

IN-LINE LABELING SYSTEMS

What Your Business Needs to Consider Before Purchasing



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INTRODUCTION

6 Factors to Consider Before Purchasing an In-Line Labeling System

Product labeling is vital in manufacturing, shipping, and distribution processes.

Manufacturers face a wide range of evolving requirements for labeling that can complicate the process. Some owners accept this as a cost of doing business.

But it doesn't have to be that way. Leveraging technology to improve labeling can make a huge difference in overcoming challenges and providing a leg up on your competition.

A tag affixed to a part, product, or package is what customers depend on to “communicate” to them the identity and quantity of items delivered. If your company is making errors with labeling or manual applications are costing you time and efficiency, it might be time to up the ante and consider purchasing an in-line labeling system.

An in-line label applicator system can make the process more efficient and reliable.

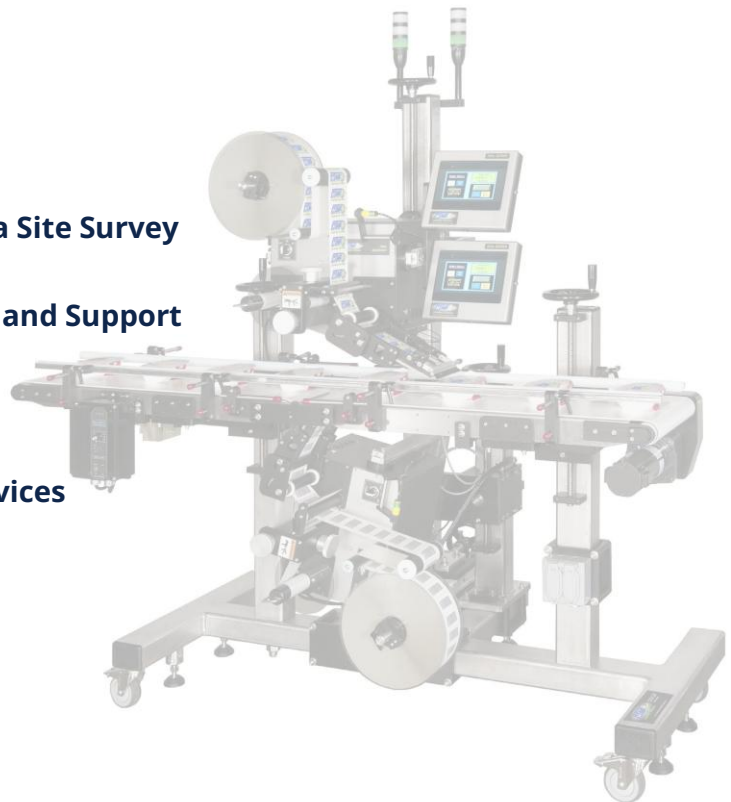
It is much faster than workers manually applying labels on a line or at a conveyor. If you are already using a tape or seal system, an in-line label applicator can work in conjunction to completely automate your packaging process.

There are several in-line label applicator systems on the market. Research is needed to make the best decision on the correct in-line labeling system for your business.

Before you move forward with any type of in-line label applicator, it is crucial to determine and understand how it would be used and how it would fit in with your current operations. As you work with various vendors, make sure they take a consultative approach to assist and guide you through the decision-making process.

Consider these **6 factors** when researching to help make the **best investment** for your business.

1. **Defining Your Scope**
2. **Know Your TCO/ROI Requirements**
3. **Define Your Application Needs With a Site Survey**
4. **Investigate Manufacturer Credibility and Support**
5. **Ease of Integration and Operation**
6. **Reliability of Systems and Repair Services**





PART 1

Defining Your Scope

What problems will a labeling system solution solve for your business? Before you decide which system would be right for your business, you need to determine why you need it and what you want the system to do. This step is often missed, and you end up backtracking to find the right solution.

Begin by asking

what problems and issues are causing you to consider automating label applications?

Inconsistent Workers

While your workers do a great job, not everyone works at the same pace every hour of every day. They may be off sick or have a vacation here and there, and someone else has to fill in, which provides a level of inconsistency.

Workers can make mistakes. Mistakes cost money. If they issue the wrong label, it could jeopardize your company's credibility as a vendor.

Labels Need Fast Application

Do you need the labels applied faster than your labor force can manually apply? Humans can only work so quickly, and you need a faster solution.

Accuracy and Precision

Does the labeling require accuracy and precision humans cannot provide?

