

How La Fermière's decision to implement Squid Ink is increasing speed, decreasing costs, and supporting growth

CASE STUDY



La Fermière is a premium yogurt brand experiencing rapid growth in the US market. But manual labeling processes added costs, increased complexity, and imposed multiple challenges on the manufacturing operations. After exploring multiple labeling solutions, La Fermière chose the Squid Ink CoPilot Max Turbo single head system, provided by Dartronics, an expert packaging solutions distributor.

Since adopting the Squid Ink CoPilot Max Turbo, La Fermière's manufacturing team has lowered its operating costs and improved its speed and efficiency, and is supporting the company's explosive growth.



La Fermière's Explosive US Growth

La Fermière, which uses all-natural ingredients in making premium yogurts and desserts, was founded in 1952 in Provence, in the south of France. The company entered the US market about seven years ago, with one plant in Schuylerville, New York, just outside of Saratoga.

Distribution Manager Ramon Mial, who is a jack-of-all-trades in managing manufacturing and distribution, described the company's US operations as "a midsize startup" that has experienced explosive sales growth over the past few years. This growth has accelerated in the past year due to a national contract with Whole Foods that has increased manufacturing volume to 300,000 to 500,000 units per week, which means producing 40,000 to 50,000 cases per week.

A major pain point: manually printing and applying labels

Part of La Fermière's distinctive packaging is a small cardboard slip (called a cluster) that goes over each unit of yogurt. As recently as two years ago, each cluster was applied manually on each individual carton of yogurt. Mial said that at the time the company's sales volume was lower, but this manual process made it very difficult for the manufacturing team to keep up with the volume being sold.

In late 2022, the company made its first major upgrade to its US packaging processes by purchasing and implementing a custom robotic assembly device. This equipment automates the process of applying the cardboard cluster on each unit, increasing La Fermière's speed and capacity.

However, while this improved the per-unit production process, La Fermière had another operational headache related to labeling its cases. That's because after the individual units were ready, they were put into six packs and packed into cases for shipping to distributors and warehouses. And, the process for labeling each case continued to be manual, with two people at the end of the line printing and applying a sticker to label all cases.

This manual process of labeling each case was expensive; prone to errors, which hurt La Fermière's quality; and difficult ergonomically. "It's a job that everyone hated," said Mial, which made it very difficult to keep people in these roles and resulted in high turnover.

"We knew there needed to be an alternative solution," Mial said.



Exploring solutions — and choosing Dartronics and Squid Ink

With the green light from the CEO to explore solutions for labeling cases, Mial did market research, made calls, spoke to several existing vendors, and spoke with the “authorized distributors of pretty much any packaging solution on the Eastern seaboard.” Many of these inquiries were discouraging. Distributors were often slow to respond, technicians were not very knowledgeable, and distributors conducted demos of solutions that were not adequate for La Fermière’s needs.

But Dartronics was different. The company—from the CEO to the technicians—was responsive, knowledgeable, flexible, and accommodating. Shortly after Mial contacted Dartronics, they informed him they had the Squid Ink CoPilot Max Turbo in stock and could install it and demo it within days. The technician from Dartronics who came out to install and demo the Squid Ink printer was extremely knowledgeable and made everything about Squid Ink sound simple, easy, and intuitive. He was able to ensure that the Squid Ink CoPilot Max could work smoothly in La Fermière’s unique, unorthodox setup.

This made La Fermière’s decision to go with Dartronics and Squid Ink easy and obvious.

Benefits of implementing Squid Ink CoPilot Max Turbo

Since implementing the CoPilot Max Turbo late in 2023, La Fermière has realized immediate and significant benefits. These benefits include:

- **Reduced labor costs.** Immediately after implementing the CoPilot Max Turbo, La Fermière was able to decrease its labor costs by having one person working at the end of the line instead of two. It also eliminated one of the worst ergonomic processes in La Fermière’s manufacturing operations, making this a better, more desirable job. That’s extremely important during this time of labor shortages and high turnover rates.
- **Reduced material costs.** After one month, La Fermière did a review and found that shifting to inkjet printing directly onto the cases resulted in 60% lower material costs. This is due to savings by eliminating thermal transfer labels, the ink for these labels, and manpower and materials costs to print those labels.
- **Eliminated the need to pre-print labels.** Not only did eliminating the need to pre-print labels save time and money, but it also improved efficiency and quality and resulted in fewer errors. Previously, labels were printed in advance, but if the production schedule changed, an incorrect label may have been applied. The CoPilot Max Turbo prints inline automatically, streamlines the entire process, increases visibility, and reduces errors and mistakes.
- **Faster changeover between runs.** Previously changeovers might take a minute or so. Now, with the CoPilot Max, a changeover only takes about five seconds. For a small company doing all packaging on one line, this is a big deal. The total time savings is significant. Similar to faster changeover is the ability to quickly and easily change lot codes at the production line. Previously, this was a time-consuming hassle, but the CoPilot Max’s software makes this fast and easy. This is based on how easy the console is to use and how intuitive the UI is.
- **Larger print area.** With labels, the print area was fixed at 4x6. But with inkjet printing it is possible to make the barcode bigger or to print information about a flavor or a marketing message. It is also simple and easy to do live testing and experimentation.



“The CoPilot Max essentially made it possible for us to completely eliminate one person from the end of that line without any sacrifice of any quality metrics.”

In combination, these benefits increase La Fermière's speed and capacity, improve the quality of the packaging operations, significantly lower the costs compared to the previous manual processes, and enable the company to achieve further growth.

Lessons learned

Based on his experience selecting the Squid Ink CoPilot Max Turbo and working with Dartronics, Mial shared several lessons:

- Speed of implementing a new solution makes a huge difference.** Once La Fermière implemented the CoPilot Max Turbo, they immediately started generating cost savings. Sometimes, projects linger and companies move too slowly in implementing solutions, and sometimes distributors don't respond with a sense of urgency. When this occurs, it costs companies money. Mial's biggest piece of advice to others is to move quickly with projects so you can immediately start generating savings.
- There are big advantages in working with small and midsize distributors that have the right expertise.** Once Mial connected with Dartronics, he knew he had found the right partner. They had the expertise that La Fermière needed and everyone at Dartronics was incredibly responsive, starting with the CEO. If you can find the right small or midsize distributor, they can be great partners.
- When you find the right solution, it pays enormous dividends.** Mial and La Fermière explored and considered several options, but none of the solutions they investigated truly met their needs. Once they received a demo of Squid Ink's CoPilot Max Turbo, conducted by a technician who really knew his stuff, it made all the difference in the world. This solution was light years better than any of the alternatives for La Fermière. And the demo proved accurate as the CoPilot Max Turbo immediately delivered labor savings, materials savings, and a host of other benefits.

Additional Information

Learn more about [Squid Ink](#) and the [CoPilot Max Turbo](#), and watch a [video](#) of the CoPilot Max Turbo in action.

Learn more about [Dartronics](#).

