How a Bottling Company Uses ColorCert Quality Control Software to Improve Color and Print Quality on Packaging

Challenge

Prior to working with ColorCert in 2016, there was no formal in-house print quality control program in place at this beverage bottling company. Without such a program in place, the company lacked the data to appropriately investigate and correct color and print quality inconsistencies and issues across its supplier base. The team often learned of print quality problems by way of a phone call or emailed picture from a store, taken by a brand manager or director. It was then difficult to track the supplier, plant of manufacture, or date of production. The team undertook the challenge of developing and rolling out a print quality program to enable the company to better manage its print suppliers, working with procurement and the company's outside prepress house.

Solution

This international bottling company invested in X-Rite ColorCert to enable suppliers to provide real-time performance data via the ColorCert ScoreCard. Suppliers are also using the ColorCert Suite of desktop tools to manage print jobs and maintain assets for those jobs — enabling them to deliver improved color and print quality more efficiently. The company has rolled this process out for many of its customers with a plan to further roll the program out to its base of customers using multiple print suppliers over time. They require their print suppliers to use the X-Rite eXact handheld spectrophotometer for all quality checks during the production run.

Results

The company and its suppliers have fully embraced the new print quality program, powered by ColorCert. On-site press checks have been reduced significantly, and all suppliers are now meeting or exceeding the ColorCert minimum score of 50. This means ALL of their print suppliers are now printing within established tolerance requirements. They now have full audit trail capability on vendor quality performance, making it faster and easier to address color issues when they occur. This increased efficiency provides time and actionable information back to design departments. Implementing an online reporting system has the added benefit of contributing to the company's sustainability efforts through less shipping, travel and redundant creation of samples.

"With the new color and print quality management capabilities we have with the X-Rite ColorCert Suite and our X-Rite eXact spectrophotometers, we have significantly improved print quality on our water bottles. As a result, we are well on our way to taking both quality control and management of our supplier base to a new level as we remain on the path of continuous improvement."

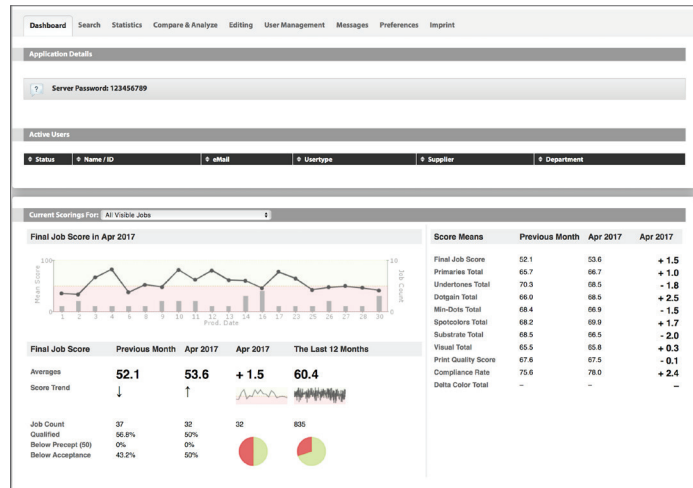~ Design Manager

Managing Customer Concerns

Just a few years ago, this bottling company did not have a formal print quality program to help it effectively manage its fleet of outside printers providing flexo and gravure labels and overwraps to its manufacturing plants. According to their Design Manager, "When we received word from one of our customers that they were not completely happy with how their products appeared on shelf, it took a great deal of time to track down where the problem occurred and to correct it. I worked with our internal team and our prepress provider to implement a Print Quality Program to both improve the overall print quality from our providers and to better enable us to track down and resolve problems when they occur." Today, the team, including procurement and quality control, as well as all our of its print providers, are enthusiastically embracing their Print Quality Program powered by the X-Rite ColorCert Suite. In fact, Print Quality Standards are included in all contracts now.

The X-Rite ColorCert Suite enables digital communication of exact color and print requirements, immediate and actionable quality reports for each and every press run in an easy-to-understand dashboard. ColorCert allows converters to provide their brand owner customers with real-time ScoreCard data that confirms compliance with brand owner specifications including G7 and PSO guidelines, speeding approval processes and often eliminating the need for expensive and time consuming on-site press checks.

The ColorCert ScoreCard Server is a cloud-based portal providing an overall view of print quality, summarizing quality levels and consolidating metrics filtered by a variety of criteria. It assigns a score to each job assessed by the system; a passing score to be 50 or higher on a scale of 1 to 100. As print quality management programs mature, the average score achieved by converters is often significantly higher than 50.

Making the Right Choice

"As we are working through this process, we found that many large brands and their suppliers are already using ColorCert to manage color and print quality. It made sense for us to adopt ColorCert as well, since it is a standard already out there. It has not disappointed us."

ColorCert Scorecard server

The Design Manager points out that the company has positioned a ColorCert score of 50 as the minimum print quality score, and all suppliers are now meeting or exceeding that requirement. But she insists that printers aren't penalized for low scores; rather, they are penalized for NO scores. "Score submissions are the key to the success of our Color and Print Quality Program. If we don't have scores, we can't effectively manage our print quality," she said. In addition, both the company and its supplier base use the X-Rite eXact handheld spectrophotometer to ensure consistency as press sheets are measured into the system. Any new supplier the company brings on board will be required to implement ColorCert if they have not already done so. In fact, the Quality Assurance department has implemented this into their Supplier Qualification process when bringing new print vendors on board. "With ColorCert, printers are reading in results in real time," she adds, "and we can see exactly what is going on, proactively addressing issues as they arise."

Before and After

Their Design Manager also cited a comparison between two recent promotions, one prior to implementing the color and print quality program, and one after. "Once we had our suppliers on board with the new program," she said, "we achieved faster time to market and completed all color management processes prior to proofing. In fact, all issues were addressed before the files even went to the suppliers. The costs of implementing and operating our print quality program are minimal compared to the costs for the pre-program campaign that were incurred as a result of redesigns, multiple color corrections per supplier, the cost of on-site press checks and our scrap costs. Add to that the value of faster time to market with these often time-sensitive promotions, and there is no question our print quality program is delivering the exceptional results we were targeting." While the goal is to identify and correct problems before product gets to the shelf, she states that the new print quality management program allows them to more quickly track down and address any problems, adding, "Before, our process was extremely time-consuming and somewhat arbitrary. Now we have the facts and data to support fast problem resolution."

Another benefit of the new program is the increased internal bandwidth having the right tools in place enables. Their Design Manager states, "We simply didn't have the knowledge, tools or bandwidth to do that before. Now that everyone is on-board with the Print Quality Management program, we have the bandwidth to take it to the next level, and ColorCert gives us the right tools to do so."

By working together, packaging converters and the company are building a stronger partnership to drive color and print quality excellence throughout the supply chain. They are experiencing a number of additional benefits from the new system, including:

- Reduction in customer print quality complaints due to improved color and print quality
- Suppliers meeting color and print quality standards more easily and efficiently – reducing downtime and rework
- Significant reduction of time-consuming and expensive on-site press checks.
- Fast, easy isolation of print quality problems, ideally prior to the product reaching the shelf.
- Increased internal bandwidth. As a result, the company is now preparing to bring design, prepress and preparation of ColorCert jobs in-house to further streamline its manufacturing process.

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AMERICAS: 800-248-9748
EUROPE / AFRICA / MIDDLE EAST   + 800-700-300-01
ASIA: + 86-21-6448-1155