



featuring the A-Class printing solution
identification labels for home improvement ■■■



Before most consumers buy a new solid surface for their kitchen or bath, they first gather together handfuls of sample chips to help them make informed decisions about color selection and surface choices. A few small chips pulled from a key ring or binder at a home improvement center might not seem like a big deal, but when the demand for those chips is multiplied by hundreds of shoppers in thousands of home improvements stores, keeping up with the demand for free sample chips becomes a monumental manufacturing endeavor.

To keep up with customers' increasing demand for chips, Wilsonart, a manufacturer of decorative laminate and acrylic solid surfaces, has dedicated a full-time production line to the task. Running virtually non-stop, the Wilsonart sample chip line produces a large number of laminate and solid surface chips each year. While Wilsonart produces a variety of samples in myriad colors, each chip has one thing in common: a print-apply identification label.

Applying labels to sample chips is not new to Wilsonart. For more than a decade, they've relied on Datamax-O'Neil printers to do the job. Because their Datamax-O'Neil printers had performed so well for so long, Wilsonart decided to use a new generation of Datamax printers when the company elected to modernize the operation of their sample chip line. To create a new technologically advanced print-apply system for the production of sample chips, Wilsonart turned to Irvine, California based Code-in-Motion, who designed their original sample labeling solution in the 1990s.

According to Dan Popovich, vice president of operations for Code-in-Motion, Wilsonart sought an updated system that would minimize the number of labels wasted during the changeover from one batch of sample chips to another. In order to lower the total cost

of ownership for Wilsonart, Code-in-Motion created an advanced system that relies on six Datamax-O'Neil A4212 printers. The Datamax-O'Neil A4212 printers are ideally suited to high-performance print and apply applications such as the one found on Wilsonart's sample chip line.

The Datamax-O'Neil A-Class family of advanced print engines includes various innovative design features such as stainless steel hardware components, a modular electronics card cage, a field installable thermal transfer ribbon assembly, a remote control panel and a full graphics display. Designed specifically for print and apply applicator integration, the A-Class utilizes the Datamax-O'Neil A4212 printers work in a unique and novel manner to minimize the number of labels wasted during product changeovers that are a frequent occurrence on the sample chip line at Wilsonart. "A three-foot high stack of labels is automatically fed into a vacuum-cup pick-an-place system puts the freshly labeled sample chip onto a cart, ready for shipment to the home improvement center. The result is an ideal environment for unrestricted speed matching between the passing sample chip and the label to be applied," Popovich says.

Another unique aspect of the new solution is its ability to act as a broadcast print system. "With the Datamax-O'Neil A4212 printers, Wilsonart has the option to use a PC to initiate one print command and have that data automatically communicated to all six printers simultaneously," says Popovich.

The Datamax-O'Neil OEM Print Engine also functions as one of the two drive systems that manage the controlled and continuous movement of the label media through the automated system.

With six new Datamax-O'Neil A4212 printers incorporated into the Code-in-Motion solution at Wilsonart, the company is able to apply labels to 300 sample chips every 45 seconds. "The Datamax-O'Neil printers run practically around the clock, printing accurately and reliably," says Popovich. "The uptime is great, and there is minimal waste in terms of label stock during changeovers. From an industry perspective, there are very few closed-loop systems that reach this level of performance."

