



The Lightning Flash

The quarterly newsletter from Lightning Labels, the leaders in digital label printing

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From the Desk of Steve Smith

As many of our customers know, we at Lightning Labels are constantly striving to be as environmentally friendly as possible. Last year we introduced the EarthFirst



PLA material (derived from corn) and were very disappointed when we had to withdraw it some months later due to quality issues. We're pleased to be able to once again offer this material, and believe the quality challenges have been resolved by moving to a different supplier.

However, we are not resting on our laurels. As time goes by, more and more research is being done to develop and perfect eco-friendly materials. One of the latest is actually derived from eucalyptus trees - which are very fast growing and need little water. We think this material has great potential, because (unlike corn) it is not taking anything away from the food chain - after all, who eats eucalyptus leaves other than koalas? We are actively pushing for this material to become a staple offering in our business and will keep you informed as we progress.

Cheers,

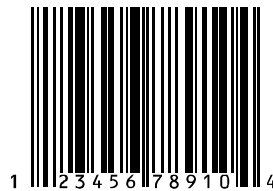
Steve
Steve Smith
President

Best of the Lightning Labels Blog

The Lightning Labels blog is one of the many resources available to Lightning Labels customers. Our blog is over two years old now, and approaching 200 posts. The intention of the blog is to educate and inform people about the world of custom labels and digital label printing.

We realize that not everyone reads the blog, so in this newsletter we are presenting the three most popular posts from the last six months. These posts are all available on our blog at <http://blog.lightninglabels.com>.

1. Understanding Bar Codes



Where would we be without the humble bar code? We would certainly be spending more time in the supermarket checkout line. Pretty much every retail product you buy these days has a bar code. This bar code is known as a UPC code and looks something like the one above. I have written before about how you can obtain a UPC code, but here I am just covering the basics of the bar codes themselves.

The UPC (Universal Product Code) bar code is a 12 digit code used by manufacturers to identify themselves and their products. The first six digits are the manufacturer's num-

ber provided to them by the Uniform Code Council (now known as the GS1 Symbolology Committee). The next five digits are the manufacturer's item number that is allocated to a specific product. Every single product a manufacturer sells including the same item of a different size carries its own unique five digit number. The last number is a calculated check digit that enables the scanner to verify that the number is correct.

Here at Lightning Labels we create UPC bar codes pretty much every day. We use the in-built functionality in CorelDraw to create a graphic file of the UPC, but you can also use a software package from such vendors as IDAutomation or Hallogram.



While most of the bar codes we do are UPC there are other bar codes we produce from time to time. The bar code above is what is known as a Code 39 (also known as Code 3 of 9). It is often used on name badges, to track inventory, and the post office uses it to track packages. You can encode letters and numbers, and often you will encode a start and stop character at the beginning and end of the data. If you want to keep track of your products internally this is a good bar code to use - we have a couple of customers who regularly request variable bar code labels using Code 39.

In this issue:

Best of the Lightning Labels Blog	1
Customer Focus.....	3
Lightning Labels News.....	3
LL Product Photo Contest Winners	4

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Best of the Lightning Labels Blog



The bar code above is a Code 128 bar code. It is what is known as a high density symbology that encodes numbers, symbols, upper and lower case text as well as returns and tabs. It is known as high density because it takes up less space than other bar codes (such as code 39) as you can see here. To create a bar code 128 you will need a start character, a stop character, and a checksum character. We use the Code 128 Font Advantage Package from IDAutomation to create these bar codes - it comes with the Code 128 fonts and an Excel macro that you can use to generate the correct start, stop and checksum characters.

The world of bar codes can be quite complex and is changing rapidly. But these three bar codes are the most common - and the UPC bar code is so ubiquitous it will be around for a long time to come.

2. Considering the Product Container

When deciding how to make your product stand out on the retail shelf, the label is obviously very important, but your choice of container will also have a big impact on the visibility of your product. There are literally thousands of containers to choose from - where do you start?

