

Shrink-Sleeve Labeler Friendly at High Speeds

A labeler that applies full-body sleeves to bottles helps a pharmacy benefit manager meet the healthcare needs of its community.

Drug and nutritional-supplement consumers in South Florida have a good friend in PAL Laboratories (Miami). The manufacturer and repackager of vitamins, minerals, and over-the-counter pharmaceuticals provides substantial discounts on a wide range of products to consumers in surrounding communities. Part of PBA, a pharmacy benefit management company, it also makes free home deliveries and fills prescriptions requested through the mail or the Internet.

PAL Labs' services have been so well received that the firm recently expanded its operation, creating hundreds of jobs and setting up a contract manufacturing location. PBA/PAL now offers more than 200 products manufactured under the PAL line and provides its manufacturing services to other firms on a contract basis.

To keep up with product demand, PAL added a second fully automated bottle-filling and -labeling line. Its first production line was equipped with an EZ-100 neck-banding labeling system from Axon Corp. (Raleigh, NC), which places printed bands around the bottle cap and neck. Ray Martinez, director of PAL's operations, found the system simple to operate. "Axon's sleeves have a minimum amount of change parts, so there's not that much that can break." He points out that other systems that he has evaluated employ timing screws and star wheels, which make change-

over "time-consuming and expensive."

When Martinez was building PAL's second production line, he upgraded to Axon's EZ-130, hoping to capitalize on the new machine's ability to carry 130-mm-wide shrink film for larger bottles. "We are looking to print our labeling on film that makes full-body sleeves for bottles," he says. "If we can, we will



PAL Labs uses the EZ-130 on its high-speed bottle-filling and -labeling line.

be able to replace pressure-sensitive labeling." Such a move could help PAL reduce costs because full-body sleeves combine labeling and tamper evidency into one construction. Martinez is currently considering films from Seal-It and Stanwell.

Delivered to PAL in December 2000, the EZ-130 has a maximum production rate of 150 parts per minute, which makes the unit fit nice-



ly into Martinez's automated line. Currently, he is running the machine at 75 parts per minute, and application has been "extremely accurate." He also likes the machine's pneumatic operation.

In addition, the labeler features a stepper drive system, an advanced monitoring system, and an operator interface panel that displays easy-to-read instructions.

Martinez expects that the new system will support PAL's growing contract business, which is already churning out a couple hundred products, as well as expand its services to neighboring and international communities. PMP News