



Creating a more efficient labeling process through integration

Case Study

Solution: NiceLabel Platform

Industry: Manufacturing

Challenges:

- Lack of flexibility
- Manual label printing process
- Inadequate labeling capabilities in ERP

Solution:

- Unified label printing and production
- Integration with ERP
- Customized print screens to match workflows

Benefits:

- Reduced printing and supplies cost
- Faster labeling process
- Automated labeling
- Improved customer service

Background

Swenco Limited is North America's leading manufacturer and distributor of components for the safety footwear industry. Located in Ontario, Canada, Swenco has manufactured high-quality products since 1962, and now services companies and industries all over the world.

Labels feature into every aspect of Swenco's manufacturing process, from production and shipping to the warehouse floor and inventory. The company has three main label types: product labels, shipping labels and process cards. Product labels contain a mixture of product information and graphics. Shipping labels contain a variety of information. Each box contains a mixture of SKUs, and the shipping labels also contain an itemized receipt of the box's contents. The process cards, which are basically work-in-process labels, were created manually. All of these labels have different sizes and formats, and they were printed using multiple printers in different environments.

Challenges



"We needed to be able to go into new markets and add new languages much more quickly"

Matthew Rowlands, Assistant General Manager, Swenco

Desire for increased flexibility

Prior to implementing NiceLabel, Swenco's labeling was outsourced. The company would purchase pre-printed labels that they would use when needed. However, this model proved to be quite challenging from a planning perspective. Every time they on-boarded a new brand or created new products, they would need to update their labels based on the new customer or product requirements. The outsourcing model lacked the flexibility they needed to be able to make these changes quickly, and left them with lots of redundant labels. "We needed to be able to go into new markets and add new languages much more quickly, without having to go out and buy pre-printed labels," comments Matthew Rowlands, Assistant General Manager at Swenco. "We wanted to be able to change requirements and branding on-the-fly."

Lack of integration meant manual workarounds

Since labeling wasn't integrated with Swenco's ERP system, employees used a series of manual workflows in order to produce and print labels in the warehouse. For example, they would export label information from the ERP system to an Excel sheet and then manually print the labels. In their steel-stamping facility, they use color-coded process cards to identify bin contents, with each type of job being assigned its own color. The production of these process cards was entirely manual, and it took 4-5 hours of manual labor in order to produce a card.

ERP upgrade opens the door to process improvement

Swenco decided to upgrade their ERP system to the latest version of Aptean Made2Manage. It had been 15 years since their last upgrade, and advances in technology meant they could get far more sophisticated functionality than they had previously. They decided to take advantage of that by integrating labeling with their ERP system. However, Swenco wasn't satisfied with the core shipping label available in the ERP system, so they reached out to long-time NiceLabel partner, Integrated Productivity Systems (IPSi), to help them find the best labeling platform to integrate with their chosen ERP solution.

As Rick Schilling, President at IPSi, puts it, finding the right fit for Swenco's labeling needs was their key focus. "Labeling is one of Swenco's mission-critical processes, so it was important that they could find a platform that would meet their needs."

One platform for all their labeling needs

Swenco came to IPSi with two basic requirements: they wanted to print all of their labels from one platform, and that platform needed to integrate with Made2Manage. That platform needed to be flexible enough to meet all of their demands and integrate with their various workflows. According to IPSi, it was this demand for flexibility that made them recommend NiceLabel. "The platform gives us unlimited capabilities," Rick states. "When Swenco told us what their requirements were, I immediately said, 'We have to do this with NiceLabel; that was the only solution.'"

Solution

// *One of the beauties of NiceLabel is that it's easy to deploy it to multiple users. They now use the same printing platform across eight different job functions. This not only consolidates all the printing, it consolidates all the people on one platform."*

Rick Schilling, President, IPSi

Using NiceLabel, IPSi was able to unify all of Swenco's label production and printing onto one platform. NiceLabel is seamlessly integrated with Made2Manage, which gives Swenco a standardized way of working across all parts of the business. "We made a system that is integrated with their ERP database and that offers a wide range of functionality. It accommodates the fact that they have users in different parts of the business: in the office, in the warehouse and in the production area," relates Rick. "One of the beauties of NiceLabel is that it's easy to deploy it to multiple users. They now use the same printing platform across eight different job functions. This not only consolidates all the printing, it consolidates all the people on one platform. So, wherever the employees are, they're using the same labeling system."

IPSi was also able to create customized print screens that matched all of Swenco's internal workflows. The print screens dynamically change the printer settings, based on the label selected, so the user doesn't have to remember to change the label size. "Before, someone might accidentally send a request for a 4x4 label to a printer that has 2x3 labels installed," explains Ian Faust, Software Developer with IPSi. "By using NiceLabel to automatically change the printer settings, you can avoid that type of error." The print screens are designed so employees only have to work inside of the label printing environment, which creates a more efficient label printing workflow.



