



A stack of coded cases moves along a conveyor, left. The digital case printer produces in-spec bar codes at a 200-dpi resolution. A restacker, right, restacks coded cases as they are completed.

No **waffling** when it comes to coding

Western Waffles Ltd. meets and exceeds customer needs for case coding using a digital printer.

Western Waffles Ltd., along with sister company Atlantic Waffles, produces more than a million waffles and pancakes a day at each of its two facilities. "During the past ten years, our business has expanded from a little waffle shop on Annacis Island, BC, serving the western U.S. and Canada, to covering both coasts in 1996," states chef and Western Waffles founder Ole Elmer.

When some of its large retail department store customers demanded standard bar codes on all of their inbound supply, Western Waffles needed an economical and reliable coding process to ensure automatic product identification of

cases. Foreseeing that other customers in the industry would soon require bar codes for tracking and inventory control, Western Waffles searched for a solution to code millions of shipping cases and streamline its shipping process. The efficiency, simplicity of operation, and printing capability of Iconotech's DCP-3200 digital case printer fulfilled their needs.

The purchase process began when Shawn Ray of Resolution Technologies, a Canadian distributor for Iconotech, noticed that Western Waffles was growing and could use the benefits and overall savings of a digital case-printing system. Ray called the general manager at Western Waffles, as he follows Iconotech's prescription for cost analysis to justify that a purchase is right for a company's needs. Ray's study revealed that payback for the

DCP purchase was a little less than a year, besides the greater efficiency and clearer information it would provide for Western Waffles' product cases.

Before purchasing Iconotech's digital case printer, the company relied on manual labor to hand-apply thermal labels on adjacent sides of each case for customers who requested bar codes. Says Greg Peckham, general manager of Atlantic Waffles, "The cost of the label and the thermal-transfer ribbon and, in manual applications such as Western Waffles, the very high cost of labor all add up."

Additionally, an abbreviated product description—type of waffle—was printed on the shipping cases using an ink-jet printer, but maintenance problems and poor print clarity were unavoidable issues. Clearly, Western Waffles needed a better solution for its case coding.

Although Western Waffles looked at several machines, the clear economic choice was the Iconotech system. According to Peckham, "Western Waffles is saving money in two ways: no labels and fewer workers. They no longer have to

print cylinder from the shuttle-feed mechanism, and the image is transferred onto two adjacent sides of the case. At the exit of the DCP, printed cases are automatically stacked and squared in bundles of 25 and carried on a powered

provided, Atlantic Waffles purchased a DCP-3200. Two months later, Atlantic reported reduced maintenance and materials costs.

"Now we don't have the cost of labels, which is three to five cents each," Peckham says. "The DCP costs less than two cents per case, and we don't have maintenance problems with this machine." Due to the elimination of labels and the almost nonstop usage of the DCP, Atlantic Waffles can purchase case stock one to two days before it is needed. This "just-in-time delivery" of corrugated allows the company to save inventory carrying costs and warehouse space.

The advantages of the DCP's multiple print capabilities also simplified the decision for Western Waffles to purchase the Iconotech machine, Peckham says. "The company now offers its customers more information on the cases and can make changes easily," he reports.

Internal efficiency was another important benefit that Peckham specified. Before the DCP, Atlantic Waffles had to buy special freezer-grade labels in order to prevent the label glue from freezing and the label from falling off. Now, Atlantic doesn't have to worry about missing labels and bar-code information; the company uses scanners to keep track of product for inventory and shipping control. With a 200-dpi print resolution providing consistently in-spec bar codes easily read by a scanner, the Iconotech machine has helped organize Atlantic's freezers.

Atlantic Waffles has experienced 20-percent savings as well as a dramatic improvement in efficiency. The company runs the DCP virtually nonstop for two shifts and prints all of its cases on it, purchasing them only one to two days prior. Thus, they save inventory costs and space. As William O'Brien, assistant production manager, recently reported, "There are no headaches with the DCP; we can just run it and walk away from it until the next day."

Peckham was just as pleased with the installation of a DCP in the Atlantic plant as Western Waffles was with its equipment. "We knew that if things went well at Western Waffles, we planned to put a DCP in at Atlantic Waffles," Peckham recalls.



Coded cases, in stacks of 25, move along a powered roller conveyor and are stored for later use.

apply two labels per box, one for the front of the box and one for the side. And, the DCP has replaced the people that would have been hand-applying the labels; instead of six workers, only one is needed."

According to Peckham, after Western Waffles acquired the DCP-3200, the process became much more efficient and organized. Although their customers only required bar codes, Western Waffles went one step further, taking advantage of the DCP-3200's capability to print full product descriptions as well. "They began to print this extra information without any customer requests," Peckham says. "The added information helps them organize their products, and it's a benefit to customers."

The procedure is simple. The user-friendly software that comes with the DCP-3200 system allows an operator to design the text and bar codes on a PC. The print message is next transmitted to a thermal imager that burns the image onto an 11×32-in. plastic-back fibrous film stencil. The imaging film is then placed onto the printer's rotating print cylinder. Flat cases are automatically fed to the

roller conveyor in a U-turn back to the infeed area.

The quick-changeover feature of the DCP for new print messages is particularly important to Western Waffles. When an ingredient changes—a frequent occurrence in the food industry—when a run is completed, or when there is a change of flavors or products, they simply replace the imaging film with a new one. There is little or no maintenance or downtime during changeover.

After experiencing the successful results of digital case printing at its facility, Western Waffles alerted Atlantic Waffles to the efficiencies of the system. The East Coast facility still used an intricate and complicated print-and-apply labeling system that was a constant maintenance nuisance. Although none of Atlantic Waffle's customers yet required bar codes, the company knew the demand was imminent and that its current labeling process would not serve the company well for its amount of production.

To demonstrate the DCP's print quality to Atlantic Waffles, the staff at Western Waffles sent some printed case samples to Peckham. Upon seeing the results the DCP

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