

Case Study

Savings Multiply for Online Retailers

Better, faster bagging reduces costs by one-third



- **Bags/hour**—Up from 100 to 350
- **Training time**—Down from 3 weeks to 1
- **Workstations**—Reduced from 24 to 13



Labor savings with automatic bagging machines

Time is money. For a leading online retailer, the 32,000 hours saved annually by using Sharp automated packaging machines to process orders amounted to significant savings.

“The main reason we wanted the machines was to cut down on our hours during the busy season,” says the company’s purchasing agent. Before the automated machine was installed, items were individually scanned, packed, labeled, sealed and placed on a conveyor. “Now, we can process 10 orders at a time by lining them up next to each other, scanning them and going through the process with someone just dropping in the materials,” he adds. The end result: the automated machines are 55 percent faster than the manual process.

Before signing the deal, the purchasing agent performed a trial with two competitive machines to see which one would perform best. The Sharp MAX 20™ machine proved far easier to use, had fewer problems, and was less costly. “Even if it had been more expensive, we would have still gone with Sharp,” notes the purchasing agent. “The machine overall performed so much better than the other one, which had so many jams—it was unbelievable.”

The company ultimately purchased four machines to be used in two distribution centers. Sharp Packaging Systems also handled installation and training for operators and maintenance staff. Of course, the biggest test of any piece of equipment is how it stands up over time. Two years after the purchase, according to the customer, “the machines are virtually running trouble free.”

Packaging savings

Six cents or eight cents may not sound like a lot of savings, but when you process thousands of orders, pennies per package quickly turn into dollars. That was the motivation behind a major online retailer purchasing Sharp MAX 20 automated bagging machines when it transitioned from boxed packaging to poly bags. Its first purchase was in 2001 and it now owns 15 units.

Time savings

The engineering manager who selected the Sharp automated baggers, preferred the Sharp machine because it could be managed through a PLC. In contrast, competitive machines come with a PC to control systems. "We found that it's a real headache keeping the software on a PC up to date. With the PLC, you put it in, and it runs forever—that's the way it's built," he says.

Printing savings

Printing is also easier with the Sharp Machines. "The way the Sharp machine works is much cleaner in its design," notes the engineer. "They built the mechanical mechanism to feed the bag to the printer. Then, they added an off the shelf label printer from Data Max and mounted it onto their machine. Labels are one less thing we have to worry about."

"I would certainly recommend them hands down—but I would also recommend their solution hands down. Anyone with an e-commerce application should look into poly bags, because they're cheaper than cardboard," suggests the engineering manager for the online retailer. "Sharp has been a terrific company to work with."

Maintenance savings

James O'Gorman, application engineer at Sharp, explains the strategy. "Using non-proprietary, off the shelf parts, provides ease of maintenance for our customers."

Sometimes installation needs to be customized to meet the needs of a particular retailer, and Sharp Packaging Systems is always willing to find a solution. "We'll come out and modify the funnel that opens the bag so that it's the appropriate size and shape," adds O'Gorman. It's this kind of attention to detail has turned retail customers into the company's biggest fans.

ABOUT SHARP PACKAGING

Part of the Pregis family of companies, Sharp Packaging systems is a nationwide, innovative manufacturer of quality, flexible packaging solutions, including film, bags and packaging machinery systems. Opening our doors in 1984, we have steadily built a successful business and reputation on the foundation of unwavering commitment to integrity in all our business dealings. Employees, suppliers, customers and business community partners have come to associate Sharp Packaging with sterling performance and a high degree of urgency in meeting the needs of our stakeholders.

Sharp designs, develops and manufactures printed and plain flexible packaging and packaging machinery in-house at our Headquarters campus in Sussex, WI and southwest expansion facilities outside of Phoenix, AZ. Headquartered near Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Sharp Packaging serves the electronics, pharmaceutical, mail order, select produce, medical components, hobby/craft, automotive and hardware industries; among others.