



## Consumables: Key To Driving Printing ROI

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BAR CODE PRINTING HAS MADE OPERATIONS THROUGHOUT various industries and applications far more efficient. The bar code and Auto ID systems address the fundamental need to track information from point “A” to point “B” in the most efficient and accurate way possible. However, a truly effective bar code system is only as good as the components selected to make the system work, specifically the printer consumables which serve as the heart of any enterprise printing system.

More than ever, there are many types of printers to choose from when selecting a bar code system. This presents a unique challenge in printer-related consumables—labels, tags, ribbons, and toners. How can a company be sure they are making the right choice when it comes to the consumables they need for their bar code application? Mike Woods, consumables product manager for PEAK Technologies, trains and consults on this very topic: “Consumables are like the razor to the razor blade. If the razor blade is not meeting your requirements, it doesn’t matter how expensive or elaborate the razor. Likewise, a company’s investment in their enterprise printing system is only as sound as the consumables running through the printers.”

Woods, who has worked with printing solutions for Auto ID since 1981, knows the challenge well: “I’ve seen printers come a long way in all technologies—thermal, thermal transfer, dot and line matrix, and laser. They’ve become better and can suit many types of applications.” In the early days of this industry, there were a lot of preprinted labels. As printers continued to develop and on-demand printing became a greater necessity, consumable products were forced to meet different requirements. Woods explains, “The decision is no longer just between a paper or polyester label. The need to match the right media to the required results has become increasingly important. This enables companies like PEAK, who have a vast knowledge of available consumables, to provide both properly matched and cost-effective solutions.”

### MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICES

According to Woods, there are many things that can go wrong when the consumable product chosen is not the best suited for either the application or the printer. Wrong choices can jeopardize manpower, delivery schedules, and customer retention. The right selection optimizes material-handling costs and gets products moving out the door as effectively as needed to maintain a competitive advantage.

Joe Aucella, IT director for Ethan Allen, Inc. in Danbury, Connecticut, knows first hand how using the correct consumables can impact operations. Ethan Allen has taken careful steps to ensure that their manufacturing and shipping facilities run efficiently to help them meet customer expectations.

“PEAK was involved in getting to know our entire process,” Aucella said. “They did not just come in and sell labels, they worked with us to understand what we use labels for, where we use them, and how many we typically need. They were able to give us advice on how to get the most out of our consumables,” Aucella added.

Ethan Allen uses bar code labels in their manufacturing and shipping plants to track inventory. Aucella cited an example of a facility that was using one type of label for their upholstered sofa pieces. The pieces pass on a belt directly from production to distribution. “The problem was that the pieces went through shrink-wrap and the high heat process turned the labels black. When the items came off the belt into distribution, the labels could not be read, and therefore the product could not be received properly. A delay or interruption like that could disrupt the whole flow of the facility and cause unnecessary downtime in our operations,” he explained. Aucella, working with Carol Willette, PEAK’s consumables account manager, recognized that switching from a direct thermal label to a more heat-resistant thermal transfer label would mean the label could pass through the shrink-wrapping step and not be damaged.

“In the long run, your choice of consumables can have a greater impact on the efficiency and value of your printing system than the hardware and software combined,” says Woods.

## LABELS AND RIBBONS

Consider the label, for example, as a critical workhorse in industrial and manufacturing trenches. The label carries bar code information, and if it fails to meet your printing system goals, there’s no printing ROI. “If I want to track and trace a product through my plant, and for whatever reason that label falls off, or the bar code is illegible, I’m dead in the water,” says Woods. “The label must stick and it must scan in order for the information to be captured and processed.”

The label’s ability to stick to a company’s product and be read is just the tip of the iceberg when looking at consumable options. Does the label have to comply with supplier, customer, or federal requirements? Must the label withstand extreme temperatures? Can the label’s face-stock material withstand UV light? Excessive abrasion? Solvents? How long must this label survive? How often do packaging requirements change? These are only a few of the questions that must be addressed to make the right choice.

Along those same lines, the success or failure of a bar coding application is also dependent on the type of ribbon chosen. When selecting a ribbon, customers must know how durable the ribbon has to be, what type of environment it is printing in, and if the ink will smudge or rub. The bottom line is if the image is unreadable, the printing system will fail. A good solutions partner can

tell whether wax, wax/resin, or any other type of ribbon best suits the application.

## SOLUTIONS PROVIDER IS KEY

An ideal first step is finding a solutions provider with extensive industry relationships to offer the widest choice of consumables to best match the application. The provider should demonstrate expertise in all features of the printing systems—ability to ensure that hardware, software, and consumables function dependably and seamlessly.

For starters, says Woods, a key question for the business customer to ask themselves should be: “What is the application NOT doing for you that you wish it would do?” This initial question allows PEAK’s consumables experts to evaluate a wide portfolio of consumables options, which could potentially address an application objective that was not even possible a few years ago.

With so many options to consider, the key is to work with experts like PEAK who explore your application needs and have the experience and knowledge necessary to prescribe the best-suited consumables, Woods added. With over 20 years’ experience in the label business and dedicated resources in the printing and consumables arena, PEAK has been able to provide perfect matches for consumables and bar code printers throughout the world. PEAK continues to perform behind the scenes, testing on new consumable offerings and keeping a finger on the pulse of evolving technologies.

## >> LABEL CHECKS: THE BOTTOM LINE

### >> MATTER OF DEGREES

What will the substrate’s surface temperature be? Will the label undergo temperature extremes?

### >> STICKY SITUATIONS

Must the label be removable or permanently affixed? Will the label need to be repositioned? Will the end-user require a residue-free product?

### >> REQUIRED READINGS

Must the label meet supplier mandates or federal specifications? Must special requirements be satisfied on formats, face-stocks, adhesives, or inks?

### >> MONEY MATTERS

What are your bottom-line cost considerations and restrictions?

To learn more about selecting the right labels, tags, ribbons, and toners, visit [www.peaktech.com/html/products/labels\\_tags\\_toner\\_ribbons.htm](http://www.peaktech.com/html/products/labels_tags_toner_ribbons.htm)

