

March 2012

Supplier Open Forum: Tickets

Tickets are a vital part of the shopping experience when a consumer goes to a store. Not only do they provide important information, such as price, size, brand, etc., they also give companies an opportunity to market their products one final time prior to POS. Of late, Retailers are also getting in on this last chance marketing opportunity by requiring tickets to adhere to certain formats and colors. As suppliers are ultimately responsible for the ticketing process, in most cases, it is important that they understand their options, both in an effort to be compliant with their retail partners' requirements and keep their costs down for this value added service. To assist us with this task, we turned to **Danika Manchester, Strategic Business Development Manager** for **SATO America**.

VCF: We've had several inquiries regarding ticket stock format changes requiring color in the price zone. Many suppliers are not currently equipped to handle printing color in-house. What are their best options?

DM: This is quite a challenge! Most companies printing in-house utilize thermal printers, which offer the price point and speed acceptable for their volume and most printing requirements. Since the majority of data on price tags and labels is in black, except maybe a logo or color bar, they could keep the number of base stocks (tags and labels) they inventoried low. A lot of people don't realize that color ribbons are available to print color on thermal printers; however, the color options are limited. To print two different colors on a stock, companies can pass the media through two thermal printers with different ribbons or pass the media through the same printer twice while changing the ribbon in between; this is acceptable if a specific color is not required (i.e. the difference between Green and PMS 348C). Ribbons of specific PMS colors are available, but considered custom so minimum orders and special pricing would apply.

Desktop laser or inkjet printers add the ability to print color, but high heat can cause adhesive ooze on labels and finishing tags can be a challenge (perforated stocks/hand tearing and rough edges). Also, depending on the printer being used, the color may not be within the required tolerance. (How many of us have a spectrophotometer at our desk to check?)

Utilizing a service bureau will offer the best and most consistent color print and widest range of finishing but will also require adjustments for lead time and cost. Depending on whether the service bureau utilizes offset, digital, or flexography + flash fusion laser printing, the challenges may include high cost, commitment to base stock inventory, high minimum SKU quantities, or long lead times.

VCF: Should a supplier decide they want to pursue printing in-house, what methods would you recommend they use for properly printing color on ticket stock?

DM: First they should review the specifications of their existing equipment to determine if 1) it is able to print color and 2) it is able to print color within the standards required. If not, then the

options are to 1) buy new in-house equipment, 2) purchase tag/label stock preprinted with the color and then print the other variable themselves on existing equipment or 3) outsource the printing of their tags and labels.

VCF: What equipment would you recommend for this process?

DM: The correct equipment for in-house printing depends on a number of variables volume, finishing (tags or labels), if they can utilize the equipment for other applications, and cost. There are terrific digital printers out there but their solutions are most likely cost-prohibitive to the person who needs to run only a small volume of color tags.

VCF: What about if the supplier wants to have tickets applied at the factory level – what recommendations do you have for ensuring this process is performed in a manner that provides the best quality?

DM: Unless every factory has the same printing equipment and quality controls then the color variation is likely to be too inconsistent. If there is a small enough number of variations for the field that requires color, the stock could be preprinted and distributed to factories to print the rest of the variable data at the factory level. It is also possible to print at a central location, the DC printing office or a service bureau and ship printed tags and labels to the factory for application to merchandise. The items would still be source ticketed, just not source-printed. Using a service bureau located near the factory may increase the per tag/label cost, but dramatically decrease the shipping (and potentially charge back) costs.

Danika Manchester, SATO America:

Danika Manchester is the Strategic Business Development Manager for SATO America, Inc. SATO is a leading global provider of innovative label and tag printing solutions throughout the supply chain at the manufacturer, DC/3PL, and in-store. Our product offering includes printers industrial laser, direct thermal, and thermal transfer, cutter-stackers, consumables, on-site service, application specific tag and label specialty materials, adhesives and designs like the PrintPeel tag on a liner and IntegraForm for e-commerce shipping, and PrintConnect service bureau. www.satoamerica.com 800-645-3290 x4232.

Ask VCF: Expert Answers to Your Most Pressing Questions

Since VCF hosted our first vendor open forum years ago, we've received hundreds of questions from members seeking assistance with issues they're facing on a regular basis. These open forums have afforded our membership the ability to talk to their peers and solicit advice on a myriad of situations they've encountered and need help with. Through the years we've found that there are several questions that get asked over and over again. VCF will highlight the most popular questions from our open forums and pose them to subject matter experts in an effort to help vendors find the solutions they need. To submit your questions, send an email to askvcf@vcfww.com.