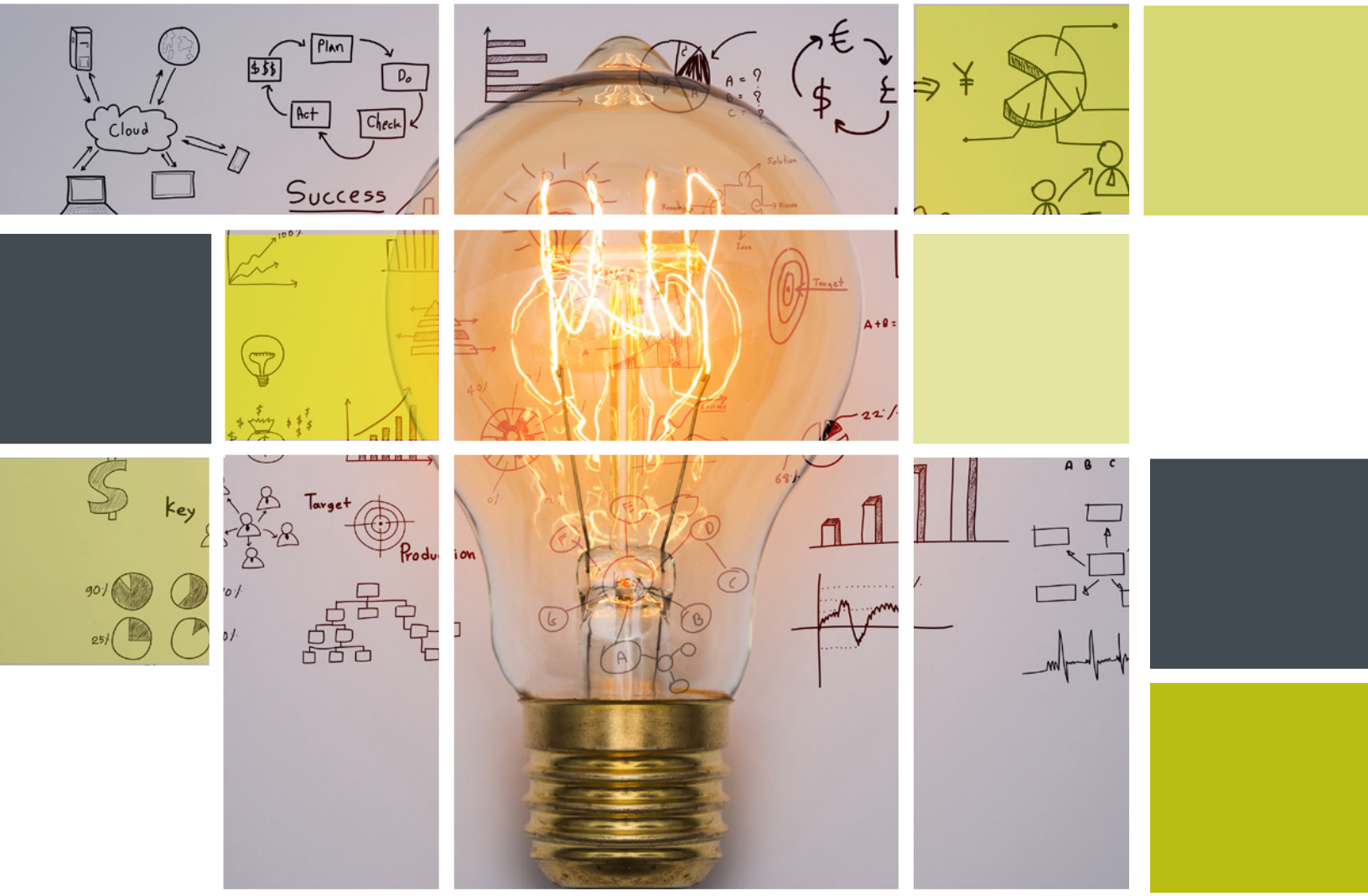
FOUR STRATEGIES TO APPLY WHEN YOUR LABELING CAN'T FAIL



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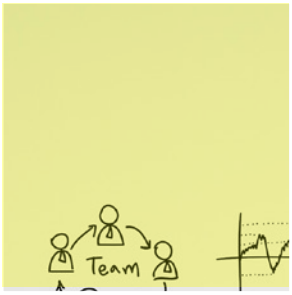

