



Application note



Meat and poultry

The move to flexible packaging in meat and poultry production



Retailers and consumers alike are interested in packaging innovations that can extend shelf life, especially for products like meat and poultry where freshness is paramount.

The challenge:

Food packaging has been shifting away from conventional packaging and towards flexible pouches as consumers seek new packaging formats and smaller pack sizes. This trend has not only impacted package sizes, but also the types of packaging used across a variety of food types, including perishable meat and poultry. Flexible pouches bring benefits in terms of shelf appeal and lower distribution and logistics costs, but they present a new set of coding challenges. Traditional printing methods may not provide sufficient resolution for the aesthetics of these new flexible packaging types. Additionally, while flexible pouches offer greater consumer convenience with features like gussets and zippers, these features can get in the way during coding of pre-formed pouches.

Videojet advantage:

Videojet offers a range of thermal transfer overprinting (TTO) products with features specifically designed to enable high-resolution printing on flexible packaging. To accommodate packaging variances, an available software setting can retract the thermal transfer printhead up to 4.5 mm between prints to move around zippers, folds, and other obstacles. This helps ensure that virtually all resealable pouch types can be coded with ease. Moreover, Videojet offers colored ribbon options for high-quality codes that complement packaging design and enhance the visual appeal of the upscale look of flexible pouches. To meet operational needs, the IP-rated Videojet DataFlex® Plus TTO printer is specifically engineered to operate in harsh environments where washdown is an essential part of daily operations. Engineered for ease of use, this printer can be made washdown ready with an IP65-rated cover that installs in less than 20 seconds.

Packaging formats for discerning consumers



Packaging trends

Active and on-the-go lifestyles, as well as smaller family sizes, have caused many consumers to move away from preparing large, sit-down meals. This move is also driving preferences for smaller serving size packaging, including single-serve and on-the-go options for meals as well as for snacking. Also popular are ready-to-eat options that facilitate fast meal preparation for couples or small families. This move in consumer preferences is likewise making resealable packages ideal due to the convenience and flexibility of saving some of the food product for later use.

These trends have been prevalent in the prepared food industry for years, and are now impacting how meat and poultry products are packaged and sold. Consumers are now looking for the same convenience packaging from these products as they might from a small bag of snacks. Prepared and ready-to-eat meat and poultry products well suited to these packaging formats.

With a move to larger supermarket or big box formats, importance is being placed on barrier packaging and active technologies to extend product shelf lives. This is where flexible packaging options, such as stand-up pouches and bags, not only provide greater flexibility in portion size, but they can also help extend freshness. Flexible packaging opens new possibilities for protecting foods from oxidation and for providing modified-atmosphere packages to expand shelf life.

There is also increased pressure for meat and poultry producers to enhance shelf appeal for their products, including the ability to for stand-up packaging in the refrigerated case. These newer packaging formats can be more visually appealing and offer more space to showcase the food contained within via clear windows. Stand-up pouches are also more easily viewable by shoppers than trays that sit flat, and offer space for graphics to highlight product attributes and branding information. This is especially important with meat and poultry producers facing competition for shelf space and consumer attention.





Videojet Thermal Transfer Overprinters (TTO): Flexible package coding with ease of integration

Videojet TTO technology provides meat and poultry producers with coding options that can easily adapt to new flexible pouch packaging technologies. TTO is an ideal coding solution for pouch applications as it is designed to print high-quality codes on flat, thin, flexible films. Printing on roll stock before pouches are formed allows the printed film to be formed into different pouch types such as zipper, 4-sided, gusseted, stand-up and other pouch variations.

Being able to use zippers, fitments, gussets and package seals are some of the benefits of using pouches. However, all present unique challenges for thermal transfer printing in the packaging line, especially if they are already part of the package before they are printed. To address this challenge, Videojet offers custom brackets available for pouching machines, including bespoke traversing systems for rotary pouch fillers to allow printing before pouches are filled.

Bespoke traversing brackets are an ideal solution for TTO printer integration into rotary filling machines often used for flexible pouches. The bracket automatically positions the printer depending on whether or not the rotary machine is stationary or indexing. This enables the printer to move close to the pouch for printing and then away from the pouch to avoid contact during rotation.

Additionally, a simple printer software setting can be used to retract the TTO printhead 0.5mm to 4.5mm between prints, helping ensure that most resealable pouch types can be coded without expected interference to the various seals.



Quality codes that represent the quality of your brand

When brand image and packaging artwork is important, brand owners want to avoid unattractive or poor quality codes that could detract from the design. Videojet TTO printers provide 300 dpi (12 dots/mm) print quality – making them a great option for printing high-quality text or graphics that don't detract from pouch design. Moreover, we offer a choice of twelve different colored ribbons so that producers are virtually guaranteed to find an ideal match for their packaging design and brand image. And for producers wanting to print nutritional and ingredients statements directly onto packaging, Videojet TTO printers can also apply fine text to pouches on-demand based on the product being run.

Solutions for washdown

Videojet has TTO options designed for the washdown environments found in meat and poultry production. The Videojet IP DataFlex® Plus offers an IP65 rated printer body and 316 stainless steel construction that can go from printing to washdown in under 20 seconds with a simple cassette change, and no special enclosures required. The controller meets IP55 standards at all times.



The bottom line

New flexible packaging formats are being used to highlight products in attractive, smaller portion sizes designed to maximize shelf life. Meat and poultry producers are under pressure to operate as efficiently as possible while also capitalizing on packaging to promote brand value at the point of purchase. These manufacturers need coding solutions that can handle not only the specific requirements for coding on new flexible packaging types, but that are also designed to withstand the rigors of meat and poultry production. Videojet TTO solutions are designed to print high-resolution codes on nearly any flexible packaging configuration in a range of colors, while providing washdown protection. Videojet also offers the industry's largest service and support network to help enable producers to maximize efficiency and uptime on their production lines.

Let Videojet help you select the ideal solution to meet your production objectives and performance needs.

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