



Technical Tutorial – Self-adhesive labels

So what is it about ‘sticky’ or self-adhesive labels that has printers waking up in a cold sweat at night?

If we start with the printing surface, most of you will have printed something very similar in a plain paper form, so that in itself is not very different.

The difference is that ‘stickies’ or self-adhesives are a combination of face material with an adhesive in the middle and a backing sheet. In simple terms, a bit like a sandwich. The technical bit is putting all of it together in a form that makes it printable, sticky and removable from the backing!

From a printing point of view you just need to remember that if you are litho printing pre cut labels, with nice sticky litho inks and compressible blankets then ‘suction’ takes over!

The mantra for printing labels is: extra low tack inks – hard blanket.

If you think of the various types of adhesive in the same way, as just a variety of paper finishes that the customer may want for their particular use, then believe it or not the options do start to make sense. As an indicator, some of the most widely used adhesive types are:

Permanent: Sticks to most things without being removable.

Extra permanent: Used where normal permanent labels are not quite ‘sticky’ enough e.g. cardboard boxes that often contain a high degree of re-pulped printers waste.

Removable: Removable from most surfaces? You would think so – but beware of this one. Removable adhesives are tested for clean removal from glass. If in doubt – try to get some samples from your supplier to use on the actual surface you want to apply to.

Deep Freeze: Yes, this is indeed the adhesive to use for frozen goods applications.

There are other more specialised adhesives that are available for particular end uses, and this is where your self-adhesive supplier or distributor can help. It is always best to ask your customer what they want to stick a label to, and if it is weird, which a great deal of them are, then it pays to talk to your suppliers and get their advice.

After 30 something years within the ‘stickies’ trade you would think that I have heard most things that people want to stick labels to, but occasionally the wonderful “have you got a label to stick to a cow’s backside” type of enquiry brightens the day. (And the answer is yes, we did indeed find something suitable...)