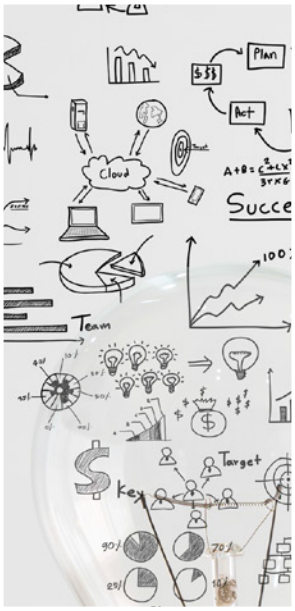

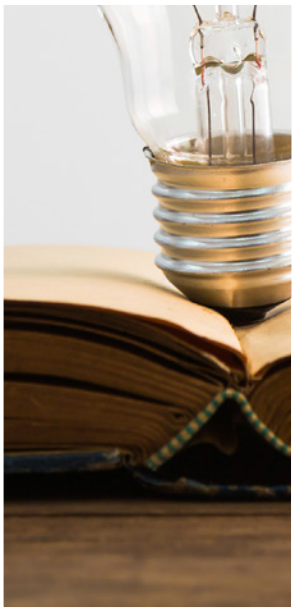

Product packaging plays an important role in the consumer experience, communicating everything from a product's features and benefits to a company's values. And when it comes to food and pharmaceutical products, the packaging is as important as the product itself. People rely on the information that's presented to them – allergen warnings, dosage guidelines, and storage instructions, for example – to care for themselves and for their loved ones. When a label's content is inaccurate, the consequences are severe. Recalls occur. Stocks plummet. Executives lose jobs. Going beyond the business consequences: people are hurt.

For many manufacturers, it's almost impossible to recover from the fall-out of a labeling error, especially one that compromises consumer safety. Even if the manufacturer can successfully manage the imminent PR disaster, the likelihood of getting into hot water with regulatory authorities is high, and the manufacturer's ability to continue to market and sell its products will be severely impacted.

There's no arguing: accurate and effective labeling is a big deal and one manufacturers can't afford to mismanage. But it's also a major challenge. More manufacturers than ever are distributing their products worldwide, with some products sold in hundreds of countries. When you consider the total labeling content a pharmaceutical company, for example, may collectively manage over the course of a year, the number is in the tens of millions of words. This is a significant amount of content to manage and ensure is error-free.

So how can manufacturers navigate the complexity of labeling, ensuring accuracy without compromising corporate performance metrics such as speed-to-market? Here are four strategies to apply when your labeling can't fail.

