

Label Automation

What are your labeling automation goals?

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What are your labeling automation goals?

Automating your labeling process, at any capacity, is a daunting task for many small to mid-sized companies. Having a **“game plan”** will make decisions on automated label systems and machines much easier.

Start out by **creating a list** of clearly defined objectives you would like to accomplish with your packaging line. For instance: What would it mean to your company if you could:



**IMPROVE YOUR
SHIPMENT TIME?**



**IMPROVE THE
QUALITY AND
PRESENTATION OF
YOUR PACKAGES?**



**REDISTRIBUTE
OR UPGRADE
YOUR LABOR
FORCE?**



**IMPROVE
PRODUCT
THROUGHPUT?**

Defining your project goals is the first step in finding a solution.

Build a Project Team

After setting your business goals, **organize key personnel** on your production team. **Their opinions are important** to the automation process success. Everyone from your operators to maintenance to finance, has information and abilities that you will need to utilize before, during, and after the automation process.

Consider questions like:

- **What can we do now to improve the packaging line?**
- **If we automate the labeling process, will that solve any problems?**
- **How long until we see an ROI?**
- **Will our throughput increase?**
- **Will our quality improve?**
- **How will this affect labor costs?**
- **How will this affect labor productivity?**

Ask **one person from each department** to be a part of your project team, choosing members who can help you justify the need for automation. **One operator may explain** that the packaging line would be more efficient with an updated conveyor system **while another employee may express** the need for higher quality print on your labels. A financial manager will help when it comes to monetary decisions and creating a budget.

Knowing Your Options

It's important to understand that you have **options**.

If you are happy overall with your packaging line, but there is one area **you would like to see improvement in**, such as print quality for your barcode labels or a better application process, consider changing out the print engine on your applicator or upgrade the tamp mechanism and keep your current printer.

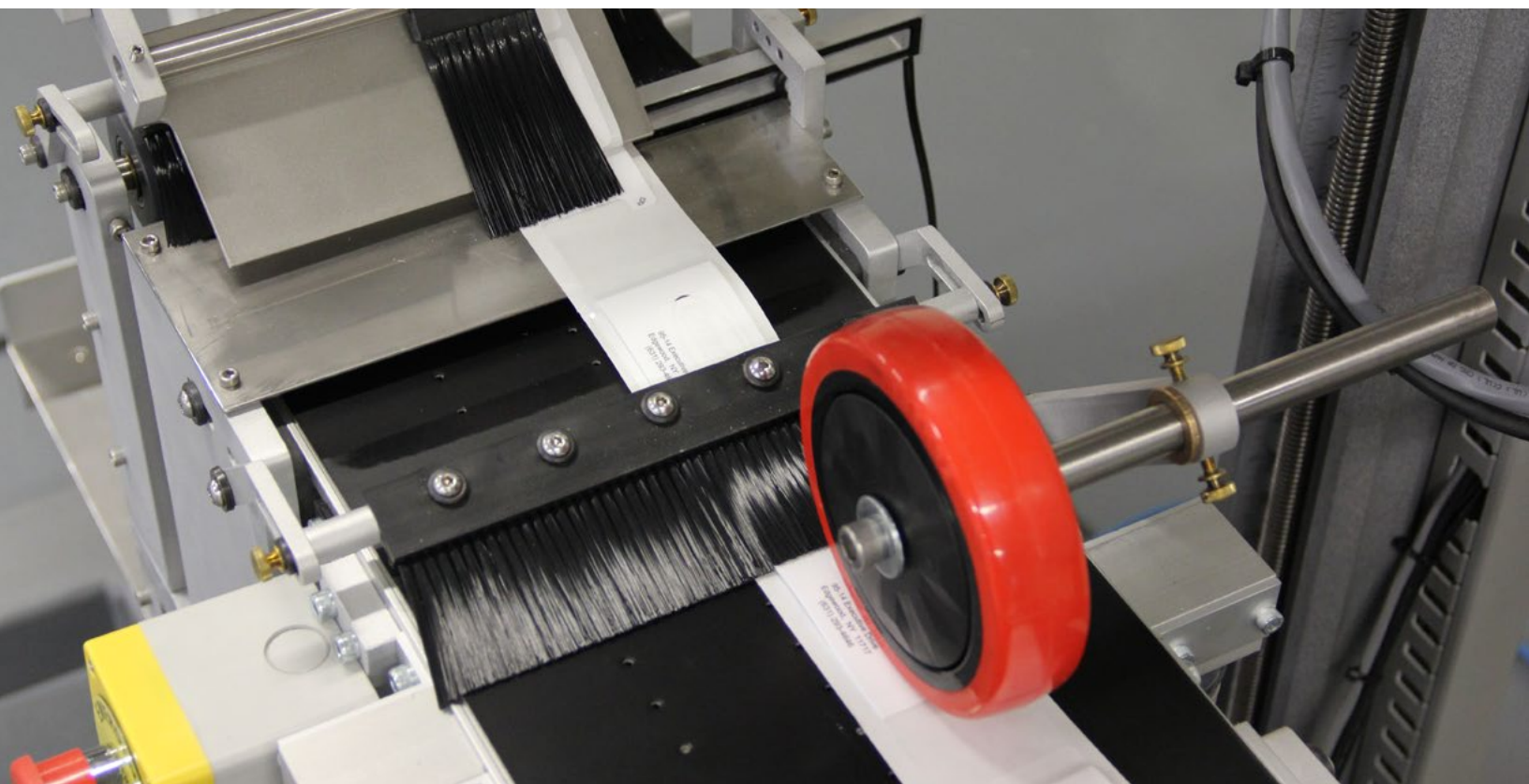
You will have a choice of either **semi-automatic or fully automatic solutions** in virtually every solution. Semi-automated systems utilize manual handling and automated labeling. Fully automated systems utilize automated handling and labeling of the product. Semi-automatic may be an ideal solution for small packaging lines who are seeing a slight increase in orders and need to improve their throughput to match. It may not be financially feasible for a company to switch to a fully automatic solution initially – **there are option for those companies who need just some additional help.**

