

case study



Labeled for Success

Koegel Meats Improves Inventory Management and Accuracy, Boosts Operational Efficiency, Thanks to Intermec by Honeywell PM4i Smart Printers and ToolWorx SmartPack Software.

For more than 90 years, Koegel Meats, Inc. has specialized in providing only the best to their customers in the form of unique hardwood-smoked hot dogs, sausages and lunch meats. And it was the same dedication to customer service that led them to look for a new solution that would offer a more streamlined approach to their plant's labeling and product tracking operations.

With all products being produced and distributed in their 100,000 square foot Flint, Michigan facility, the company was operating an antiquated manual labeling system that required roll label dispensers equipped with roll-style date imprinters. They also had to stock a separate label for each product and were experiencing major downtime as a result. Their print quality had also begun to falter, causing unreadable labels. In short, they realized it was time for a major technology upgrade.

Honeywell

However, because of the facility's wash-down cooler environment, any new solution involving PCs, displays, keyboards and all the resulting wires and fans – in addition to printers – was not an option. Koegel needed a simpler, cleaner and more reliable solution to improve their product labeling and tracking.

They turned to Informs Inc. and their partner ToolWorx, a systems integrator specializing in automated data collection applications for traceability and error proofing, to provide a seamless transition from their existing labeling process to a more innovative solution that would allow for increased accuracy and efficiency.

The Solution? Intermec by Honeywell PM4i Smart Printers coupled with ToolWorx SmartPack software.

Getting Smart

Before partnering with Informs, Koegel Meats wasted time changing labels and date slugs for each product. They were using pre-printed labels and adding a code date using outdated rolling slug style printers with automatic label dispensers. Some of their labels were even printed outside of the department, which required them to guess how many labels would be needed for production runs of various sizes.

This typically resulted in pre-printing more labels than needed, as over-printing and throwing away unused labels was easier than halting production to produce additional labels should they run out. This system resulted in a huge amount of waste – something Koegel hoped a new technology solution would help resolve.

“We looked for a very simple, easy-to-use labeling solution to apply barcodes, product descriptions and date information on our products, but given our facility's environment we couldn't have anything with elaborate wiring and cables,” said Jim Lay, Plant Manager at Koegel Meats. “Smart Printing was clearly the right choice for us.”

“The Intermec [by Honeywell] equipment is reliable and easy to use. It's been a great fit to our current processes.”

– Jim Lay, Plant Manager, Koegel Meats

Integrating New Technology

ToolWorx helped Koegel Meats install the ToolWorx SmartPack solution with Intermec by Honeywell PM4i Smart Printers at each of their production cells.

“Under the new system, production is much more streamlined,” said Lay. “Now, at each work station the line operator enters a product number, which then populates all of the product information automatically. In the case of fixed-weight products, the products come down the production line and labels are dispensed on-demand. These labels contain all of the pertinent information, including product name, case weight, sell-by date and time, and in some cases, product ingredients.”

In the case of random weight products, cases are placed on a scale at the end of the production line. The scales are attached to the Intermec by Honeywell printers and automatically transmit the weight information. After receiving weight, the printers dispense a label in real time with all of the product information.

“In this situation, the labels are now not printed until needed, so we ensure that each label has the correct information,” said Lay.

Additionally, some of Koegel's new smart printers are situated on mobile carts along with the scale platform, meaning they can move to wherever they're needed in the facility.

Lay also noted the solution was easy and intuitive for staff to implement.

“The roll-out only took a few weeks and overall went very well,” said Lay. “Employees adapted very quickly because of the simplicity of the equipment.”

Streamlining Success

“It's now a very simple changeover from one batch of product to the next. We also have automated inventory control data and tracking capabilities we never had in the past,” said Lay.

Overall, the solution has allowed Koegel Meats much more efficient operations. Additionally, there are no wasted labels and product identification has improved.

“Without the addition of these printers to the department, we would not have been able to implement the product tracking we are currently able to do,” said Lay. “The addition of the bar code labels containing a unique ID serial number allows us to accurately track all products from production to the store level.”

With new tracking capabilities and more streamlined operations, Lay said they are more than pleased with the updates.

“The Intermec by Honeywell equipment is reliable and easy to use,” said Lay. “It's been a great fit to our current processes.”

For the Future

In the future, and as food traceability legislation expands, Lay says he knows their new technology solution will keep them ahead of the curve.

“Not only does this solution work for our current needs, but it allows us to further expand our product tracking down the road should we need to go that route,” said Lay. “The solution helps future-proof our operations and maximize our overall investment for years to come.”

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