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• By Designing a two-part label that includes a shipping label on top and a packing list underneath, this integrator not only solved its customer's challenge, it created a whole new source of revenue.

by Dan Schell

When integrator Numina Systems Corp. began selling its One-Step Fulfillment system in 2003, company CEO Dan Hanrahan already knew this innovative solution would be a hit. That's because one of Numina's clients had been testing it for about 18 months and had recently ordered four more.

Numina Systems is part of the Numina Group, a material handling automation solution provider. Numina's One-Step systems consists of printer/applifiers from Panther Industries, Numina's RDS TRAK3 software, fixed-mount bar code scanners from companies such as SICK and Vitronic, and a conveyor belt encoder tracking control specifically developed by Numina for labeling applications. Once a carton is placed on a conveyor belt, a fixed-mount scanner reads the carton's order bar code and transmits that data to the RDS software. The software accesses the company's database and then transmits both the packing slip and shipping label data for the carton to the printer/applifiers. The pulse encoders (built into the conveyor) track the carton at least every 1/8 inch as it moves along the belt. Printer/applifiers and bar code scanners are placed at a specific number of pulses (i.e. distance) along the conveyor line and controlled via the RDS control engine. Once the carton reaches the first applicator, a customer packing slip label is printed and automatically applied to the top or side of the carton. A scanner positioned directly following the applicator verifies the packing slip is correct. The carton continues on the conveyor to the second applicator, where a shipping label, which is slightly larger than the packing slip label, is precisely applied over the packing slip label. Again, a scanner positioned directly following this printer/applifier provides for labeling validation. If the label doesn't pass the scan test, the exception carton is diverted off the conveyor to a separate workstation for an operator to correct the error.

Combo Packing/Shipping Label Is The Key

While a lot of application know-how was required to integrate all of these components, Hanrahan explains that it is the labels that really make this application unique. "The packing slip is a special 4-inch by 5-inch perforated label that can be easily peeled off," he explains. "This is different from typical 8 1/2-inch by 11-inch paper packing list that is tucked into a plastic envelope and stuck to a box. We had tried a label-over-label version of this idea back in 1996, but the adhesive on the top label would sometimes damage the label below. This time, we collaborated with a

label company that developed a patented set of labels that had adhesive only on the border of the top label."

He adds that the smaller (it can fit 12 to 15 line items) packing slip was an initial concern of the computer equipment company that had originally contacted Numina in 2002 for this project. Would the end users accept such a packing slip? After the testing phase, the answer was a resounding yes.

The Orders Keep Coming

So far, Numina has sold 13 One-Step systems – which can cost up to \$200,000 – and many clients are installing 4 or more systems. This success has caused Numina to put more emphasis on the system. For instance, the company has hired an additional salesperson and added incentives for its sales force. Hanrahan now spends about 30% of his time per week promoting the One-Step system. "This is a very consultative sale, usually lasting about nine months," he says. "We have to determine how much labor can be reduced and the volume of parcels shipped. Typically, the system can eliminate three to four people from a shipping/packing process and is designed for companies shipping an average of 2,500 to 3,000 cartons a day. The payback is between 6 and 12 months."



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