Data Integration

If you are adding variable printed information for product identification or barcoding you will need to consider how the data stream is going to be integrated into your process.

- **Do you have an ERP system and how will that integrate?**
- **Do you have an enterprise wide labeling system or is it stand alone?**
- **What is the source of the data?**
- **Do you have network infrastructure in place?**
- **Will you be using network cabling or wireless?**
- **What is your labeling design software?**
- **What printer are you utilizing?**
- **What print quality does your application demand?**

Answering the above questions will help guide you in your decision process.



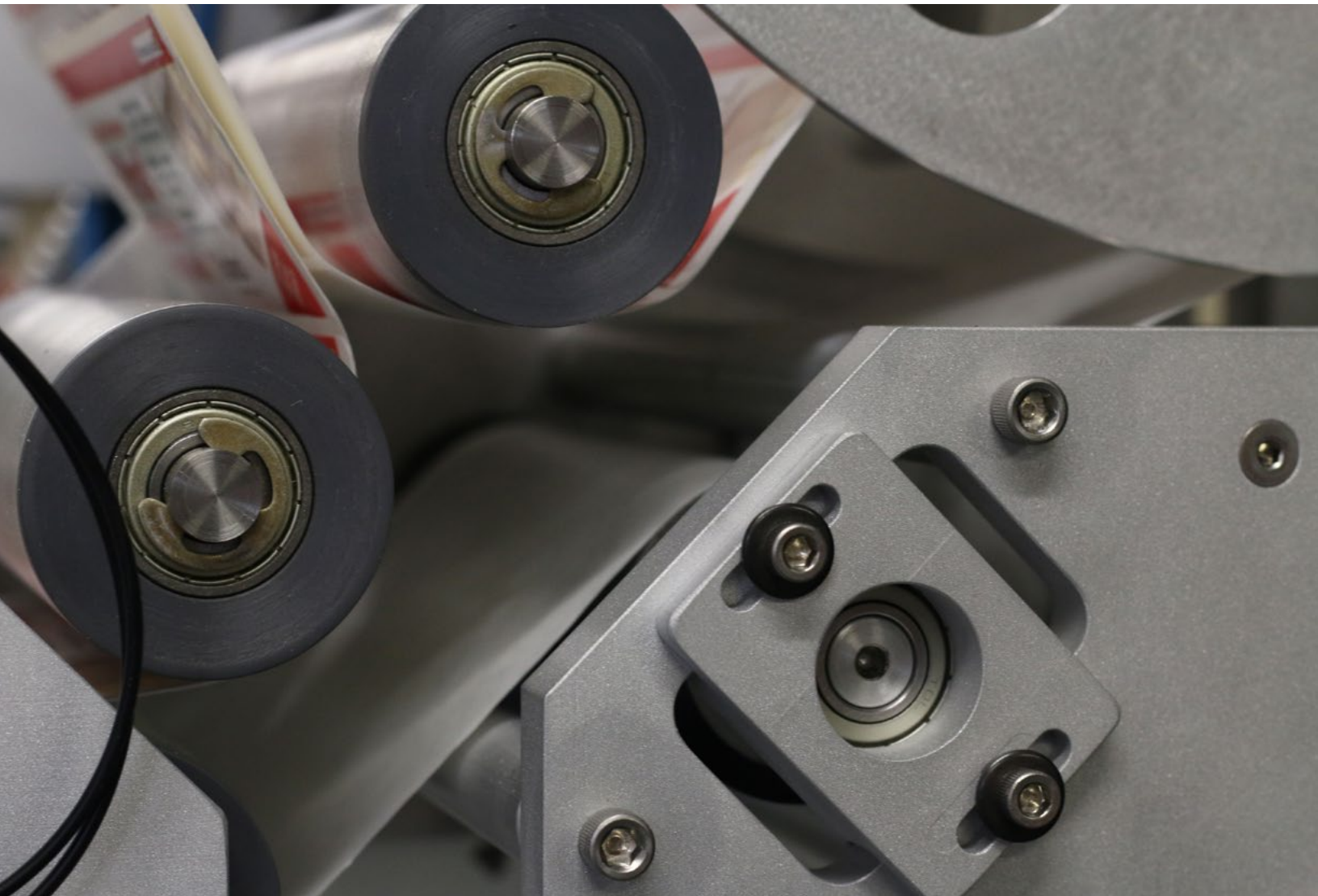
Choosing a System

Once you have decided on whether a semi-automated or full automation solution is best for your business you will need to evaluate the different types of components and machinery to **determine exactly what will help you reach your production goals.**

Consider questions such as:

- **Do we need a label applicator and printer? Will just a label printer suffice?**
- **Will a box former fulfill our requirements or do we need a sealer as well?**
- **Do we need uniform components or random components that can account for different sized and shaped products?**

We suggest **having your own idea in mind** when it comes to your production needs before contacting a technology solutions expert. While a solution expert may have different insight, **the more knowledgeable you are about your product**, production line, labor force and the components you are looking to upgrade **the more seamlessly the automation integration will go.**



Sourcing a Technology Solutions Expert

Choosing a supplier will be like choosing a co-captain for your team, somebody that is going **to work well with both yourself and your team**. Look for characteristics such as:

- **Proven Expertise:**

Are they able to accurately, and in detail, answer any questions you have concerning the machines, automation plan, and operations. Also, are they able to **quickly produce the information** from another expert that they work with?

