

Ossid LLC

New Generation of Weigh Price Labelers Empowers the Packager

By Joe Grove, Vice President of Engineering, Ossid LLC

A new generation of weigh price labeling machines not only performs weighing, pricing, and labeling easier, faster, and more reliably than ever before, these machines also collect real time data on packaging line productivity, throughput, and status of customer orders. Industrial PCs, database technology, high speed connectivity, and the location of weigh price labelers at the end of production lines have transformed this stand-alone machine into a strategic data acquisition asset for the enterprise.

Because information flows to and from new generation weigh price labeling machines, up-to-the-second customer requests for price changes can be downloaded. This helps to make the packager more responsive, as well as giving the organization a competitive advantage. These new generation machines share common characteristics, including:

- Open architecture operating system
- Off-the-shelf Industrial PCs and PLCs
- Flexible operation
- Modularity
- Rugged construction
- Competitive price

Open architecture

There are a number of important reasons new generation weigh price labeling machines feature the open architecture Windows operating system and off-the-shelf components such as industrial PCs and PLCs. Open architecture does away with proprietary controllers and firmware, which are difficult and costly to maintain and offer no migration path. Plant operators, maintenance, and IT personnel are familiar with the open architecture and off-the-shelf components technology, generating greater productivity and higher

throughput. Open in its truest sense allows the packager to purchase software and hardware at globally competitive prices.

The new generation weigh price label machine is a hybrid of industrial PC-based operator interface and PLC control. The industrial PC should come standard with a structured query language (SQL) database. This is the key component for ensuring that vital information is easily accessible to management. Wired or wireless high speed Ethernet connectivity makes uploading real time data practical.

Connectivity also means that the machine's manufacturer will be able to remotely diagnose problems, provide custom programming, and offer training to operators new to the machine. Any weigh price labeling machine that does not offer these and similar connectivity benefits cannot be considered the latest generation technology.

At the machine level, advanced operator interface strategy in new generation machines reduces menu complexity to an absolute minimum number of "on screen" selections. This helps to reduce the potential for error while speeding up and simplifying operation.

Chaotic mode emphasizes the flexibility of new generation machines

New generation machines truly showcase differences with the past when operating in high speed chaotic mode — running a mix of several items with each featuring a different weight-to-price ratio. An example of chaotic mode would be running New York strip, Filet Mignon, and rib eye steaks in random order through the same weigh price labeler at unit speeds between 120 and 160 per minute.

Companies successfully implementing chaotic mode improve overall throughput and decrease equipment changeover costs.

Product Traceability

Compliance issues are not new for consumer packaged goods companies and their converter partners. What is new is the increased level of traceability of products from foods to pharmaceuticals that regulators are beginning to require — down to the individual primary and secondary packages. In effect, the industry is moving toward a system where the lineage — pedigree of a product — will be verifiable and traceable from source to destination. The rise in counterfeit products and heightened concerns over food and product safety are two of the major forces pushing greater traceability.

There are two capabilities of new generation weigh price labeling machines that enable traceability. The first is the ability to print any 1D or 2D barcode. The second is the machine's onboard database which can log date, time, content, price, and weight information for every package. Having the ability to trace products down to the individual package will give producers and retailers more control over production and distribution. Retailers will be able to have faster and more effective product recall capabilities. This translates into improved consumer relations.

Flexibility

Big box retailers and club stores are looking for ways of differentiating their beef, pork, poultry, fish, produce, and other items sold by the pound. Labeling is vital to this differentiation. New generation weigh price labelers have the capability to print in various fonts and place labels on different sections of the package. Retailers also want to work with suppliers who can quickly react to volatile market conditions. This means being able to quickly and accurately change weigh/price calculations. New generation weigh price labeling machines offer a solution to these needs. In terms of greater flexibility, new generation machines can apply top and bottom labels and run a wide range of package configurations from flat to contour.

New generation weigh price label machines emphasize modularity. Packagers specify a machine that solves today's production needs, while leaving the door open to reconfiguring the machine in the future. Packagers have the choice of various sized weigh conveyors, the number of print heads, semi-automatic or fully automatic set up, and more. Modularity emphasizes plug-and-play components.

Sometimes technology advances in design and electronics come at the expense of less substantial materials and lower quality construction. That is not the case for new generation weigh price labelers. Expect rugged stainless steel construction in both the frame and critically important conveyor bearings. Mechanical set up for semi-automatic machines will be straight forward and allow for precise adjustment. Fully automatic machines will rely on absolute positioning and state-of-the-art servo motor technology.

New generation weigh price labeling machines are not premium priced. Ossid, for example, has developed a line of U.S. designed and manufactured machines that are within two percent of the cost of the last generation technology. This is a direct result of the price and performance delivered by the open architecture/modular strategy.

In the past, weigh price labeling machines were simply another station on a packaging line. Today, these machines are integral to providing a wealth of benefits — the types of advantages packagers require to effectively compete in the global marketplace.

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Ossid is a North American designer and manufacturer of packaging equipment solutions for fresh and processed protein products, convenience foods, medical devices, and consumer goods. The company is headquartered in Rocky Mount, NC. Joe Grove has more than 16 years experience in the packaging industry. He helped lead the team at Ossid that designed the company's new generation weigh price label machines. Joe welcomes your comments, jgrove@ossid.com.

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