

# Global workflow

Servicing the label requirements of global garment brands has led a UK converter to a radical workflow solution which has reduced lead times and virtually eliminated errors from manual data entry.

**Andy Thomas** reports

**B**ritannia Labels, based in Leicester, UK, has a long tradition in label and packaging printing for the garment industry, supplying labels that go in or on the garment, including wash care labels, tickets, self-adhesive labels and outer packaging labels.

The company was founded in 1976 by Robert Brownhill, who is still actively involved in the day-to-day running of the business. In those days, the vast majority of UK garment production was based around the British Midlands, encouraging the growth of a local labels industry. 'Label printing back then was like having a license to print money,' recalls Brownhill. By the mid-80s the company was experiencing exceptional growth as well as the beginning of increased competition.

Brownhill realized that garment production would eventually move offshore as a result of intensified competition between retailers and the resulting pressure to reduce manufacturing costs. Inevitable globalization meant his business would no longer be about putting ink on paper or fabric, but about managing the process of transferring image, information and structure.

By the early 1990s, Britannia was well into the process of building the infrastructure to be a global player in garment packaging and labeling. It first moved into Hong Kong and Sri Lanka, followed by another ten countries across the world, Egypt being the most recent venture. Britannia now has a turnover of £20 million (\$40M) and in the last two years has experienced a sales growth rate of 20 percent year on year.

In 2002 Robert's son Paul took a more active role in Britannia, bringing invaluable insights from his previous job in the retail industry. 'To stay competitive, garment retailers are constantly looking to reduce expense,' says Paul, now MD at Britannia. 'Having cut labor costs by moving offshore, they are now embracing lean 'just-in-time manufacturing' which means garment labels have got to arrive on time and they have got to be right first time, every time. The average cost of the packaging we supply per garment is around 0.5 pence – rather minimal compared to the average cost of the garment they go in or on,

which is between £10 and £20 (\$20-30). However, the implications of the garment not selling because the packaging was late or wrong are huge.'

Paul points out that retailers are faced with an ever-growing administrative burden of checking on manufacturing status and progress as cycle times reduce. In addition, as global brands, they are looking for consistency across countries and need to make sure that the latest designs are being used. It is estimated that on average 4-5 percent of labels arrive late or with the wrong information, while in some countries this can reach up to 10-15 percent. Britannia is currently working with a one percent chance of error and aiming to hit zero defects.

To achieve this ambitious goal, Britannia formed a technology partnership with Esko. Esko engineers integrated their BackStage and WebCenter systems with Britannia's own online ordering database and a Shuttleworth MIS to create a seamless workflow from order placement through approval to finished output.

Paul Brownhill comments: 'We use Esko WebCenter to collaborate with retailers and internally amongst the different subsidiaries of the group around the world. It has nicely slotted

*Paul Brownhill, Jane Hislop and Danny Seager*





into our online ordering system and allows us to work on and store label design templates created in Esko BackStage DesignWizard. The artwork then becomes available for all stakeholders to view, amend or download depending on their user rights. And the system is on 24 hours a day, seven days a week, which works brilliantly when you operate across different time zones. One of our retailer clients has actually saved an amazing £20,000 (\$40K) a year just on distribution costs of CDs and printed manuals.'

The Esko WebCenter viewer allows fast access to the high resolution files, providing a wide range of tools including switching separations and layers on and off, measuring widths, lengths, distances and ink densities. The notes tool tracks individual corrections and documents every step of the process, which helps eliminate misunderstandings and makes the workflow fully transparent.

Danny Seager, IT manager and the architect of Britannia's online ordering system, comments: 'Clients and colleagues love being able to access high resolution visuals so fast and our global partners can easily download final artwork ready for plate output.'

### New ways for old

Britannia was previously working on lead times ranging between 5-7 days and 10-15 days. Orders were faxed, then scanned and

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input onto the Shuttleworth MIS. The label info would be entered manually on the MIS system and then re-entered on the design system for further processing. After the necessary approvals and checks, the files would be ready for output to film or plate before going to press.

With the Esko BackStage/WebCenter workflow, the order is received electronically through Britannia's online ordering system and is automatically transferred to the Shuttleworth MIS using open standards such as XML. At the same time JDF and XML data is sent to Esko BackStage, which produces PDFs and JPEG visuals for approval by the relevant stakeholders. Plate output data is automatically generated along with the JPEG visuals. Printing happens locally in close proximity to garment manufacturing.

Britannia is already using this workflow for George, the successful clothes range owned by the Wal-Mart/Asda supermarket chain. George garment suppliers around the world access Britannia's online ordering system via the web, enter a purchase order number and a label reference and choose a delivery date. The packaging team at George has already entered generic data such as identification code, barcode, color and sizes. The garment supplier enters the quantities required as well as choosing the wash care codes, copyright statements and fiber content. The artwork is then generated in PDF format in real-time using the DesignWizard templates stored in the Esko BackStage workflow server.

'The process runs very fast. It can populate and generate ten labels in approximately five seconds,' says Paul Brownhill. 'This means no data has been entered by Britannia Labels personnel, which limits the possibility for mistakes. The layout of the file and format of the data on each individual label – such as font size and weight – gets defined and transferred around the workflow in JDF form, which means we only need to create one template for each product in Esko BackStage.'

Brownhill believes this system represents a real revolution. 'For me the real wow factor is the integration we have been able to achieve between our online ordering database and the Esko BackStage workflow. This new fully integrated way of working is helping us improve our service levels by reducing the time to process orders and allowing us to potentially eliminate errors completely. It helps us minimize bottle necks and improve global consistency by allowing us to output plates fingerprinted to a specific press.' ■