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1

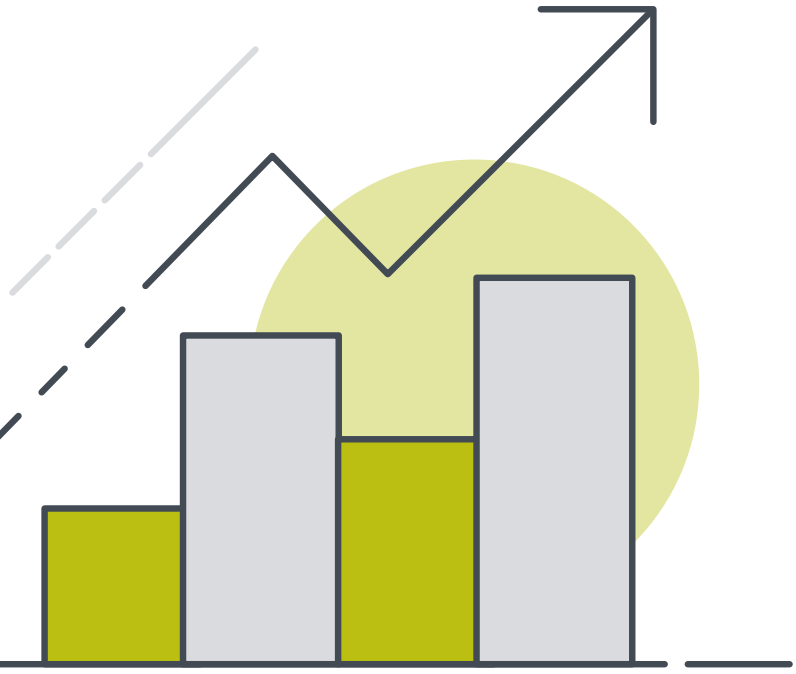
INSTALL PROBLEM DETECTORS

Today's manufacturers can't afford to be passive or to procrastinate improving their label and artwork management processes. Tools, technology, and tactics are available now to provide early warning signs when there are labeling issues or "weak spots."

For example, many manufacturers use electronic tools to route product labels and artwork between different teams responsible for various aspects of the label content, i.e., marketing and regulatory. A stakeholder will receive an alert that it is his or her turn to review a piece of artwork, and he or she can provide feedback such as, "Move this element to the left," or "Please double check this ingredient," before rejecting the artwork outright. The good news here is that the label is being handled with a high degree of scrutiny. The bad news, however, is that even though the stakeholder has left meaningful feedback prior to rejecting the artwork, the manufacturer doesn't actually have a tangible way to go back and identify what the specific reason for the rejection was. Metrics are difficult - if not impossible - to calculate from comments on a file, and without metrics it will be difficult - if not impossible - to address common errors and improve performance the next time around.

Best practice, which is actually governed by CFR 21 part 11, is to collect and categorize rejection reasons at the point of rejection. In this scenario, an electronic signature is required at the point of hand-off, and the signature process assigns the rejection reason to one of a handful of categories, such as "inaccurate content" or "older version of artwork." Manufacturers can then collect and report on the KPIs around these reasons and begin to identify trends. For example, is the same rejection reason appearing on a specific product line or across product lines? Are there rejection reasons common to a specific geography? Are the labels and artwork for pills rejected more frequently than liquids?

Some keys to KPI reporting success include:



Be sure to establish automated KPI reports. A weekly or monthly reporting schedule is ideal, so there's a regular cadence that drives teams' behavior. And when it comes to selecting which KPIs to measure, remember there's no right or wrong answer. Simply put: the KPIs you need to run your business are the right ones to track.

Make sure your reporting platform provides meaningful visual cues. When software was first designed for the packaging industry, each vendor created their own iconography: an exclamation point might represent "important" or a star might represent "favorite." The problem, however, is that many vendors chose to use different icons, which can increase training time and cause usability problems when the icons are hard to recognize. When you use software with iconography that matches popular platforms such as Google, Facebook, and LinkedIn, your teams need less training, and your data and reporting are easily accessible and intuitive to use.

Send the right kinds of notifications. While many solutions send email notifications, the truth is, most of us are overwhelmed by our email inboxes. Software with internal chat features or automated emails that include links into the tool are more likely to attract attention and facilitate ongoing, complex conversations.

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2

REMOVE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ERROR

In the end-to-end packaging process, there are plenty of opportunities for error, and these opportunities often coincide with "gaps" in the process. For instance, you might spend a lot of time getting the right artwork printed on the right label and shipping the right label roll to the right manufacturer, but at the very end of the process the plant still has to verify the label they're about to place on the product is correct. If you're relying on a visual check at this point of hand-off, you're creating a "gap" and inviting human error into the process. It's always better to invest in technology, such as a scan to compare tool, whereby the plant can scan the label and compare it to the final approved artwork to verify the label and artwork components and product codes match.

Similar gaps also exist upstream in the packaging process, and these too can be closed with the right solutions.

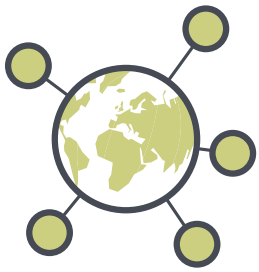
Some tips for doing so successfully:

Analyze your label and artwork workflows and identify opportunities for automation.

