

Continued from page 25

customers quickly identify illegible codes, thereby reducing packaging waste and rework time.

Clean, clear, precise

Laser marking systems are highly effective when manufacturers require individual products to be coded at a high speed. Due to the variety of ingredients and nutrition, consumer-driven product proliferation is commonly seen in snack bars. The need to shut down and set up for different products makes flexible production lines experience more downtime than dedicated lines.

Advanced laser controller software like line set-up wizards, along with a suite of productivity tools, can help operators address the sources of both planned and unplanned downtime. Depending on user familiarity, set-up wizards can be between 25-50% faster than legacy controller interfaces. Assuming even a modest number of changeovers per day, these time savings can add up to meaningful production hours over a year. In addition, Code Assurance features enable production supervisors and quality teams to easily create error-proofing rules during job set-up that limit operator input to predefined choices.

Laser solutions are also able to minimise packaging uses and contribute to certain

corporate social responsibility (CSR) goals. Because laser solutions use no consumables outside of electricity and require little maintenance, plants are able to reduce production waste caused by planned or unplanned downtime, and can significantly reduce or often eliminate the use of Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs).

A versatile option with its own set of 'smarts'

A continuous inkjet (CIJ) printer is a great option for snack bar manufacturers looking for ease of integration, as they can code and mark on both carton cases and plastic films before or after a product is packaged.

Although regulations in the food sector are strict and complicated, a selection of inks has been developed to accommodate the unique requirements. A newly launched supplies brand, iQMark, including inks, make-ups, cleaners and ribbons, has been designed to comply with strict governmental and industry regulations as well as help customers meet their corporate social responsibility (CSR) goals.

There are over 30 inks under iQMark that address those objectives. One of the newest iQMark inks for CIJ complies with the European Printing Ink Association (EuPIA) Exclusion List. iQMark supplies also help enable 'go green' and 'environmentally friendly' initiatives by helping customers reduce or even eliminate methyl ethyl ketone (MEK), emissions of Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs), and consumption of energy and raw materials.

While manufacturers may have concerns that inks and fluids can damage the food production environment, embedded microchips in CIJ can ensure the right fluid is being used, and a Smart Cartridge fluid delivery system can virtually eliminate spillages.

Like laser and TTO technologies, CIJ printers also feature intuitive interfaces to ensure the elimination of coding errors. Especially where fast changeovers are required, improving efficiency and keeping uptime to a maximum is critical.

From big to small

The challenges presented to snack bar manufacturers are growing bigger. Printing in a precise and small area at high speeds is challenging enough, not to mention keeping the entire line running without stopping for printing errors.

Through an overall understanding of the product, packaging substrates, operating speeds and regulatory requirements, an expert supplier in coding and marking can turn those big challenges into small ones, which allows manufacturers to concentrate on the important business of production and to continue to provide consumers with convenient and healthy snack options. ■