

Global, vertically integrated apparel retailer streamlines its labeling process with BarTender®

An American multi-brand, multi-channel, specialty apparel retailer offers an assortment of women's, men's and children's apparel, operating over 450 retail stores throughout the United States in addition to conducting business online and through catalogs.

The challenge: The company faced important business challenges

- The retailer's supply chain is vertically integrated. It includes online sales, brick and mortar sales, catalog sales, apparel and accessory vendors, as well as distribution outlets and warehouses. It needed to find a consistent and uniform method of labeling the more than 150,000 items from over 500 separate merchandise suppliers that passed through its doors daily.
- Suppliers were creating their own homemade labeling, requiring extra time and labor at distribution centers for correction. The company wanted standardized labeling, printed and affixed at the site of manufacture, to improve supply chain visibility and velocity.
- The company had to keep up with the velocity of merchandise seasonality — items, inventories and manufacturers are in a constant state of flux, based upon new season fashions and adjustments to merchandise between seasonal cycles.

The key was to find a more consistent and efficient method of labeling that would follow merchandise from the site of manufacture to the point of sale, eliminating cross-dock labeling.

Goods from suppliers were often incorrectly and inconsistently labeled, and had to be relabeled at the warehouse before they could head to retail racks. These label edits consumed considerable extra time in warehouse and distribution centers, which slowed supply and added costs to operations. The company looked for ways to increase labeling accuracy and minimize time consumed correcting, designing and affixing labels in warehouse and distribution centers.

There was also a second cost problem. The company licensed their legacy labeling system based on number of users. Since every seasonal shift in supplier also meant that different vendors were creating the labeling, the retailer was paying for technology that went unused most of the year.



The solution: finding a better way to label

- The company wanted a labeling solution that would align more effectively with its business needs and address its labeling pain points. The company determined that their new labeling system should:
 - Produce consistent and accurate labeling for the volume of merchandise items that came through sales and distribution points daily.
 - Be implemented in a straightforward and uncomplicated manner with minimal training. The company's worldwide group of suppliers ranged from home-based microbusinesses in the developing world to large, traditional apparel manufacturers, with a wide variety of technological infrastructure and skill among them.
 - Be compatible with a wide spectrum of printing technologies, since the level of technological sophistication varied among the company's constantly changing roster of suppliers.
 - Create a seamless interface to the diverse collection of supplier printers, so that the retailer's own warehousing and distribution personnel no longer had to step in to correct and reprint incorrect labeling work

— suppliers would have label templates and software that would enable standardization among their supplier community and, in turn, speed processes and reduce errors.

- Offer a licensing agreement issued on a per-printer instead of on a per-user basis. The roster of suppliers was in continuous flux due to seasonality and other considerations — to avoid paying for unused labeling technology during a supplier's "off-season," the company could assign licenses to active manufacturers.

BarTender delivers on cost and operational efficiency

After completing an RFP and systems evaluation process, the retailer chose BarTender® to manage the implementation of the new labeling system for their global supplier base.

With BarTender, the retailer can integrate the new labeling program deeply and completely into its business processes, enabling interoperability, consistency, economy and efficiency of operations.

BarTender's per-printer licensing resolves paying for idle technology used only seasonally.



Standardizing labeling around the world with BarTender's Print Portal

To create uniform templates for labels that its ever-changing corps suppliers could access and use for labeling merchandise at their local facilities, BarTender label templates were created and then disseminated using BarTender's web-based Print Portal.

With Print Portal's print time forms, suppliers can select a label format, and then using pre-populated menus, select the appropriate data to include on the label. Standardizing labeling across all suppliers eliminates the homemade (and inconsistent) label making that had occurred previously. The Web portal supports interfaces to a broad assortment of browsers, including Safari and Internet Explorer/Edge, which also gave users flexible alternatives based on available technology.

Interoperability with a diverse range of printers and operating systems

Since its global supplier base changes continuously, the retailer was never certain which printers and operating systems its vendors were using. The company created interfaces between BarTender and a broad variety of printers, providing support to print on Windows and iOS operating systems, positioning itself for any situation, and adding agility to its printer and labeling business processes.

Optimization of label printing

Labeling now resides wholly with its supplier base. By designing an easy-to-use business process engineered to eliminate mistakes and workarounds, the company is able to achieve its goals of goods arriving at warehouse and distribution points correctly labeled, gaining new efficiencies and saving resources, time and money.

Agility of training and deployment

The company needed a streamlined implementation process that would quickly get vendors on board with labeling. BarTender can print to virtually any output device — it operates at a plug-and-play level with most printers. The company created predefined templates in BarTender. They're readily understandable with simple, automated production, even if English isn't the supplier's native language. The company backs this up with video training for the labeling system that it includes as part of its supplier onboarding process.

Benefits

Because business rules and processes are quickly revised and shared using BarTender, the company has increased its agility, enabling rapid response to any future business scenarios that could unfold. This agility enables the retailer to get to market with its goods faster, respond to fashion trends more quickly, and streamline operations from supplier points of origin through warehouses, distribution centers and onward to online, catalog and retail outlets, saving time, resources and money.

Labeling, the carrier of item traceability data throughout the supply chain, is consistent and standardized, regardless of the printer or operating system used, or the technological understanding of the supplier doing the labeling.

Solving critical issues in labeling, licensing, deployment and execution have enabled the retailer to focus on business growth and maintain its reputation as a retail market leader.

Synopsis

- ▶ A multi-national retailer needed to find a consistent and uniform method of labeling 150,000 items from over 500 separate merchandise suppliers each day.
- ▶ The company wanted standardized labeling that followed merchandise from the site of manufacture to the point of sale, to improve supply chain visibility and velocity, and to reduce errors.
- ▶ The retailer's merchandise came from different vendors during different seasons. They wanted to avoid paying for unused technology during a supplier's "off-season."
- ▶ The company required a labeling system that could work with the varied levels of technological infrastructure and skill in its supplier community, with simple adoption and minimal training required.
- ▶ The company chose BarTender. Now, labels are disseminated globally through BarTender's browser-based Print Portal. The supplier enters a SKU, generating the appropriate labels automatically.
- ▶ The system can print to virtually any printer, including Windows and iOS.
- ▶ Shifting licenses to active manufacturers avoids the cost of maintaining unused technology.
- ▶ The system is easy to learn and easy to use. After viewing a short video, suppliers are ready to start printing their labels.
- ▶ With their BarTender labeling system, the retailer has captured new system efficiencies and savings of time, resources and money.

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