For example, a lot of artwork is made by cutting and pasting text from approved artwork documents into Adobe Illustrator, where the packaging artwork is created. There are now tools that can take the text from a word document or a database of approved packaging copy and move it through an XML structure directly onto the package. This automates the construction of the artwork and it closes the gap between approved content and data entry.

Make each artwork "touch" a high value touch.

Every time somebody touches artwork in the packaging process, the touch actually represents a cost for the product manufacturer. Therefore, when people touch the artwork, the touch needs to make sense and add value. Keep in mind, you're not trying to entirely remove people from the process, you're designing the process to ensure each touch either improves artwork quality or communication across the team.



Balance global and local needs.

While most companies have to adhere to global regulations across geographic markets, this can be difficult. Different markets may have different processes, and it's likely teams want to work their own way. Ideally, however, you want to harmonize to one or two global processes that are flexible enough to handle changes in a particular market. There should be enough balance that local markets feel their nuances have been addressed, but regulatory doesn't have to review dozens of different operations when they conduct an audit.

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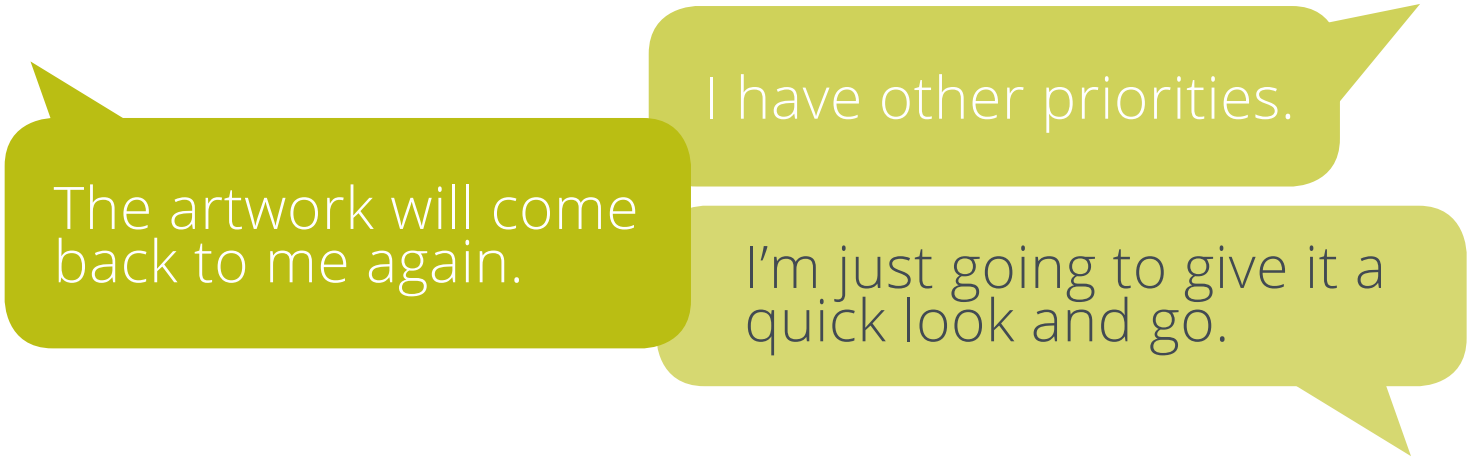
3

FOSTER A “RIGHT FIRST TIME” CULTURE

In the end-to-end packaging process, artwork is often routed so frequently, people don’t really know when they’re reviewing it for the last time. In this environment, it’s easy to think...



This mindset is a lost opportunity in two ways:

- It doesn’t encourage a high value touch.
- It’s possible the artwork might not come around again.
- It’s important to instill a mindset in your approvers that each time they see the artwork, it could be the last, and therefore their touch needs to be high value and highly accurate.

Tactics for fostering this mindset include:

- **Reduce the expected number of revision rounds.**
- **Enhance comment visibility.** When team members can see others’ comments, it enhances visibility and accountability to the product. It creates a team culture around the artwork where everybody’s working toward making sure it’s right.
- **Heighten accountability.** While some companies have workflows where only a manager sees comments, this isn’t best practice. When teams are able to see comments from all approvers, they can apply positive pressure to each other when an approval is late or of poor quality.

