 percent on the packaging line
- Gains of nearly full batch per day
- Improved customer service through error tracking improvements

Transtar Improves Business IQ with Smart Printing Solution

With upwards of 70 pallets of product to prepare and ship each day, operations need to move quickly for Transtar Autobody Technologies, a Michigan-based manufacturer and distributor of specialty automotive coatings, adhesives, sealants and more. However, with a manual labeling process that required two hours each morning to apply more than 4,000 sticker labels – by hand – the company was experiencing a high percentage of errors and lower overall productivity than their growing business required.

"As Transtar has grown over the past 70 years, we saw that we could not continue down the path of doing things manually," said Tom Gambaccini, IT Manager for Transtar.

The company couldn't easily track shipment errors, and in fact was spending increased staff hours on a manual process growing increasingly outdated. They sought a seamless transition from the outdated labeling process to a streamlined, easy-to-implement solution that would increase productivity, reduce lengthy preparation time and increase customer satisfaction.

The solution? Intermec PM4i and PX6i Smart Printers, PCM/Image-Tek Applicators and SmartPack™ software from ToolWorx Information Products.

Navigating a Sticky Situation

"We're trying to build lines with the future in mind, so we looked to ToolWorx to help us implement a solution to not only meet our current needs, but that would also keep us ahead of the game as our production and technologies increase," said Keith Palmer, Transtar Production Manager.

With human error percentages increasing, ToolWorx, a systems integrator specializing in automated data collection applications for traceability and error proofing, worked with Transtar to implement their SmartPack™ Smart Printing software – offering Transtar a new system where all guesswork was removed, something their previous system couldn't offer.

"Before, at the end of the day, if we scanned an order containing boxes that didn't belong, we had to go back and figure out where the mistake was made and how to correct it," said Tony Berecz, Transtar Filling and Packaging Coordinator. "This added a lot of labor on the shipping end and on our end."

Intermec
by Honeywell

Additionally, the solution needed to fit within Transtar's production floor space constraints – and Smart Printing doesn't require additional room for a PC.

"I searched for a solution with the least amount of variables – where I could point my finger in one direction to keep things moving forward," said Gambaccini. "Smart Printing was one of the only options that allowed us to do just that."

A Smart Choice

After implementing the Smart Printing system, packaging line productivity increased almost instantly by 40 percent.

Because Intermec Smart Printers have the power of a personal computer built right in, they enable businesses to change the way their printing operations are structured, simplifying processes and cutting back on additional operating costs.

The Smart Printing system implemented by ToolWorx not only creates the case label, but then scans it immediately afterward, counts it, and creates a pallet label when the correct number of cases are stacked onto the pallet. All of this processing is controlled by the Smart Printer, making it simple and intuitive for users.

"My operators have not had any formal training rather than hands-on training," said Berecz. "It was just so easy and straightforward in three easy steps – step one: scan, step two: program, step three: you're done."

Transtar also knew Intermec Smart Printers would be rugged enough to withstand the constantly changing manufacturing environment.

"That in itself is huge for us – the printers are self-contained, portable, I can move the equipment to any line I have," said Gambaccini.

Resulting in Excellence

After implementation, the 40 percent productivity increase was due in large part to process improvements and automation, one of which included a red light and alarm in the event of an error.

"Before we wouldn't know about most errors until the end of the day or when they were getting ready to be shipped out," said Berecz. "Now we are notified in real-time if there's a problem. This allows us to solve many errors before they happen, something we just couldn't do before."

After reducing prep time from two hours to just 15 minutes, the saved labor has also allowed Transtar additional time to run more production orders.

"To complete what I'm now able to do would have taken about 14 hours on our previous system. Now I'm done in eight," said Berecz. "We are more turn-key. If you look at the process we used to do, I'm almost gaining a full batch a day."

The change has also increased customer satisfaction, as the ToolWorx system allows any error to be traced.

"When a customer calls and says they possibly did not receive what they ordered or that it was damaged, we can actually go back into the database and figure out every detail – from when we ran it, to what pallet it was on, to who pulled the order and exactly what was scanned. This is a huge value to make sure our customers are 100 percent satisfied, and to ensure they get what they ordered on time," said Berecz.

In terms of reliability, the surface residue and dust that caused problems for Transtar's equipment in the past hasn't interfered with the Intermec Smart Printers to date.

"They've withstood the rigors of the manufacturing environment very well," said Palmer.

Berecz added "These sit right out in the open, right in the thick of it, and they start right up every day and go to work."

Preparing for the future

One of the key factors in choosing the ToolWorx system and Intermec Smart Printers was their capabilities for the future.

"Intermec is a major player in the market and there are plenty of other solutions out there, but we believe we bought into the quality of the product," said Gambaccini. "It was really important to us that we didn't adopt something that would quickly outdate ourselves in the future. This system has the capabilities for us to add components to increase our throughput and will be right along with the tools we'll use in the future."

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