



Automation is a Game-Changer

Texas Pride Trailers uses QR Codes to automate work-in-process application

BACKGROUND

With nine locations nationwide, over 300 employees, 250,000 square feet of manufacturing space and over seven different trailer lines, Texas Pride has become one of the largest trailer manufacturers in the country.

Like any growing company, they face challenges to stay as productive and efficient as they want to be. Automation using barcodes seemed to be a good place to start shoring up their system.

OPPORTUNITY/CHALLENGE

Brad Walker, Chief Engineer at Texas Pride and his team were looking to automate a previously manual application with their manufacturing system. The system uses a 5-6 digit stock number that everything involving the trailer revolves around. That number is used to execute tasks and store information, i.e. build information such as where a trailer is located. The previous method was to manually key in the stock number. However, this led to a lot of incorrect information due to keying in wrong numbers (which created errors).

Walker came across Metalcraft because they were already looking at the Iowa-based manufacturer for another application when they discovered that they did QR codes as well as RFID.

SOLUTION

Walker explained that they needed a bulletproof way to stop the entry errors from happening. Working with the Metalcraft team, they decided on a QR code because it was so visually appealing. It also needed to be big enough to be easily visible on the trailer. Using the QR code to query and scan information made the process much easier and more accurate.

Because of the paint process the trailers go through, the QR code label needed to be a paint-resistant product. Bre Allbright, Territory Specialist in Texas, recommended Metalcraft's Permanent Paint Mask Barcode Labels. This product features a fluoropolymer laminate that resists up to 12 paintings and can withstand temperatures up to 250 °F. Using these specialized labels allows Walker and his team to identify the trailers earlier in the process so that the QR code and subsequent information can be used at every station.

Walker and his team were very pleased with the result. "Mistakes can cost a lot of money, i.e., building the wrong trailer," he said. "With the QR code tags, the problems just disappeared. It's accurate, efficient and easier to use.

Before the change to using QR codes, incorrect information could lead to the wrong trailer being marked as picked up or the wrong build. According to Walker, "There were substantial consequences with the wrong stock code that were virtually eliminated overnight thanks to the QR code."

RESULT

Walker explains that historically, the company has had mostly manual processes with little automation, but that is changing. "The QR code tags are a piece of a larger picture with technology," he said. "It helps eliminate mistakes and free up bandwidth to do something else."

They are not yet done with automation. A potential future use with the QR codes is to use handheld scanners to track inventory throughout the plant. The company typically has 500-600 units on the floor and inventory can take up to two days. Walker has big plans for this application. "With automation, we're looking to bring that inventory time down to two hours."

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BRAD WALKER

-Chief Engineer at Texas Pride Trailers