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Printing Barcode Labels And Five Ways To Improve The Print Quality

I have been in the barcode industry for almost 20 years and continue to be amazed by the quality of the supplies used when printing barcodes.

Not every label manufacturer makes, or should make, labels for the thermal transfer industry. Thermal transfer printing requires a label and ribbon “marriage” to achieve a long lasting, functional result. In other words, the label material needs to be properly coated to be imprintable with a thermal transfer ribbon. This is not a difficult process, but it is critical to the success of a thermal transfer printing system.

I have seen many examples of incorrectly coated thermal transfer labels. Not only do these labels result in poor print quality, but, in most situations, there are other products on the market more suitable for the application. Recently, a company called me regarding a label printing problem. They indicated they were having problems with the label pre-print registration and intermittent printing of variable information. After some investigation, I determined the current label vendor was doing a poor job manufacturing the labels. In addition, they were using a thermal imprintable varnish on a label material not suitable for thermal transfer printing. This was not the first time I had encountered this type of problem. I designed the correct label and ribbon combination for their application and worked with our label manufacturer to correct the pre-print registration issues. Needless to say, our new customer was thrilled. His exact words were, “We have wanted our labels to look like this for over a year and they finally look perfect.” Solving problems and helping our customers be successful is what motivates me and drives our business.

With that in mind, here are five tips for better thermal transfer printing. These are the standards I follow with my customers.

1. Make sure the label and the ribbon formulations are correct for your application. Many vendors offer the “one size fits all” approach.
2. Use good quality labels and ribbons. Remember, this is a marriage; both are equally important.
3. Make sure your current label vendor vacuums the labels on press. Yes, the labels need to be vacuumed. During the manufacturing process, dust and particles adhere to the label material. If these particles are not removed, the ribbon will not print on these areas. The resulting “pits and voids” look like white specks on your labels. The result is labels that are aesthetically poor in appearance. More importantly, your barcodes may not scan properly.



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4. The labels and ribbons need to be properly packaged from your supplier. The labels need to be bagged or shrink wrapped. This will help keep dust off the labels during shipping and handling.

5. The printer needs to be properly maintained. Clean printers and printheads are critical to the quality of any thermal transfer printing system.

For help with cleaning your printheads, consider using the “Clean Start” system. There has been little innovation in thermal transfer ribbons during the last ten years with the exception of “Clean Start.” “Clean Start” ribbons have a cleaning leader that cleans the printhead as the ribbon is loaded into the printer. This cleaning process requires no additional time, enhances print quality and helps prevent premature printhead failure. [Click Here](#) for a demonstration and more detailed information about the “Clean Start” printhead cleaning system. Samples are available upon request.

Follow our five tips for better thermal transfer printing and try our “Clean Start” ribbons, you will not be disappointed. For answers to your questions or additional information on thermal transfer labels and ribbons, contact me at 603.527.0256 or at dritchie@PaladinID.com.

Thank you for your interest in PaladinID, LLC. We are here to help you “Make Your Mark.”

Dana J. Ritchie

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