I would always start by looking at your competitors. You don't necessarily need to have a very different container. In fact if their packaging is very plain you could choose a similar container and use the product label as a way to really stand out. Alternatively, you could choose an innovative container shape that will become part of your brand.

This is the route that Method has done with their product containers with significant success. Or you could use an unusual container with an eye-catching label to really stand out from the crowd.

At the same time you are choosing your container you should also consider the kind of label you want. What size of label is best? Do you want a front and back label, a wrap-around label, clear or white? These are the questions you need to ask. Another important factor is the shape of the container. If you have a really curved container you may be limited to the size of the label. Your label needs to be applied to a flat surface in order to avoid wrinkling. You also need to be aware of where your container starts to taper in as it rounds at the bottom - you will need to keep your label above the taper line.

Most packaging companies will be happy to send you sample containers so feel free to experiment first. You could narrow it down to two or three containers and then request a hard copy proof with your label order and stick one of the label proofs on each container to see what looks best. If you need some inspiration and are looking for something new and innovative I would check out Web Packaging, they have a wealth of innovative containers on their site, and they even have an RSS feed so you can get daily updates of new containers that become available.

3. How to get into Whole Foods

We have a Whole Foods Market just a mile from where I live and whenever I shop there I enjoy browsing the shelves and looking for products with labels that we printed (there are usually a few). Whole Foods is the holy grail for many makers of natural products, and here at Lightning Labels we have a large number of companies providing these kinds of products. Whole Foods often source locally made products, so even for new companies you have a chance of getting on the shelves there. But how? This week Fortune Small Business tackled this issue, and they

provide some very useful advice for any company looking to make it into a big retail store like Whole Foods.

The article covers a range of issues such as when to hire a consultant to help, getting in touch with a Whole Foods "food forager", attending trade shows, and making sure your product stands out from the crowd. If you are graduating from selling your products at the local farmer's market on weekends to Whole Foods, you will need professional looking labels. Your products will look far better with a high quality, durable label than one you printed on your desktop using blank Avery labels you bought at Staples.

Some people start their company with the idea that they want a professional looking product right out of the box. Other people are on a tight budget and want to do everything themselves. But if you want to get in to Whole Foods, printing your labels on your \$100 ink jet printer just isn't going to cut it. Once you are ready to make that leap you need a great looking label, so your product launch has the highest possible chance of success.

We usually write new posts on our blog about twice a week. If you are interested in reading our blog regularly, you don't have to remember to go the blog's web site. A much simpler way is to subscribe through an RSS reader. If you use Microsoft Outlook 2007 then you have an RSS reader built-in and you can receive new posts directly in your inbox. If not, there are plenty of free RSS readers out there that are very easy to use. Google Reader (www.google.com/reader) and Bloglines (www.bloglines.com) are two of the most popular.

By using an RSS reader you will be notified within just a few minutes any time there is a new blog post. Blogs are quickly becoming a valuable resource for anyone in business today. They have proven to be more than a fad, but an effective business resource that will be around for many years to come.

Customer Focus

Jamila White
j.blossom and co.
Bowie, MD

Jamila White was looking for ways to get off her computer. As a successful e-commerce consultant since 1995 she had spent all day every day in front of the computer. So she started making her own bath and body products. She loved experimenting with different recipes and her friends were always impressed with her products.



Then one day she was looking for a gift for her god daughter's fifth birthday party and was shocked she couldn't find much of a selection of quality kids body products that were positive, healthy and fun. So she made her own – some fun lip balm that she gave away as party favors and they were a huge hit, many people wanted to buy them. So

she started to think about her hobby a little more seriously.

She did more research and she found that the products that were on the market were focused on just little blond girls or portrayed what she felt were age-inappropriate images. She found nothing at all targeted for young African-American girls. So Jamila started to put together her business plan while perfecting the product formulations, and j.blossom officially launched two days before Christmas in 2006 with a handful of high quality, natural products for girls.

