

Success Story: Pentair



Lean Manufacturer Relies on Flexible Supply Chain Partners

As devotees of the Kanban system of lean manufacturing, Pentair Water Quality Systems continually adjusts production levels of their water filtration products to match incoming order volumes. The company also strives to keep inventory to a minimum, which means its vendors must be responsive and flexible – able to provide a steady stream of materials during normal production times, but also able to turn larger orders around quickly when order volumes spike.

The Challenge: Managing Just-in-Time Production With Limited Warehouse Space

Pentair's warehouses play a key factor in this lean-and-mean approach. Space is at a premium, and there simply isn't room to store a multi-year supply of parts – including product labels. The Kanban "pull" system has helped alleviate these constraints, by automatically notifying vendors when a part is pulled from inventory and therefore needs to be replaced.

However, this poses a challenge when bigger-than-usual orders come in and Pentair's warehouse stock of labels isn't enough to meet the demand. In these cases, Pentair needs its label supplier to respond quickly and deliver the additional labels within a tight time frame.

**Kanban is a
scheduling system for
lean manufacturing
and just-in-time
manufacturing.**

The Solution: Alignment, Communication, and Availability

Pentair has been working with The Label Printers for custom product labels for over a decade. In that time, The Label Printers has seamlessly plugged itself into Pentair's Kanban system.

Typically, Pentair estimates how many labels it will need in a year and creates a blanket purchase order for that amount. The Label Printers doesn't deliver the entire order at once; instead, they ship only enough labels to fill a designated space in the Pentair warehouse. When the Pentair team removes a box of labels from their warehouse shelf and scans it, an inventory management system triggers an order with The Label Printers to replace the box. The Label Printers usually delivers the new order within a day or two and charges it against the standing P.O.

When unexpected larger orders come in, The Label Printers can handle that, too. To keep things running smoothly, Pentair Senior Buyer Ross Dungo and The Label Printers Estimator Christine Kane stay in constant communication.

"I always have a point of contact at The Label Printers."

–Ross Dungo, Senior Buyer, Pentair

"I have almost a daily call with Christine," Dungo says. "She keeps me in the loop on everything, so I always have a point of contact at The Label Printers. Even if she's coming in late for some reason, she has called me directly just to tell me."

The Label Printers particularly impressed Dungo and the Pentair team during a recent rush to re-label products with California Proposition 65 warnings.

"It was a massive change. We have almost 200 different label designs we get from The Label Printers, and all of those needed to have the warning added," says Dungo. "But Christine was on top of it. We were able to make all the changes, keep the line running, and avoid paying \$4,000 fines for each infraction."

The Label Printers, Dungo says, are unique among Pentair's vendors.

"We can be crazy, at times, with how much we demand. There are times when the line is running, and we're almost out of labels. They can process my order quickly, send a messenger, and in less than two hours, our labels are there," he said. "The Label Printers align exactly with what we need."



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