

# Streamlining shrink sleeve production

Creating the correct amount of distortion for shrink sleeves is complex, labor-intensive, and typically requires a significant amount of trial and error to get the design right. Total Quality Labels is working with Studio Toolkit for Shrink Sleeves and streamlined their complete shrink sleeve production.

## The Challenge:

Shrink sleeve production remains one of the biggest challenges in packaging for both designers and converters. Historically, it's a difficult, cumbersome process--creating the correct amount of distortion for shrink sleeves is complex, labor-intensive, and typically requires a significant amount of trial and error to get the design right.

## The Solution:

**Studio Toolkit for Shrink Sleeves**

## The Benefits:

**The entire shrink sleeve process has been streamlined!**

Find out more at: [esko.com/products/overview/studio/](http://esko.com/products/overview/studio/)

Watch a video: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=le1DBHTxs3Y](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=le1DBHTxs3Y)

The global \$3 billion shrink sleeve market is growing at about 7% a year, yet shrink sleeve production remains one of the biggest challenges in packaging for both designers and converters. Historically, it's a difficult, cumbersome process--creating the correct amount of distortion for shrink sleeves is complex, labor-intensive, and typically requires a significant amount of trial and error to get the design right.

printing in up to 10 colors, four-color process, custom die-cuts, as well as metallic, overprint, UV, and water-based inks. The company also provides laminate and UV coating.

*“Shrink sleeve jobs now take us two to three hours, instead of 20-24 hours”*

Meeting or exceeding customer's quality expectations is an ongoing mission, prompting Total Quality Label to develop and seek out unique solutions to common package and labeling needs.

## Long lead times

The process also demands long lead times, and if the distortion isn't correct, it costs the packager big, in time and money. With customers requiring head-spinning turnaround times, and profit margins incredibly tight, packagers are looking for a way to resolve the shrink sleeve conundrum.

Greg Swindle, Production Manager,  
Total Quality Labels

The search for a solution to this all-too-common problem brought Total Quality Labels, a high quality producer of labels and packaging products, to Esko's Studio Toolkit for Shrink Sleeves, a recipient of a Printing Industries of America 2011 InterTech™ Technology Award.

## Exceeding customer's quality expectations

Located in Dallas, Total Quality Labels supplies premium heat shrinkable film products—full body sleeves, multi-pack bands and neckbands—for a wide variety of markets, including beverage, food, health and beauty, pharmaceutical, household products, automotive and petroleum. Its capabilities include flexographic



## Improving the process

"We are constantly looking for ways to improve the production process—to streamline operations, boost quality and hold costs down," says Greg Swindle, Production Manager, Total Quality Labels. "Last year we installed Studio Toolkit for Shrink Sleeves from Esko. Our immediate goal was to streamline the shrink sleeve process, trying to eliminate some of the steps and get products out the door faster."

The biggest challenge with shrink sleeves, notes Swindle, occurs during prepress, "when you're trying to assess just how much distortion you'll need—where you'll need the most and the least—to make sure that the graphics are positioned correctly and in the right alignment on the package or bottle," he explains.

### \$600 errors

"Before we had Studio Toolkit for Shrink Sleeves, we would take a sample of the material and create a grid on film, shrink wrap it on to the product, and then measure the distortion of the sleeve off the grid," says Swindle. "Sometimes we got it right, and sometimes we didn't."

When the distortion didn't work, the prepress department would have to rebuild the art and start the project over from scratch. It was a time-consuming and costly process; it wasn't unusual for TQL to conduct two to three test runs to get it right. Each test run cost the company \$300-\$400 for plates, plus an hour of press time. "Each time we were wrong it could cost us between \$500-\$600," says Swindle.

### Art is art

Using Studio Toolkit, preparing art for shrink sleeves isn't any more time consuming than preparing art for any other job. "Shrink sleeve jobs now take us two to three hours, instead of 20-24 hours," says Swindle.

Studio Toolkit is able to work with asymmetrical shapes and multipacks, on a wide variety of substrates, taking into consideration the specific shrinking properties of each.

## 3D mock-up

Customers are also thrilled with the feature, as they can also see a 3D mock-up of what the label will look like prior to printing. It hastens the design approval process and gets products out the door faster and for less cost.



"We can see exactly how graphics are positioned on the label ahead of time, before we make a plate," says Swindle. "We can manipulate the art to make sure it looks good, and then show it to the customer."

A recent project emphasizes how critical Studio Toolkit for Shrink Sleeves has become to Total Quality Label's production process. "We worked on a honey bear that had a lot of detail—nose, eyes, feet, legs—everything had to line up over the bottle, so it was a

pretty complex deal," says Swindle. "Using Toolkit, we actually nailed it the first time through. We ran it through the software and looked at the viewer, tweaked it in a couple of spots, but none of the art moved more than 1/16th of an inch, and when we rendered it again, it lined up very nicely. If we had to do it with a grid and using math, it would have required at least 3 or 4 trial run-throughs."

### Streamlining the entire shrink sleeve process

Studio Toolkit for Shrink Sleeves accomplished everything TQL hoped it would—and more. "The entire shrink sleeve process has been streamlined," says Swindle. "It's helped us immensely in the production process. We typically

only have only one go-around now. We're not making plates and going to press to see if the pre-distortion is correct. We might have to make changes in the artwork and work on the design after the customer has previewed it, but we don't have to remake plates. Also, our designers are not spending all that time on math — which, of course, is not what they should be doing, anyway. We don't have to make grids to figure out the distortion. It's point and click."

For Total Quality Label, what was once a tedious, frustrating part of the production workflow, has become just another part of the packaging process.

“*Each time we were wrong it could cost us between \$500-\$600*”