The labels were always going to be important for her products. Jamila wanted some labels that were fun and colorful as well as providing a positive message for the little girls she was targeting. Every label on every product contains an affirming message such as "I am totally lovable" or "I have a beautiful smile." She also knew she wanted high quality professionally printed labels. Back when she was experimenting with her products she would buy Avery labels, but they weren't durable and looked terrible after being exposed to water.

So before her company launched she contacted Lightning Labels, after being referred by a fellow bath and body product maker. In her words, "we love working with Lightning

Labels; the print quality is superb and the prices are very affordable for small companies like j.blossom. Not only that, but the friendly and efficient customer service is outstanding. Our rep, Peggy Nelson, is awesome."

While j.blossom is still a part time venture, Jamila works in front of her computer doing her e-commerce consulting business. She does hope one day to make it her full time job. Right now she does most of the work herself, but she does enlist support from friends and relatives on weekends to help with the packaging of her products. She hopes to hire her first employee in the fall.

In the ingredient list on her lip balm she lists beeswax, shea butter and other ingredients that you might expect, but the last ingredient is not something you see on many product labels: "lots of love." Jamila loves what she does, and she wants to convey that love to her young customers through her products. j.blossom really is a labor of love.



Lightning Labels News

LL Featured in New Video from HP

In late March several people from HP came by our facility to do some filming. They wanted to create a promotional video featuring the HP-Indigo WS4500 digital label printing presses. We were very pleased with the results, and it really focuses far more on Lightning Labels than it does on HP. If you have a few minutes (it is just under five minutes long) and want to see inside our label printing operation, we have loaded this video on to our web site at: www.lightning-labels.com/videos.htm.

New Finishing Equipment on Order

In April we placed an order for several pieces of new equipment from AB Graphic International. They make what is called "finishing equipment" which are die cutters, sheeters, and rewinders. We ordered five new pieces of equipment including a state of the art Digi-con 2 die cutter. We expect to take delivery in late July or early August. This new equipment will allow us to serve you better in a number of ways. We will be able get orders through our plant faster, and die cutting will be even more accurate than it is today.

LL President Scores a Hole-in-One

In late February, the owners of Lightning Labels (Steve Smith and Peter Renton) went to the annual HP DSCOOP conference in San Diego. Like many of these conferences it featured a golf tournament, and this one was at the storied Torrey Pines South Course, the site of this year's US Open. It is a spectacular course right on the ocean, and the number 11 hole is considered the most difficult par 3 on the course. Not for our president Steve Smith. He walked away from it with an ace, his first one ever.



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The LL Product Photo Contest Winners

Over 300 Entries Received in Photo Contest

Thank you to everyone who entered our product photo contest announced in the last issue of the Lightning Flash. We had over 300 entries and it was a very difficult job narrowing it down to one winner and four runners-up.

We are pleased to announce that the grand prize of \$500 goes to Bella Luce in Irmo, SC. They won with the photo below.

The four runners-up, who receive \$250 each are: Reminiscent by Jennifer, Blue Flour, Vetro Winery, and Good Girl Graphics. Their photos are all on our web site at: www.lightninglabels.com/contestwinners.htm.

Also on that page is a slide show featuring every photo that we received. You can also browse all the photos on Flickr (www.flickr.com), just search for "LLContest."



A Touch of Humor

The Photographer's Flight

The photographer for a national magazine was assigned to get photos of a great forest fire. Smoke at the scene was too thick to get any good shots, so he frantically called his home office to hire a plane. "It will be waiting for you at the airport!" he was assured by his editor.

As soon as he got to the small, rural airport, sure enough, a plane was warming up near the runway. He jumped in with his equipment and yelled, "Let's go! Let's go!" The pilot swung the plane into the wind and soon they were in the air.

"Fly over the north side of the fire," said the photographer, "and make three or four low level passes." "Why?" asked the pilot. "Because I'm going to take pictures! I'm a photographer, and photographers take pictures!" said the photographer with great exasperation.

After a long pause the pilot said, "You mean you're not the instructor?"

"Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work."

~ Thomas Edison