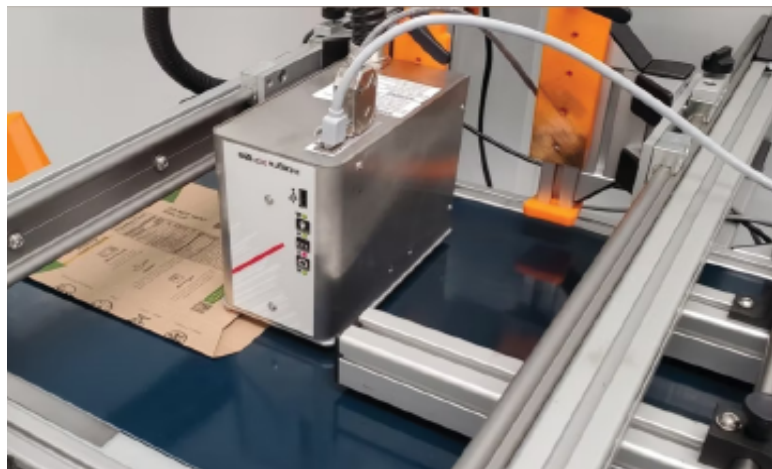


QuickFresh Automates Nutrition Label Printing

This prepared meal delivery company improved flexibility and throughput with a full-color variable printer for cartonboard sleeves.

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In less than one year, QuickFresh, a Utah-based food delivery service, has been able to grow and scale its business exponentially. When the company first opened in May 2021, it was delivering its freshly prepared meals locally. In November 2021, the company expanded its delivery area to the entire West Coast. Now, QuickFresh delivers ready-to-heat prepared meals to the lower 48 states.



Still in its first year of business, the company's meal packaging process is mostly handled manually. Once the food is manufactured, it's placed in a tray, which is then sealed and wrapped with a paperboard sleeve that carries the meal's nutrition information.

But the process of getting the nutrition label and meal information onto the sleeves slowed throughput and created a bottleneck. QuickFresh had four operators printing off stickers that were hand-placed, one by one, front and back of each sleeved tray. A labor-intensive process isn't ideal during a nationwide labor shortage. Not only was the process tedious, it was also prone to human error.

Meanwhile, QuickFresh needed to be poised for even more rapid growth. Josh Rookstool, Director of Operations at QuickFresh, began to look for a solution to help the company scale and improve throughput and the quality of its product's package and labels.

"We needed a better solution that was scalable, saved us money, and helped to automate things where we could," Rookstool says. "We posed the challenge of, 'how can we get to a point where we can take these nice [paperboard] sleeves, wrap them around the meals, and have a printing process that can add all of the variable information?'" Rookstool says.

When looking for an automated solution, Rookstool also needed to be mindful of flexibility. The menus being printed for the freshly prepared meals change every week, so the meal's name, expiration date, and nutrition label would also change.

"It was difficult for us to try and purchase pre-printed sleeves because we don't know what the volumes will be," Rookstool says. "And so, we really needed something that was flexible enough for us to print all of this variable information right on the sleeves."

QuickFresh turned to its long-time partner CRS Data Solutions, a marking, coding, and tracking equipment distributor, to help them identify the best solution for their needs.

"QuickFresh was looking for a full-color type printer, which doesn't really exist in the variable printing world," says Brian Wagner, a territory sales representative at CRS Data Solutions. "So, we were looking for solutions to where they could create a carton that was semi-generic and then we could just add the different fields for the variable information that needed to be printed. We needed a high-res mark because they have the nutrition facts on there. And to get that smaller print, be able to read it, and fit it on the carton, we needed a high-resolution type of printer."

In August 2021, QuickFresh purchased a Markoprint integra PP108 printer and instantly saw improvements and increased efficiencies. The printer is ideal for nutrition labels because it can print fonts as small as 1 mm, as well as high-resolution graphics and logos, according to QuickFresh. "It can fly through our sleeves," Rookstool says. "What took six people four hours to do, we can now do that with one person operating it and get through the same amount of work in less than an hour."

The Markoprint integra is integrated into a Rotech RF1 feeder where an operator loads sleeves into a magazine and ensures the right file is sent to the Markoprint printer. After sleeves run through the printer, they are compiled and then taken to a separate station where someone manually slides the tray of prepared food into the cartonboard sleeve. As QuickFresh grows, Rookstool plans to automate this process further.

In addition to having a more streamlined process, the printer uses inks that are mineral oil-free (MOF), which is more eco-friendly than other inks on the market, according to Jeff Norton, business development manager, AT Information Products, a Markoprint distributor. The MOF oil ink is also ideal for printing on absorbent, porous surfaces in the food industry since it's a safe, direct replacement for petroleum-based inks.

