**Taking the Leap: Our Decision to Bring Labeling In-House**

As a medical device manufacturer, it is critical for us to maximize the safety and efficiency of our supply chain in order to deliver high quality goods to the marketplace and to satisfy specific industry regulations and pass rigorous FDA testing protocols.

Our portfolio includes a variety of products for the toxicology industry, including drug test kits for medical examiners, departments of justice, forensics teams and police departments. We work with over 500 SKUs, some of which require refrigeration, and many of our kits are produced, packaged and distributed the same day. These complexities put a lot of pressure on our supply chain and production processes to work seamlessly.

Our process offered the flexibility we needed in every area except one: labeling. We were relying on a two-step labeling process – where we would order pre-printed color labels and then print black and white variable data in-house – which proved to be insufficient to keep up with market changes. For one, label management was taking more time than any other aspect of production. If we ran out of or were low on labels for a given SKU, it took a long time to reorder and restock our inventory. Our customers also began requesting unique marking, such as QR codes, to be included on the labels for their internal inventory management. This customization was difficult when relying on pre-printed stock. We were also experiencing quality issues with the label media. Labels were tearing and graphics were smudging or rubbing off when coming in contact with certain chemicals or being exposed to specific environments. The pending GHS labeling requirements from OSHA was the proverbial straw that broke the camel’s back. We knew we need to identify an alternative labeling solution.

We explored two possible paths: finding a new label supplier or switching our in-house printers to inkjet or thermal color label printers. Any solution would need to meet with requirements of our ISO 13485 and ISO 9001 certifications as well as be GMP compliant. After conducting some research online, we decided to consult with Neway Packaging Corporation, our partner for sourcing, installing and maintaining our packaging equipment. After analyzing our situation, they recommended that we explore bringing all labeling production in-house. They helped us narrow down the field of options to two printing solutions and arranged for side-by-side demos of the equipment so we could make an informed decision.

We ultimately chose to embark on a 60-day trial run with [Epson’s ColorWorks™ C7500 Inkjet Label Printer](http://www.epson.com/cgi-bin/Store/jsp/Product.do?sku=C31CD84011) to produce on demand color labels. First, we validated it against FDA requirements, checking installation, operation and the process of the printer. We then really put the printer to the test and ran over 500 different labels. In addition to checking for speed, quality and consistency, we verified if the labels met military standard specifications. This involves ensuring labels are extremely durable and resistant to climatic, chemical, nuclear and biological environments.

The ColorWorks™ C7500 printer passed all of these tests with flying colors. The printer also delivered a number of other benefits. It has better ink yield and print quality than any other solution we have owned. The system is also very user-friendly and operates at very high speeds, which are at least five times faster than our legacy printer.

While we were initially hesitant to switch from our established two-step process, making the change has been well worth it. We were strategic in our approach and took the steps and time we needed before making a final purchase decision. The speed of the ColorWorks™ C7500 ensures we can meet client demands for color coding and color imagery and puts us in a strong position to adapt to the always evolving labeling requirements for our industry. We were even able to find a new use for the system: printing internal codes to help maximize inventory management.

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