If the label requires a level of accuracy and precision that humans cannot provide, *it is time to consider automation.*

Cost Savings

Can positions be eliminated, providing a cost savings? Will the employee be repurposed, and will it mean significant savings for the company? We will look at this more in part two when discussing your total cost of ownership and return on investment requirements.

Once you know the answers to these questions, you can begin to see the benefits and learn the different options of in-line label applications to best meet your business needs.

DecisionPoint guides you the entire way and works side-by-side with you to ensure that your needs are completely met.



PART 2

Know Your TCO/ROI Requirements

When making a significant investment, you want to be sure you are aware of the total cost of ownership and a projection of when you will see a return on your investment. Whether installing an automated labeling solution for the first time or upgrading your existing technology, it is an investment of time and money. You have to consider the costs and how important it is to your business.

Things you need to take into consideration include:

Metrics

- What are the metrics needed for a labeling system to be a successful project?
- What percentage of products per hour are needed to have an ROI of x?
- If a worker is eliminated or repurposed, what is the cost savings?

Improved Efficiency and Accuracy

Will improved efficiency and accuracy offset the initial cost of an automated labeling solution? Manual label applications are labor-intensive and error prone. By increasing productivity with an automated labeling solution, your company will positively impact its profitability and provide a positive ROI.



PART 3

Define Your Application Needs With a Site Survey

A site survey is a multi-page document that gathers information from you and your staff regarding your business and your specific printing application needs. Some companies may simply send a form for completion. We prefer to work with you to complete the form. A site survey should include:

What Types of Items Need to Be Labeled?

Because there are various types of packaging and products that require different types of labels, different print engines could be needed. *Where will the labels be placed? Are they to be placed on a flat surface such as a case, or will it be placed on a cylinder bottle or a pail of some sort? Will it be placed in a recess area such as the top of a deli container?*

In-line label applicators for the job will vary by case and by product. Various applicators enable central label management and label application by methods including tamp blow, air blow or wipe on. Or a print and apply solution that incorporates a print engine with an applicator. These are popular with shipping applications.

Products with a long shelf, such as automotive parts, might need a thermal transfer print engine which requires a ribbon and long-lasting, durable labels. On the other hand, food items with a high turnover rate might need to use a direct thermal print engine to provide economical labeling.

What Is Included on the Label?

Will you be able to use a static pre-printed label? Is the information included on all the labels the same, or will you need different barcodes, RFID tags, logos, and graphics included? *Remember to consider what industry and regulatory requirements are required for compliance.*

What Is the Size of the Label?

What will the label size be, and will it always be the same? Printers have minimum and maximum label sizes they can print. Your size specifications for labels will help narrow your choices to the models that can accommodate your operations.

What Is the Physical Layout Envisioned for the Project?

Is there already a conveying system in place? Where will the label applicator fit into your line in relation to other equipment it must integrate with on the line? Will it be spliced into an existing conveyor, or are you looking for a completely new line installation?

If you currently have workers applying the printed labels by hand, *adding an in-line label applicator can have a quick ROI for your company.* Or perhaps you are just considering how to add automation. If that is the case, consider how all the components would work together, plus how the process could scale as your company continues to grow.

Other Factors to Consider

Are there environmental factors that need to be taken into consideration such as exposure to large amounts of dust, moisture, or chemicals, temperature extremes or a risk of impact?

Are there operational demands such as speed, volume or print resolution?

What will work with your current IT network infrastructure?

Consider only options that are compatible with your computer operating system and that can integrate with your existing business systems.

Ask you can see there is a lot to consider before making a decision. It is essential to take time to do a thorough Site Survey before making a decision. The Site Survey will save you time and money in the long run, and costly decision mistakes will be avoided. The clearer the vision you have for how the in-line label applicator will work with your existing operation, the more successful your decision will be in providing the specific functionality you desire.



PART 4

Investigate Manufacturer Credibility and Support

The reputation and integrity of the manufacturer are important in your choice of application systems.

Please do your research and learn about how long the manufacturer has been in business and what their reputation is. Ask for a list of other clients that have deployed their equipment.

Do they have a high turnover rate? Ask questions to find out how long their account managers and technicians have been with the company.

What qualifications do they require of their engineers and technical staff? And don't forget the sales staff — do they have significant product knowledge that makes you feel confident knowing they can fully support your purchase through its entire life cycle?

Can the manufacturer provide the following:

- Print and apply label systems
- Application systems
- Start “head on a stick” off-the-shelf systems at a lower cost
- Custom system that meets specific non-standard needs

Do they provide standardized subsystems such as the **Zebra ZE500** or **Sato S84** print engines?

