

TAL Apparel

BarTender supports manufacturer's mission of innovation



Hong Kong-based TAL Apparel has been a force in global apparel manufacturing for more than 70 years. The company actively researches and develops advanced garment technologies, and produces high-quality products with design, comfort and functionality in mind. Innovation in technology and process are primary drivers for the company — the company positions itself as an “INNOFACTURER,” short for “innovative garment manufacturer.”

At TAL Apparel, every production detail is considered for its impact on their overarching strategy, including labeling. The company deployed BarTender enterprise labeling software on their manufacturing lines, advancing their label production to meet their high organizational standards for innovation. BarTender enabled streamlined processes and savings of time, resources and money.

Challenge

Some of the world's most well-known retail clothiers, companies like Nordstrom, Michael Kors, Brooks Brothers, and Under Armor, rely on TAL Apparel to manufacture the items they sell under their brand names. The company has revolutionized apparel manufacturing and garment technology. Their innovations include their patented SofTAL® Shirt, recognized as the finest wrinkle-free shirt available, Natural•Cool™, a technology that allows garments to rapidly absorb and disperse perspiration, EZWash™, which eliminates collar and cuff staining; and their high-performance PerformanceKnit™ for polo shirts, which guarantees little or no shrinkage, minimizes piling and fading and improves shape retention.

TAL Apparel's retailer brands choose them for their leadership in garment technology, but also for their unrivalled supply chain expertise. They advertise their supply chain models as being Data Driven, KPI Driven and based on Advanced Support Systems — sophisticated IT infrastructure that includes scalable data handling and ERP systems that connect portals to streamline the supply chain.

The company has nine plants worldwide, and their production lines include 70 label and tag printers, creating labels that include in-garment washing instructions, and logistics and packaging labeling.



TAL Apparel had been developing its own label design and printer code in-house, employing programmers to write Visual Basic or Java Script every time an existing label needed modification or a new label needed formatting. The company employed a team of engineers, needing different programming skills to manage the coding for each brand and model printer in their factories. Writing a label printing code string was time consuming and the results unpredictable.

The barcodes the company needed to create were complex, and needed to be compliant with stringent international standards and rules. Each new EAN, UPC, Code 128 and QR code required new code to be written.

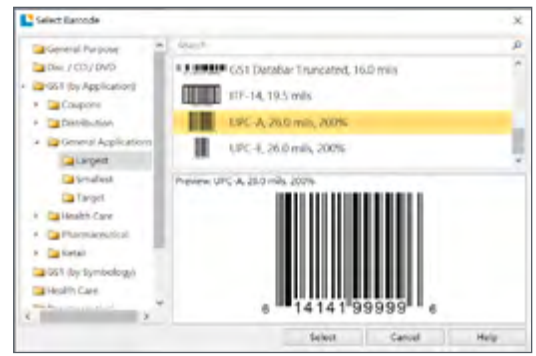
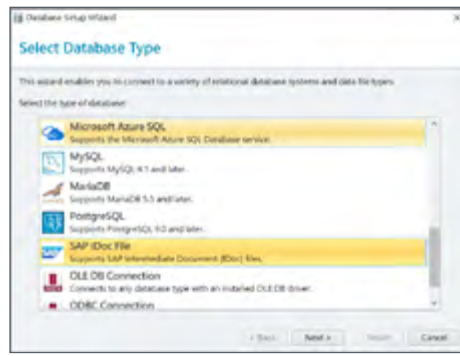
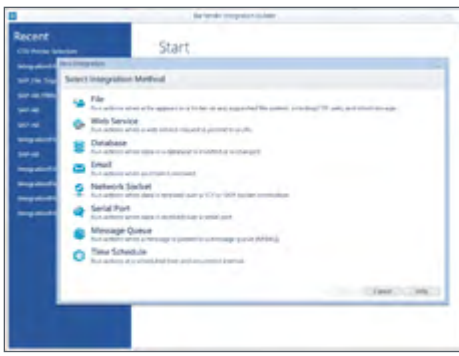
The high costs associated with maintaining a team of developers to perform this intensive work wasn't the

only drawback of their process. There was no print preview functionality — the on-screen view of a print-ready label appeared as characters of the programming language, rather than a visual representation of the label. Because labels were generated directly in the production system, the only way to proof a label was to put it into the production queue by altering the system's source code and printing it, halting production, creating a cumbersome edit and approval process that involved time-consuming back-and-forth, and introducing significant and unnecessary risk into their production system.

