

Ice cream maker melts label inventory

Nutrition labeling requirements threatened to throw a real wrench in the works at one family-owned dairy. Thermal-transfer printing on-site was the answer.



Charlap's uses one size label for quarts and another for half-gallons; both are supplied on rolls.

On-site, thermal-transfer printing of pressure-sensitive paper labels is proving to be an ideal solution to what could have been an inventory nightmare at Charlap's Dairy.

Based in Hamburg, NY, this family-owned and operated dairy products producer packs 40 different flavors of ice cream. The only printing or package identification on the 1-qt and 1/2-gal tubs is on the lid.

Until recently, the company ordered a single lid. It was preprinted with "Vanilla" as the flavor as well as company name and address. To use the lid for a flavor other than vanilla, the company simply overlabeled the lid with a p-s label printed with the appropriate flavor. While this system worked, says company president Henry Charlap, it left plenty of room for improvement.

"I wanted to keep about five thousand labels in inventory for each flavor, so that meant managing two hundred thousand labels in inventory," says Charlap.

The company managed to do this efficiently enough, until Congress passed the Nutrition Labeling and Education Act in the early '90s. Because it required a printed breakdown of the calories, cholesterol, dietary fiber content and so on for each of Charlap's ice cream varieties, something had to change in the company's carton decorating scheme.

And change it did when Charlap's installed a thermal-transfer printer from Diagraph (St. Louis, MO). The LPT/1050 Series printer enables Charlap's to print its own flavor-specific labels on-site. Operators then apply the labels to the lids by hand. Supplied by Paper Distributors Inc. (Buffalo, NY), lids and tubs are manufactured by Berry Plastics (Evansville, IN). Lids are injection-molded of linear low-density polyethylene. Tub lids are injection-

molded from high-density PE.

One necessary step prior to the implementation of the new labeling approach was a call to all ingredient suppliers. "I told each one that I needed the nutrition facts for their particular ingredient," says Charlap. That information was then entered into the software that helps drive the LPT/1050 printer.

Software combo

Two software packages work in conjunction at Charlap's. For development of the nutrition facts information, Genesis software from ESHA (Salem, OR) is used. Charlap's simply enters the serving size, the ingredients and the amount of each ingredient. The software calculates all the dietary information that must go on the label. Then, Diagraph's Performance Series Software for Windows(TM) is used to display and print out the label format.

"You just plug in the information, and the label is



Variable information is printed as needed by the thermal-transfer printer

No shelf life

“If you keep a roll of labels too long, they just don’t stick right,” says Charlap. “Especially in the cold temperatures that ice cream requires. I’ve been in the freezer and seen labels just fall right off.” That’s not a problem with the new labels, says Charlap.

“I haven’t had one come off yet,” he says. “And they don’t fray, either, even when we get ice cream drippage on the label. We just chip it off and it doesn’t mar the finish on the label.”

Helping to keep the 4-1/2" x 5-1/2" labels where they belong regardless of temperature is a special low-temperature, acrylic adhesive from the maker of the labelstock, Avery Dennison, Fasson Roll Division (Painesville, OH).

created,” says Charlap. “The software lets us store all of the nutrition facts for each flavor. If we’re doing strawberry ice cream, for instance, the operator just enters the quantity of labels needed and the printer prints out exactly that amount. It’s completely eliminated preprinted label inventory for us.”

Currently Charlap’s carries two different label sizes, one for quart lids and the other for 1/2-gal lids. But the firm is looking into using the same label on both sizes. “If that works out,” says Charlap, “we’ll only have to inventory one label size.”

Supplied by Diagraph, labels in use at Charlap’s are a 50# ultra-smooth paper stock. They’re custom-printed flexographically in two colors by Diagraph. They’re die-cut to shape the contour of the round ice-cream container lids. Inside the colorful blue and red border, white space allows for variable information to be imprinted, including flavor, container size, nutrition facts, ingredients and a UPC bar code for scanning at the checkout counter.

Charlap says the new labels save both time and money. They also enhance appearance because they don’t peel or fall off as labels applied under the old method did.



Now Charlap prints as many labels as it needs for a specific flavor and operators apply them to lids by hand

The new labels have been in use at Charlap for a little more than a year now, and Henry Charlap, for one, does not miss the old way.

“We don’t have to go into inventory looking for a specific label flavor only to discover we’ve run out,” says Charlap. “We run two hundred of a flavor at a time, and we do it when we need them.” ‡

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