Benefits



We've achieved a 50% cost savings by eliminating the need for pre-printed labels."

Matthew Rowlands, Assistant General Manager, Swenco

Reduced costs and increased efficiency

The switch to NiceLabel has meant significant cost savings, both in terms of materials and labor costs. "We would just look at how much money we were throwing away," comments Matt. "The cost of making your own labels is significantly lower than buying them pre-printed. I would say we've achieved a 50% cost savings on that alone, not including what we've saved in labor costs." The ability to print labels on-demand has also drastically reduced Swenco's lead time. "It now takes us 30 seconds to add a new label," Matt states. "Going from design to production now takes a matter of minutes, instead of days. And we don't have to worry about things like order quantity and volume breaks, because now everything is the same price."

From manual processes to full automation

Thanks to the integration of labeling with the ERP system, Swenco has been able to automate virtually all of their manual processes. "With the help of IPSi, we were able to integrate the process card creation workflow into the system, basically removing the thought process involved with printing process cards. Now, they automatically come out color-coded, so we went from spending 4-5 man-hours to just pressing a button," Matt relates. This automation also makes it easier for the production staff, as they have to make fewer decisions when printing labels. Automation in turn, has led to staff empowerment.

The screenshot displays the 'IPSi Print' software interface. On the left, three blue buttons are stacked vertically: 'Product Labels', 'Shipping Labels', and 'Process Cards'. The main area shows a preview of a label with the Swenco Limited logo and contact information for Integrated Productivity Systems, LLC. Below this is a 'STEEL-FLEX' label for 'SEN-651' with a barcode and dimensions '45" / 114cm'. At the bottom, a 'STEEL SOLE PRODUCTION - PROCESS CARD' is shown with fields for 'Job Order: UJ799', 'Style - Size: 105503-10, STEEL-FLEX SOLE PLATE', and 'Order Quantity: 1'. A small table below the process card shows '0 Pairs' and 'LOT # 1'.

0 Pairs		SALES ORDER #	
LOT #	1	CUSTOMER P.O. #	2201197

Part No. SGG-726			
105503-10, STEEL-FLEX SOLE PLATE			
SHIP-TO:	Integrated Productivity Systems 416 N. Spring Garden Street Ambler Pennsylvania 19002 USA		

Empowering business users to print labels

"Prior to NiceLabel, it used to only be the Production Coordinator, who could print labels. We had to do it that way, because it was important for the production staff to be able to focus on production and not waste time with system development," Matt states. With NiceLabel, however, Swenco has been able to empower production staff to print their own labels. "Now, instead of us controlling the process, we can empower them to choose their own stocks. We're able to give them a system that we know will work without too much supervision. They have their own computer with a designer, and all shipping labels are done at one location and everyone knows how to do it."

Flexibility creates a competitive advantage

Increased flexibility is another benefit. "As a smaller manufacturer, the things that have helped us grow are customer service, flexibility and being able to respond to our customers' immediate needs," Matt states. "Flexibility is what keeps us in business, and we are far more flexible now than we were before."

Interestingly enough, the same flexibility is what helps IPSi to meet their customers' demands. "In our world, as generic problem solvers, we can't do it without products like NiceLabel," Rick asserts. "Every place we put this software, that company ends up having more flexibility and more control than they've ever had around labeling."

Looking to the future

Now that Swenco has achieved a more agile, efficient labeling process, the company is looking at using NiceLabel to improve their overall operational efficiency. "We're eventually going to convert to a barcode system for our warehouse system, and introduce barcoding all of our inventory. NiceLabel will be a big part of that," Matt comments. Swenco also hopes to extend their streamlined labeling process to suppliers as well.

Swenco now has a labeling platform that can support future business growth as well. "As we continue to expand our product offering, NiceLabel will play a big part. Once we start manufacturing ourselves, we'll need to create our own labels. We also do a lot of work with Amazon, and NiceLabel enables us to save money because we can label things properly, according to their specifications."

For IPSi, it's been satisfying to see how NiceLabel has transformed Swenco's business. "When you systemize a workflow that was totally disconnected and inefficient, it has a huge impact," Rick states. "With NiceLabel, we're able to put our customers in a position where they can have better control of a mission-critical process."



About NiceLabel

NiceLabel is a leading global developer of label and marking productivity software solutions that help SME and large enterprises reduce complexity and mitigate risk while meeting compliance requirements and increasing productivity, quality and agility. NiceLabel's design, print and management solutions are modular, easily configurable and scalable so they enable best practice labeling processes to be implemented quickly. This provides significant ROI over the lifetime of their use. Through its headquarters in Europe and global offices in Germany, USA, Singapore and China, NiceLabel serves and supports its clients around the world with technology at the forefront of market demand.

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