Solution

TAL Apparel realized that the inefficiencies associated with their existing labeling system impacted their supply chain velocity, and ran counter to the company's mission of innovation. The company's





Application Services group began planning an efficient, modern label platform that managed the labeling at their manufacturing sites from one central location, and to be run separately from their production system.

The company considered a number of labeling technologies, eventually running a Proof of Concept with BarTender, testing in their production environment.

“We used the BarTender SDK, and ran a number of tags through their print engine API. BarTender automatically managed and monitored print jobs, with no need for intervention on the part of our developers,” said Apparel Application Services Director, Tan Binglin. “The efficiency was very high.”

Based on the results of the labeling pilot and a total cost of ownership assessment, and with approval of the company’s senior executives, TAL Apparel chose the BarTender 2016 Enterprise Automation Edition, launching the project globally in 2017.

Benefits

The new BarTender labeling system has increased efficiency: it puts labels into production 50% faster than before.

BarTender’s intuitive WYSIWYG label interface has reduced unnecessary labor time — even people with no coding experience are able to manage the label printing process and make edits

when required, no Visual Basic or Java scripting skills required.

The company’s EAN, UPC, Code 128 and QR codes labels are simple to produce. A symbology is selected from BarTender’s menu of barcodes, and then it’s automatically encoded from the company’s master data. In the case of GS1 standards, BarTender’s GS1 wizard features enable the production of accurate, compliant codes quickly and easily.

BarTender’s Integration Builder has enabled TAL Apparel’s labeling system to be completely separate from their production management system, reducing risk and dramatically streamlining the process of creating or modifying a label.

The ability to preview the print results during the design process has eliminated the need to halt production to test and proof a label. Now, when a file needs editing, BarTender first checks the user’s permissions to make modifications, and then once authenticated, automatically updates the label file in real time, performing version management and managing approval workflows.

TAL Apparel’s new BarTender labeling system reflects their mission of sophistication in technology and process, and helps them meet the organization’s mandate of innovation in technology and process.

¹ Beginning with the release of BarTender 2019, this edition is called Enterprise.

Synopsis

- ▶ Instead of using a commercially available labeling software, TAL Apparel created labels for laundering instructions, logistics and packaging using proprietary printer code, developed in-house.
- ▶ Any changes to a label file or format required intervention from an internal technical resource skilled in Visual Basic or Java Script. Label modifications were time-consuming, labor-intensive and complicated.
- ▶ Edits to the labels were made directly in the production management system, increasing risk to the entire system.
- ▶ There was no feature in the system to allow TAL to preview the label design results. This lengthened the time needed for label approval. Many labels required multiple modifications, and each modification required the label to be printed for review.
- ▶ The company chose BarTender enterprise labeling software, elevating its labeling processes up to the same leading edge, innovative standard as the rest of its operations.
- ▶ BarTender provides an electronic preview of a label, helping the company avoid the repeated input and back-and-forth its former system required for edits and approvals.
- ▶ BarTender’s Integration Builder connects the company’s data to their labeling. Labels are generated in BarTender, completely outside the company’s production management system, making the process more agile and less likely to impact production in the case of error.
- ▶ BarTender’s intuitive, WYSIWYG, easy-to-use interface means that label designers can make a change in an instant, no technical skill or programming capabilities required.

Americas:
Sales@SeagullScientific.com
+1 425 641 1408

EMEA:
EMEASales@SeagullScientific.com
+34 91 198 4600

APAC:
AsiaSales@SeagullScientific.com
+886 70 1018 4700

Japan:
JapanSales@SeagullScientific.com
+81 3 4589 5400

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