

Now Brewing: New Material Handling Solutions

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The surge of craft brewing over the last several years has driven many discussions around how to quickly scale product identification operations to better meet retailer requirements as breweries grow more sophisticated distribution networks over time. With craft breweries increasing their production capacity and distribution, we see a trend in them moving away from pre-printed boxes and hand applied labels in favor of adopting print-on-demand inkjet technology. Print-on-demand inkjet technology offers many benefits for a growing brewery including a lower cost-per-mark compared to pressure sensitive labels as well as more flexibility for managing corrugate stock volumes and case sizes.

Our recommended high resolution inkjet technology, FoxJet ProSeries printheads, have been recently enhanced to consistently print scannable barcodes on porous cases at higher speeds. When automating the printing of product identification equipment on cases, brewers are also looking at integrating scan and select capabilities into their case coding operation to make product changeovers and subsequent print message changes effortless and free of human error. This involves using a hand scanner to scan a barcode from a work order which in turn selects the correct message to be printed on the case. This is often paired with a barcode vision system which can verify the readability of barcodes before they are palletized and shipped to retailers, making for a turnkey case coding solution that will scale as breweries continue to grow their production capacity and complexity.

Moving up the production line to focus on primary packaging product identification needs, we also see a growing desire for high contrast date coding on bottles and cans that are dark in color. With a focus on freshness, an increasing number of craft breweries are requesting to use yellow and light blue inks to make the date code and other important product information pop out to consumers. The introduction of the Linx 8900 Plus soft pigment inkjet printer allows brewers to print high contrast codes on their bottles and cans while avoiding the difficulty commonly found with traditional pigmented ink printers. A special ink agitation methodology keeps the printer ready to print high quality codes while avoiding downtime from frequent printer faults. Recent advancements with Linx soft pigmented inks protect them from smudging or smearing during bottling and canning processes.

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