

Avoid never-ending revision cycles with packaging artwork

Enhance collaboration and shorten time-to-market by allowing departments to review and approve packaging artwork faster and more efficiently



Introduction

Addressing excessive artwork revisions

In the new product development arena, artwork approval takes time, effort and the participation of multiple stakeholders to run smoothly. Organizations pay a lot of attention to getting the packaging's contents right, but the actual Artwork Management is often handled through a patchworked system of spreadsheets, emails, phone calls and manila envelopes shared across departments. This creates a chaotic and cumbersome revision process that impacts time-to-market and puts the company at a competitive disadvantage.

Impacted by market shifts, globalization and constantly changing customer demands, companies that want to get to market faster need technology that streamlines the Artwork Management process, eliminates excessive reworks and minimizes confusion during review cycles. By replacing their manual, disparate systems with configurable, automated Artwork Management software, organizations are enhancing collaboration, shortening time-to-market, and greatly improving the packaging artwork review and approval process.



This white paper explores the impacts of excessive artwork revisions and shows how a unified, cloud-based solution designed specifically for Artwork Management can help companies overcome these challenges and transform their product packaging into a valued asset instead of a burdensome cost center.

Stakeholder Collaboration

Gaining visibility and accountability among all stakeholders

Bottlenecks at the Artwork Management stage are a common cause of delayed product launches in a business environment where packaging is a key driver of product sales. In fact, the right artwork can lift sales, communicate the brand (e.g., Estee Lauder puts a lot of effort into its packaging and artwork because it's an elite brand) and help the company adhere to regulatory requirements (e.g., for medical devices, drugs, vitamins, food and beverage). "Many people scour the nutrition fact panel before making a purchase to ensure that what's in the package aligns with their dietary preferences," said Troy Walker, Lofware Smartflow Artwork Solution Executive.

One manufacturer of floor cleaners lifted its sales by 33% by changing its packaging artwork from a basic lime-green design to one focused on "non-toxic" messaging on a label that featured a picture of a toddler playing on the floor with a puppy. Such switchovers sound straightforward enough in theory, but simply collecting the latest content from multiple sources; photos, logos or other images; ingredient lists, warnings and pack copy text; and physical specifications (i.e., die-line details) can be a major challenge.

Managing the multiple stakeholders who need to sign off on the artwork elements—or send them back for revision and rework—can't be handled properly using spreadsheets and PDFs. Yet, that's exactly how many companies handle the artwork approval process.

Rewind the clock back about 10 years and the "job jacket"—a manila folder passed from department to department for review and approval of the enclosed documentation—was the main vehicle for artwork revision management. Labeled with the product name, due date and other details, the manila folder was routed around the office.

"Back when I worked on the artwork automation project for one of the world's largest spirits companies, they had filing cabinets in a 20' X 30' room where they kept every single piece of artwork that the company had ever created," said Walker.

As technology advanced, companies began using PDFs, FTP sites (for uploading/sharing files) and solutions like SharePoint to manage artwork. Most wound up with four or five different tools—none of which integrated or “talked” to one another—to handle the artwork revision process. By 2006, Walker was helping companies move this integral business process into the 21st Century. “We knew organizations wanted to get their artwork done better, faster and more efficiently,” said Walker. “Technology was the key to making that happen.”

The Pains of Excessive Artwork Revisions

Time and money organizations can't afford to waste

Lack of clarity between teams, inefficient workflows, too much manual oversight and communication gaps can all bring the artwork approval process to a standstill at any point. Often traced back to inadequate initial preparation, excessive artwork revisions create problems like:

Delays

Every day spent revising the work means another day before a review can be completed and signed off on. And even when the project makes it through one hoop, there's always the chance that more delays will ensue as it's passed along to the next reviewers. Over time, this multitude of delays can severely impact time-to-market (not to mention waste a lot of man hours in the process).

Unnecessary man hours

Slowdowns in any business process can be costly, and particularly if those slowdowns delay your delivery to market and put you at a competitive disadvantage. Unnecessary revision cycles consume scarce resources. If your team members are busy making and reviewing revisions, that's time they aren't spending moving another project forward.

Compliance risk

When changes are made to any packaging artwork element, you need to ensure that those alterations are made everywhere. If you're operating in a highly regulated industry, for example, you'll have to gather many details and meet many different regulatory requirements. To make this happen, efficiencies have to extend beyond just packaging artwork to include the labeling that goes on most of these packages.

Costly errors

One national pet food manufacturer added a line of dog treats to its product mix, made a mistake on the packaging artwork and wound up paying about \$15,000 to fix the error. In another example, a drug manufacturer mistakenly placed a critical barcode on the bottom of its cartons which, once folded and glued, obscured the barcode. The company spent about \$15,000 for an emergency reprint—a cost that could have been avoided using an automated, cloud-based Artwork Management tool, which catches errors that the human eye may miss.