- **Excellent Communication:**

Choose a supplier who will be in contact with you throughout the entire process and after the integration. If any issues may arise post-integration, you need to be able to trust that your supplier **will be available to troubleshoot them immediately**.

- **Honesty:**

With any major upgrade or modification, automation can be tricky and throw you curve balls that you may not have considered. It is important to team up with an expert who **is upfront and honest about what issues may arise** rather than lead you to believe the process will be 100% seamless.

The supplier you choose should be someone that you are comfortable working with, will be available to you through each stage of the automation process, and you **trust your business with**.



“Punch List” and the Testing Phase

The testing phase is crucial because, as the phrase “testing phase” suggests, it ensures that everything from the type of components, the training of your operators, and the communication between the components all produces the desired effect. It’s critical that your new automated line can adjust to fit the needs of your product, adjusting for the sizes and shapes of your products.

This phase is also **the testing phase for your employees**. Everyone involved with the production line will be trained to use and maintain the components. For those working on the line this will be a “trial” to test their new knowledge of the automated line and ensure that once you continue normal production your workers will know the machines as well as possible.

Calculate Changes & Complications into Your Integration Plan

The issue that a lot of project managers and business owners face isn’t with what’s in their plan – it’s what’s not in their plan. Like anything in life, let alone production and business, **issues will arise that will complicate the path you imagined**. What will make the difference for you and your business will be **the fact that you have accounted for these road bumps and work through them calmly**.





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