

PROFILE

NAME: WestHort, a division of Stafford Press

LOCATION: Redmond, Wash.

FOUNDED: 1990

WEBSITE: www.westhort.com

CHALLENGE

Create a solution to print labels using thick and non-traditionally shaped label media and make available for on-demand printing in the horticulture industry.

SOLUTION

Modified Epson ColorWorks® C6500A on-demand label printer accommodates thick media to produce durable and resistant horticulture labels with crisp, clear text and images.

A Color Solution for Thick Horticulture Labels and Tags

WestHort modified the ColorWorks CW-C6500A for printing with thick label media for the horticulture industry

Meeting labeling demands in the horticulture space can be tough. The labels incorporate images, sharp text, barcodes, and compelling color graphics that must weather the extreme conditions of bright sun, dirt and water. Equally as challenging is finding a label printer that can handle the thick media required for producing durable labels and tags. Thick plant stakes and heavy wraparound tags often prove too challenging for most color printers.

[WestHort](http://www.westhort.com), a division of [Stafford Press](http://www.staffordpress.com), one of the West Coast's top manufacturers for niche tags and labels, specializes in cost-effective, comprehensive solutions tailored to the unique printing and product identification needs of the horticulture retail and wholesale industry.

"Most nurseries rely on, and significantly benefit from, the ability to print labels and tags in-house and on demand," noted Jim York, sales manager, Stafford Press. "And these businesses depend on their printers to produce durable, weatherproof and smudge-resistant labels, as well as accommodate specialized printing requirements."

"That's where Epson comes in," he continued.

Tending to customer needs

Stafford Press and WestHort began working with Epson over 10 years ago and, over the years, has leveraged its full lineup of [ColorWorks](http://www.epson.com) on-demand color label printers to help customers with tailored label printing solutions. WestHort initially brought on the ColorWorks because of its waterproof pigment ink, an optimal quality for nurseries.

After great success with introducing wrap-around tree tags and adhesives capabilities with the ColorWorks, York and team began exploring additional methods of innovation with Epson printers.

In retail or wholesale environments alike, garden labels need to be extremely durable and remain legible during the entire lifecycle – from growth to sale and in between. Pot stakes, signs and wrap



around tags are a few of the most popular labels that must be resilient enough to withstand sun fading, and water and dirt exposure. Thick media is needed to create these resistant labels – typically around 20 millimeters in thickness – but most label printers can only accommodate a maximum of 10 millimeters, including the liner, adhesive and face.

"The typical label printing process works well for adhesive labels; however, most horticulture media can be up to five times thicker, making it virtually incapable of working with legacy label printers," said York.

The launch of the ColorWorks CW-C6500A became a catalyst for the creation of a state-of-the-art, thick color label printing solution because it uses highly durable pigment-based inks and can produce crisp, color labels and images up to 1200 dpi resolution.

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“Epson made a commitment to us and truly supported us from the very beginning,” said York. “Their engineers worked closely with our technicians to explain the blueprint of the printhead and the inner workings of the printer to make sure our team had the tools to accurately build the modifications.”

The result is a printer with a slightly lifted printhead and additional modifications to guarantee seamless color printing on thick media without any jams. And, with ZPL II, major middleware, SAP, Windows®, Mac® and Linux compatibility, the solution offers seamless integration with existing workflow.

York explained, “Now, WestHort is able to provide nurseries a color solution that can create stakes and labels stiff enough to put in the ground without breaking or bending, and that can last outside for two years.”

“In fact, I tested this myself,” he continued. “I monitored a wrap-around tree tag that was printed on an Epson over the course of 14 months, and through the Seattle rain and sun, the tag proved to still be readable.”

“WestHort has also become a center to service the new modified printers,” said York. “Epson made sure we were set up for any irregularities that might arise and has been a fantastic partner throughout the whole engineering process.”

Growing color capabilities

Crisp, accurate and legible tags and labels are a necessity in the horticulture industry. For those that sell their products to larger chains, faded, mismarked or illegible barcodes or QR codes can result in fines and penalties.

“While all nurseries rely on crisp black ink to produce barcodes, text and QR codes, a lot of times these businesses also want color capabilities, and that’s where Epson is a differentiator,” said York. “Nine out of ten nurseries want to purchase their own solution for in-house label printing, and, now with the thick media capabilities and price point of the CW-C6500A, it’s really a no-brainer. And as I see it, if you can get a better, more durable black barcode from the Epson color printer at the same printer cost than you can from a horticultural thermal printer, nurseries are going to see that as a win-win.”

“The fact that it’s an affordable machine is a big selling point. Nurseries can print a hundred or a thousand labels at a time,” said York. “The ColorWorks gives companies a lot of control and flexibility to be able to do that kind of printing on their own.”

The CW-C6500A is the first printer specifically designed as a color upgrade to black-and-white thermal transfer printers,¹ making it easy for customers to bring color to their in-house operations. It has similar media handling capabilities, speed, features, and connectivity options, all at a comparable price point.

1 The CW-C6000/C6500 family is the first to bring to market the combination of features of direct ZPL II printing, peel-and-present, remote printer management, companion four- and eight-inch models, applicator I/O interface, broad middleware support, and comparable price points.

2 Printing in Max Speed Mode, 300 x 600 dpi, 3.6" (92 mm) print width.

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“Epson’s black ink alone produces a crisp image with a high resolution,” York noted. “In my experience, the Epson black ink simply delivers better prints than legacy thermal printers.”

“And, when it comes to color, the ability to print on-demand has become a huge selling point for nurseries because they have the flexibility to create color labels for marketing purposes, such as sales, promotions and holidays, but also for production or inventory purposes. For example, some nurseries will use color coded shelf labels to organize inventory or incorporate color branding information on their shipping labels,” continued York.

A fruitful collaboration

There are other applications for thick labels, but York notes they are especially important in the horticulture space. “Now that we have the modified ColorWorks solution to accommodate thick media, we have the ability to expand into other territories if a dealer approaches us with the need,” said York.

And York sees color labels as only gaining more traction within the horticulture space. “I’m confident color is going to continue to become increasingly important to nurseries and wholesalers,” he continues. “With the new, modified ColorWorks now available for sale, we’ve received a plethora of positive feedback from nurseries who have been anticipating the solution.”

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