Missed deadlines

If one person makes a comment that conflicts with the other five stakeholders' opinions, for instance, then that comment must be assessed by the rest of the team members. This is where the excessive revisions sneak in. With comments surfacing multiple different times during the review of a single piece of artwork, coordinating the review and sign-off process—and getting to the “final” stage—is extremely difficult and time consuming.

Customer dissatisfaction

Major retailers aren't very forgiving when it comes to label errors. One in particular requires its suppliers to come to its location at night and manually place stickers over the labels of every single one of the items (on the shelf, in the freezer, in the cold case, etc.) to fix the error. In one example, the total bill for doing this across all stores was about \$400,000 for one supplier that shipped its goods with incorrect labels.

Dealing with Costly Bottlenecks

Packaging design professionals need to get artwork done better, faster and more efficiently.

Most times, artwork is distributed to an average of six different people before it can receive final approval and integrated into the product labeling. That can't happen until every single person—plus any other third parties—signs off on the artwork. In absence of a cloud-based Artwork Management solution that automates the packaging artwork creation and management, there is no visibility or accountability across those various processes and stakeholders.



At one organic consumer food manufacturer, for example, all artwork was coordinated by a single communications director. With most of her days consumed by meetings, this director had the final say on all artwork. Once all feedback and revisions were received, the director would send the changes to the creative agency via PDF. She often worked on these projects into the late hours of the evening, effectively making the director the “bottleneck” and generator of much revision work for the rest of the team.

“Every day cost the organic food manufacturer another \$175-\$200 (the fee associated with opening an art file and making the change) as everyone went back to the drawing board to manage the revisions,” Walker recounted. “With the primary approver in meetings all day, the company rarely met its due dates.”

By implementing an automated, configurable Artwork Management platform, the manufacturer eliminated those bottlenecks, cut out the costs of excessive revisions and improved its time-to-market.

An automated solution, SmartFlow lets users review single and multipage PDF artwork and the metadata associated with each of those versions. An automated system that handles all aspects of the Artwork Management process, SmartFlow eliminates manual workflow processes and automates all of the steps involved. It also addresses excessive revisions with real-time annotations/reviewing and collaboration and ensures that jobs don’t come back around as “incomplete.”

The solution enhances collaboration, streamlines the approval process and shortens time-to-market by enabling reviewers to get instant visibility to the correct artwork version. This eliminates confusion that happens when artwork changes frequently, or when too many people are making updates.

“You never have to look in your email, Google Drive, SharePoint or Box.com for artwork files again,” said Walker. “You have one place that coordinates the tedious activities, catches errors and flags tasks that need to be done—something your inbox can’t do.” This allows companies to better coordinate, orchestrate and automate the steps in the artwork revision process, collaborate better, reduce excessive revisions and get to market faster.

SmartFlow also comes with real-time collaboration capabilities that leverage platforms to initiate chat among team members, who can ping a colleague to “take a look at this” for a quick reply and fast action. Catching problems during the early stages, before the files are sent to the graphic designers for revisions, can save companies a substantial sum in design work (usually \$175-\$200 per incident whether it’s handled internally or outsourced).



What's the Tipping Point?

Smartflow saves time and money and speeds time-to-market

For many companies, the tipping point on artwork revisions comes when those organizations start completing 200 or more changes per year. As they grow and expand, these companies also deal with a high degree of SKU proliferation, increased regulations, private-label projects and product variability. When they can no longer address these issues without adding new employees, companies turn to solutions like SmartFlow for help.

"When a department with limited resources suddenly has too much artwork to manage, it won't be able to meet the demand without adding more employees," said Walker. "Manually passing materials around and then waiting for people to bring stuff back is inefficient and having to address any errors that surface is both costly and time consuming."

One Software customer summed it up by saying, "Smartflow cut four days out of our artwork process because we literally used to print out an artwork review form, attach it to the artwork and then send it person-to-person for review." Now, the same company has a streamlined, cloud-based Artwork Management solution that saves it time and money; speeds up time-to-market; and allows valuable talent to focus on more important tasks.



Loftware and NiceLabel combined under the Loftware umbrella to offer customers and partners an expanded choice of Enterprise Labeling & Artwork Management solutions, providing enhanced labeling capabilities and the benefits of greater investment in cloud-based solutions for companies of all sizes. Loftware maintains a global presence with offices in the US, UK, Germany, Slovenia, China, Japan, and Singapore. The union combines 60 years of expertise in solving labeling challenges, helping companies improve the quality, speed, and efficiency of their labeling while reducing cost. Together, as the leading global provider of Enterprise Labeling and Artwork Management solutions, Loftware enables supply chain agility, supports evolving regulations, and optimizes business operations for a wide range of industries including life sciences, manufacturing, food & beverage, retail, automotive, consumer products and apparel.

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