

P-S labeling system polishes up productivity

Manufacturer of wood-care products opts for versatile, easy-changeover, easy-maintenance, precise-positioning labeler to accommodate diverse product/package line.



Howard Products, Paso Robles, CA, is a manufacturer of a broad range of fine wood-care products, including polishing, refinishing, restoration, and conditioning products. These items are marketed through major retail outlets such as Ace Hardware and Home Depot, as well as through antique shops.

The wood-care products are being marketed in a variety of bottle sizes, shapes, and types—including trigger-spray, pump-spray, and squeeze bottles. So the pressure-sensitive labeling equipment needs to be versatile to accommodate different front and back bottle and label sizes/shapes, positioning, and wipe-on requirements.

When Howard Products began encountering cost issues with its labeling production and maintenance operations, COO Eric Howard investigated the problems and causes. “We needed to increase production speeds. Our old labeler could only run at 20 to 25 units per minute,” notes Howard.

Adding to the production problems, Howard says, “The old labeler sometimes applied labels inaccurately, and label wrinkles or bubbles would emerge. We ended up wasting a lot of labels. And when the labeling machine required service, we had to ship the entire unit to the original supplier—a very expensive task.”



EASY CHANGEOVERS. All labeling set-up and operational functions are managed from a central touch-pad controller that facilitates fast changeovers.

➔ SUCCESSFUL SEARCH

In Autumn 2009, Howard Products representatives attended Pack Expo Las Vegas to seek out solutions to their labeling challenges. When Eric Howard witnessed in action the Tronics Series 3 pressure-sensitive labeling system from **Weber Packaging Solutions** (www.weberpackaging.com), he was impressed with its overall operation. He says, "Right away, I could see that Weber's system was solidly engineered. And the fact that the machine was modular and individually component-driven meant that any repairs would be simpler and could be accomplished at our plant."

Due to the modular aspects of the Tronics labeling system, Howard Products could pick and choose exactly which modules they wanted to fit their operations. The company chose a machine that can apply p-s labels to the front and back of a container in one operation. A wrap label option also is available, but Howard Products does not use that option at this time.

The PET bottles, supplied primarily by **Polytainer** (www.polytainer.com), are filled on a rotary filling system from **Biner Ellison** (www.binerellison.com) and capped using a cap torquer from **SureKap** (www.surekap.com). Howard Products sources all of its closures from **McKernan Packaging** (www.mckernan.com).

For its part, Weber simplifies sourcing by supplying and printing the labels that are applied by its Tronics system. The labels are digitally printed in a four-color process on H-P WS series digital label presses and incorporate complex graphics, including pearlescent features for some applications. After printing, the labels have laminated to them a layer of

clear film to resist abrasion and heighten gloss.

The front label for the squeeze bottle is made from 2-mil clear polypropylene film. The front label for the pump-spray bottle is made from 2.3-mil high-gloss white polypropylene film. Back labels for both bottle types also are made from 2.3-mil high-gloss white polypropylene film.

➔ EFFICIENCY IMPROVEMENTS

Howard Products Plant Manager Jesse Munoz says, "The Weber machine is very adjustable. Making changes in the bottles we run or in the placement of the labels is very easy."

Munoz also points out that the former labeler operated at just 25 bottles per minute, versus the current 33 bpm. He says, "Even at the slower speed, we had to peel off labels that weren't properly applied. We wasted a lot of labels and time that way. The Weber unit is very accurate and does not waste labels."

Set-up and operational functions are managed from a central touchpad controller, making it easy to switch from one labeling project to



SHELF PRESENCE. Stylish pressure-sensitive labels adorn all products in the wood-care line, left.

PRECISE POSITIONING. An adjustable overhead hold-down belt keeps the bottles steady for pinpoint wipe-on of the p-s labels, below.



another. Munoz reports, "We used to waste up to 100 labels making change set-ups on the old machine. Now we're up and running almost instantly with no label loss."

Howard Products also now is able to make creative use of transparent film labels that help highlight the color of the products in the clear bottles. The old labeler did not have the ability to sense and apply clear labels. The Tronics system features sensors that facilitate transparent label handling and application.

The Tronics system at Howard Products also is equipped with an optional Model PB-260U ink-jet coder from **Hitachi** (www.hitachi-america.us) that marks each bottle with a date of manufacture.

Eric Howard is pleased with the quick return-on-investment (ROI) yielded by the new labeling system, and estimates the payback time as approximately 18 months. —**Judy Rice**



Watch video of this packaging line in action at www.bit.ly/pwt00387