The technology they produce is important but also consider visiting their facility to see for yourself how they run their organization, learn about their quality control and service, and support capabilities.



PART 5

Ease of Integration and Operation

A successful implementation should include a labeling solution that will fit in smoothly if you have existing operations. It needs to be user-friendly and match the physical space available, allow for the correct configuration, and be hardware/software compatible with what you already have. Your site survey will help both you and the label applicator manufacturer understand your operation's specific needs and help you make a selection that will blend seamlessly into your manufacturing or shipping processes.

A user-friendly labeling system should include these ease-of-operation features:

- User-friendly and matches the physical space available
- Customizable to meet your label application needs
- Seamlessly integrates into your existing conveying process flow or a new installation of conveying to meet your needs

Your labeling system should provide versatility and feature flexible options to meet not only your current needs but future needs as your business grows. This ensures that you get as much out of your label applicator solution investment as possible.

Label Applicator Systems You Might Want to Consider

- An applicator-only system that can be configured in right- or left-hand dispensing mode depending on what works best with your conveyor is the **CTM360 Series**.
- The **CTM3600 series** of label applicators provides automated solutions for your product labeling needs with the versatility to operate as a dispenser for pre-printed labels or print-and-apply labels.

These units can be customized for a specific application, and labels can be applied almost anywhere on the product.

- A variety of mounting and orientation options are available with the **CTM3600 Series**, and it features 203, 300, and 600 dpi print resolution choices.



CTM360a Series



CTM360a Integrated Loose-Loop Labeler



CTM3600 Series



- The **Zebra ZE500** also provides right- and left-hand dispensing modes and includes a print engine plus barcode printing and RFID capabilities.
- The **SATO S84-EX Series** and **S86-EX Series** include a print engine (4" and 6" print width) with the capacity for field-configurable print resolution changes and a wide range of connectivity options, including serial, parallel, Ethernet, USB, and wireless. They also have barcode printing and RFID capabilities.
- Another print engine option is the **LT408** that provides a low-volume and lower-cost print engine.

There are other manufacturers, but these are our most popular models making up 80–90% of the print engine market.

Some questions to ask regarding training include:

- Does the manufacturer provide training, and is the training in-person or virtual with a person to answer questions or recorded videos?
- Are written step-by-step instructions provided as well for future reference?

It is crucial to get the right equipment to meet your needs, but learning to use it correctly is also essential. Training should be included in your contract.



PART 6

Reliability of Systems and Repair Services

Reliability in equipment and repair is important to consider in your decision-making process.

Insist on high quality control standards for inspecting and testing of products to ensure they are reliable. Trustworthy products usually have some type of limited lifetime warranties.

You want a dependable labeling system that features quality construction to withstand constant daily use in demanding environments. *Some of the features to look for are all-metal frameworks and high IP ratings for protection against dust and water.*

Some models have specific features that make them easy to use and maintain.

Let's Talk About Maintenance and Support

All machines will need routine maintenance, professional servicing, and support at some point. Does the company you are purchasing from provide support and repair services? An excellent manufacturer will not only make the sale but provide a commitment to you to support your new label applicator system after it is put into use.

It is important to talk with them and learn if their maintenance and tech support is provided on-site. This is important since it decreases downtime for the line.

solution



CONCLUSION

DecisionPoint Technologies prides itself in providing support services throughout the lifecycle of your label applicator system.

To ensure your rollout is successful, our dedicated project managers can assist with your new labeling system's staging and deployment.

Our qualified consultants help with label design in multiple ways, such as assisting in developing applications to meet compliance and other needs, installing software, and providing training to your employees. *Finally, to minimize downtime, our certified technicians are available to perform break-fix/depot and on-site repairs.*

If the company partners with another manufacturer or outsources support with a partner business, does that partner provide high-quality equipment and support after the sale? If they outsource support, are the technicians qualified, and do they visit on-site for repairs?

When you work with DecisionPoint, we manage the entire process with our partners.

Make the Correct Decision

Taking time to investigate automated in-line label application system options will help you make the right investment and feel confident that your business operations will run more efficiently and provide a positive ROI for years in the future.

At DecisionPoint Technologies, we partner with industry leaders to offer a variety of quality labeling systems. We know one size does not fit all, and if you can't find what you need in an existing model, we can custom engineer a solution that will fit your unique requirements. Our knowledgeable team will work closely with you through all stages of planning and implementation.

Contact us today to see what we can do for you.