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4

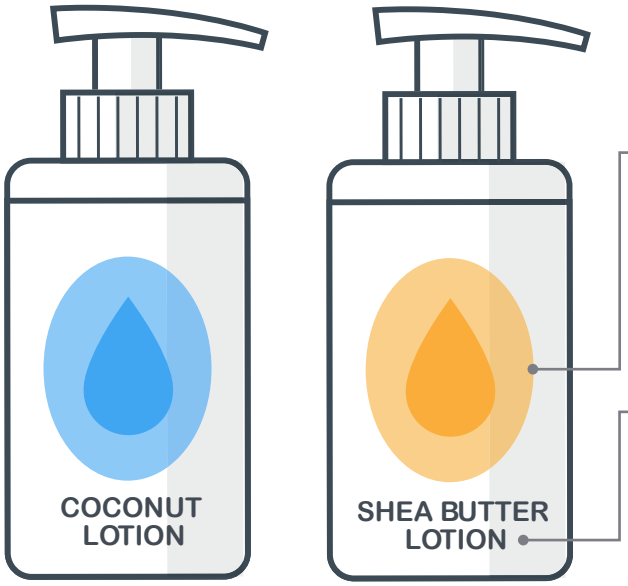
ALWAYS USE SAFETY NETS

The truth is, people don't work at 100% all day, every day. Even the very best of us have a day where we don't "show up." Perhaps we're distracted by a personal issue, or we're not feeling well. Maybe our mind is on administrative or other tasks unrelated to packaging.

Smart manufacturers recognize this reality and make sure there are tools in place to safeguard the process:

Start the workflow with the last approved version of the artwork. In pre-media terms, this is referred to as a "pick-up." By starting with something that's already been routed, approved, and in the market, you're reducing the number of approval cycles and the chance for error. You can also see prior approver comments and benefit from the learning. One word of caution, however: make sure you don't pick up all of the data that comes with the artwork. For example: if the artwork change is going to cause a change in the bar, UPC, or QR code, and you're picking up from the last approved version, you could introduce an error into the process. Be careful about what's kept and what's removed when you pick up the artwork.

Use graphic compare, text compare, and scan compare tools. Ideally, these should all work together to create a single audit trail that denotes every single deviation in text and graphics from one cycle to the next.



Graphic compare tools take artwork, pixelate it, and then present the user with a pixel by pixel comparison. Graphic compare tools even flash errors to users so they can see where changes have been made. Keep in mind, this is extremely helpful when there has only been a small change made to the artwork. In addition, when reviewing artwork, our eyes tend to gravitate to where we know a change was made, and therefore it becomes easy to overlook a change that occurred inadvertently.

Text compare on the other hand, is a content compare tool. Text compare tools can take a source document and compare it to an Illustrator file to identify differences. For example, a text compare tool can review a drug facts panel with the data on the artwork and alert the user to anything that is out of place such as a comma, a hyphen, or bolded text.

Finally, at the end of the workflow stream, you can verify the physical label matches the digital sample with scan compare tools. These tools enable plants to scan the label and compare it to the final approved artwork to verify the label and artwork components and product codes match, reducing the risk that inaccurate labels ever make it to market.

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NO-FAIL LABELING CHECKLIST

- Automate the process and ensure every artwork "touch" is a high value touch.
- Select Label and Artwork Management tools that can be flexible, even while a project is in flight.
- Pick tools and vendors with experience implementing new processes.
- Strive for globally harmonized, "glocal" processes.
- Identify who your change champions are.
- Expect your team to be frustrated as they adapt their daily work habits - and be patient.
- Don't be afraid to perform A/B testing when you're defining your processes and document the testing.
- Be smart about managing your profiles (key lines, die lines) and try to group labels that share profiles.
- Be thoughtful about versioning and recognize that a great label is not a great version of the label.

NOW YOU'RE READY TO GO TO MARKET!

As you look for ways to improve your end-to-end Label and Artwork Management process, visit esko.com/brands today to see how our Label and Artwork Management software can support these four strategies and improve efficiency KPIs, such as speed-to-market, sales lift, and regulatory compliance.

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