

case study



AstralPool Makes a Big Splash with an Automated Labeling Solution from Intermec by Honeywell.

AstralPool is a leading international brand in the swimming pool and spa industry, manufacturing and supplying a complete range of equipment extending from pool pumps, pool cleaners, pool filters to pool heating. Their products are distributed in over 170 countries and available at more than 100 sales offices and branches located across 30 countries.

At AstralPool's Noble Park manufacturing location in Melbourne, Victoria, 3,500 line items and a total of around 2.6 million finished goods and components are shipped out to approximately 4,000 customers nationally and internationally.

“Over the past five years with growth of around 20% per year, AstralPool's manufacturing and distribution centre was looking for a technology solution that could significantly boost the efficiency of our product and packaging labeling process. Specifically, we wanted to invest in a modern labeling system that could significantly cut the amount of time spent printing labels, offer the flexibility to meet the varying labeling requirements of our international and local customers and reduce waste,” said Brendan Butler, Production Manufacturing Manager, AstralPool.

Honeywell

A Dated System Struggling to Stay Afloat

From the conception of AstralPool's Noble Park location in the 1990's up until 2012, the labeling software system was run from a desktop computer connected to a printer which was managed by the production planner. This saw the production planner printing up to 5,000 labels per day prior to the products actually being produced.



Considering AstralPool Noble Park's strong growth over the past ten years and the amount of products manufactured doubling and tripling, it is little surprise that the number of labels needed to identify these products has sky-rocketed. The database containing all the different label templates required for each customer had in turn been increasing. In recent years this left the production planner with a complex maze to navigate each day when it came time to print off all the required labels.

Aside from the huge difficulties locating the right label to print in the system, another issue for the production planner was that labels were printed in bulk. The production planner would print what they judged to be enough labels for the entire day, rather than waste time having to re-navigate through the database

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over and over. During the day changes in production and label details often led to fluctuations in the number of labels needed, subsequently wasting labels or further time printing more labels.

The main catalyst for change eventually came when AstralPool's labels were no longer approved for all the markets that they sold into around the world. This predominantly applied to the U.S market, which began requiring that labels adhered to UL Standards for Safety, the labeling

standards introduced in the European market as well as the Australian Gas Association requirements.

Filtering the Problems Out

Driven by the need to source a new labeling solution to meet the UL Standards, which will likely require them to add another labeling supplier to an already long list, AstralPool decided it was time for a system overhaul.

“AstralPool contacted Peacock Bros and explained their desire to find and integrate a new technology solution that would allow them to have one labeling system that could generate a range of labels suitable for all their different customer requirements,” said Neil Crump, Peacock Brothers Managing Director.

Following consideration of AstralPool's key requirements for the new label printing technology solution of increased flexibility, label printing productivity as well as efficiency, it became clear the best option was the PM43 from Intermec by Honeywell. The Smart Printer fitted all the requirements; the PM43 could operate in a completely stand-alone operation due to the unique Fingerprint program from Intermec by Honeywell, which allows the product database to easily be updated, it was a rugged industrial printer suited to the factory floor and it had a reliably fast print speed for as-required label printing.

The Intermec by Honeywell PM43 is remotely managed with a locally stored easy to manage database with all of AstralPool's different label templates to meet worldwide customer standards, as well as incorporated logo graphics and part information provided by other companies for OEM products.

It is easy and fast to make repairs to the printers, such as replacing print heads and rollers, in the factory without the need for any tools. The result is significantly lower repair costs compared to the more common situation in which repairs would come associated with the high costs of calling someone out to replace parts or mailing the whole printer back to a service centre. But the most significant saving comes with the avoidance of printer down time, which causes disruption to labeling of products and packages and subsequently causes delays in product delivery to customers.

A Quick Return on Investment

Throughout the project, AstralPool had the primary concept of 'Lean Manufacturing', with an emphasis on reducing cost and waste. "Since moving to one autonomous technology solution for label printing, we've already seen a return on investment through massive time savings of 60-70% in our label printing," said Brendan Butler.

"It was very refreshing to find that rather than the project being a huge challenge as I expected, it was made incredibly easy by working with the right integration company and the right technologies straight away. It took just a month to roll-out the new solution, which has already paid for itself five times over."

In addition to saving in costs of labour and upping the speed of label printing, AstralPool also achieved a reduction in the waste it had previously generated when discarding thousands of pre-printed date stamped labels at the end of each month.

Future Automation

The new manufacturing labeling solution introduced at AstralPool gives the company new scope to leverage these solutions across its entire operations. This would further their ability to be best in class in Australia, as well as operate more competitively at an international level as a lean manufacturing plant and distributor.

"Intermec [by Honeywell] is very pleased to see the successful impact smart printing has had on AstralPool's labeling processes and we're excited about future plans to expand automation in to their packaging and quality control systems as well," said Tony Repaci, Honeywell Scanning and Mobility Country Manager, ANZ.

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