



## Label Solutions Meets Its Need for Fast, Reliable Digital Printing

Label Solutions Inc. is a diverse label manufacturer located in Marshfield, Missouri. It supplies pressure sensitive labels throughout North America serving the food and beverage, beer and spirits, and wide-format graphics markets, and holding a dominant position in the compressed gas cylinder markets for industrial and medical uses.

The company's printing capabilities include two flexo presses (a Webtron and a Mark Andy 2200), two digital presses (an EFI Jetrion 4900 and a Mark Andy Digital Series hybrid press), and two wide format printers. Its finishing operation includes an Aztech Die Master, three Rotoflex rewinders, and two ABG Digicons. To support its customers, it typically runs about a shift and a half, five days per week.

Label Solutions is progressive when it comes to the technologies and services it offers its customers. It was a relatively early adopter of digital printing technology, having gotten into digital printing about 10 years ago. "We told our owners right away that digital was coming into the arena and if we didn't get in front of it, we would get left behind," says Jeff Jaynes, engineering manager.

The company went through the expected growing pains with digital technology but Jaynes said its first digital press was a "workhorse".

About three years ago, this press was replaced by two newer models. But as the company became more dependent on the productivity from these digital investments, deficiencies in the technology became more of a burden, namely speed and dependability.

This came to a head in mid-2015 when the company experienced an extremely busy period supporting all its compressed gas cylinder customers in complying with new labeling requirements of the Globally Harmonized System (GHS).



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“We were in the middle of the GHS transition and were working 24 hours per day, 6 to 7 days per week,” reports Merlin Dennis, production manager. “There would be days when I’d come into the plant and I wouldn’t know what level of production we’d get from one of our presses.” Speed was another factor as it was difficult to get color consistency across the web at speeds approaching 100 fpm.

Label Solutions knew they needed a new solution and knowing a lot can change in three years, they conducted a thorough search of the latest press offerings. They were focused on finding a supplier who could satisfy their needs for dependability, consistency and speed. They had narrowed the selection to two options when they received a call from Mark Andy inviting them to a demonstration of the Digital Series hybrid press.

“We went to Mark Andy with a healthy skepticism about what we would see,” says Dennis. “We were told it would run at 240fpm but we know the difference between what is advertised on sales brochures and what is possible in the real world.” Understanding their extensive experience with digital, that skepticism was valid.

The team that went to Mark Andy was more than impressed. “They ran our files on our substrates at 240 fpm and the quality was great,” says Jaynes. Two of the company’s owners attended Mark Andy’s Open House the following month and were likewise impressed with its capabilities. Once Label Solutions made its decision, Mark Andy delivered the press in 14 days.

The company has been running its Mark Andy Digital Series hybrid press in production since April 2016 and has already replaced one of its existing digital presses. The Digital Series configured for Label Solutions has a flexo station before and after the UV inkjet printing module, along with capabilities for laminating, varnishing, and cold foiling.

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The company currently uses the press to effectively run a wide range of versions for its compressed gas cylinder customers. They do extensive printing runs for this market at least two times per week with volumes easily reaching 500-600K labels, with peak periods producing 1MM labels. “With the digital press, we can do version changes on the fly,” says Jaynes. “If a client has 30 SKUs and they want to order different amounts for each and they are on the same die, we just line them up one after the other and run them back to back without stopping the machine.”

The quality and dependability achieved by the Digital Series press is meeting their

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expectations for a reliable production machine. “Any issues we’ve experienced have been minor and easily managed,” notes Jaynes. “There’s a learning curve and we are getting better at it all the time. The quality we are getting at 240 fpm is pretty amazing.”

For maintenance, there’s a start-up and shutdown procedure that the operators do on each shift, along with some routine head cleaning. “It’s really very minimal; at startup, it’s about 15 minutes,” says Dennis.

The support provided by Mark Andy has more than met expectations. “From our past experience with digital technology, we didn’t expect the installation and transfer of files from one machine to this new one to be problem-free, and there have been some blips, but I can tell you we’ve never seen this level of responsiveness from the support team making sure we have what we need when we need it,” says Dennis. “We have had really amazing service from everybody we’ve dealt with at Mark Andy.”

With industrial label production well in hand, Label Solutions is looking to take advantage of the additional decorating and converting capabilities available with their press configuration. “The craft brewing industry is booming and is going to be a key market for us,” says Jaynes. “We are excited about our upside and opportunities,” says Dennis. “We feel we are in a great position to make real strides in 2017. Things are moving in the right direction.”

