

Inergy Automotive Systems | 100-Percent Accurate Bar Codes Automatically

Corporate Profile | Intelligent Printers for Maximum Security

Inergy Automotive Systems, the world's leading manufacturer of plastic tank systems for top German car makers including Porsche and BMW, depends on the security and reliability of Printronix printers for internal logistics at its manufacturing plant in Rottenburg, Germany. Equipped with a customized Online Data Validation (ODV) system, Inergy is able to check bar code labels for accuracy and ensure all production and assembly documentation is readable.

With 25 plants in 19 countries, Inergy Automotive Systems employs approximately 4,500 people. The company, headquartered in Paris, France, has three manufacturing plants in Germany at Rottenburg, Eisenach and Ginsheim-Gustavsburg.

The plant in Rottenburg an der Laaber in Lower Bavaria, employs approximately 150 people working three shifts, to make more than 700,000 plastic tanks a year. The Rottenburg plant has made, tested and dispatched more than eight million tanks. This is demanding work, and the plant is certified in quality management, environmental management and safety-at-work management.

Problem Met | Printers for Quality and Process Assurance

Inergy Automotive Systems needed a printing specialist with a robust offering for reading bar codes and cancelling them immediately if they are faulty or incorrect. From its good experience with Ratio Label Service GmbH (RLS) of Flörsheim, the decision-makers at the Rottenburg plant learned about Printronix. Printronix is the only supplier in the market offering intelligent print systems, such as ODV. The ODV solution from Printronix does more than just confirm that bar codes are readable, it intelligently cancels and reprints inaccurate labels.

"When we decided to use RFID printers at our Rottenburg plant, we opted for Printronix because they offer the best and most versatile thermal printing solutions with ODV," said Robert Bruschi, industrial engineer for Inergy Automotive Systems who worked with Manfred Grahl, manager information systems and services, to coordinate IT and production.

"What really made us select Printronix is that they were already working in a highly reliable partnership with RLS," said Grahl. "Since RLS wrote the software for our requirements, it just made sense."

"We're incredibly pleased that Inergy Automotive Systems, one of the largest international automotive contractors, believes in Printronix," says Holger Steer, area sales manager for Central Europe and South Africa, Printronix. "We're also pleased that the automotive industry, as well as its suppliers are turning to Printronix more often for our reliability and performance. Our solutions are highly flexible and can meet any demand."

The Printronix Solution | T5204r with ODV

Inergy chose the Printronix T5204r thermal bar code printer with ODV for its flexibility, easy maintenance and ability to quickly upgrade to RFID in the future. The T5204r is used to print two, code 128 bar code labels containing the tank's serial number for tracking during the manufacturing process and beyond. Building on the flexibility of the Printronix solution, RLS created custom software for Inergy. The printers connect to a PC with the RLS software installed. This



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temporary stand-alone solution can be integrated later in a remote-manageable network if the other moulding systems are fitted with ODV systems, which can then be fitted with PrintNet Enterprise, Printronix's own management software, so the computers can be remote controlled from anywhere.

Inergy Software Solution

The software designed by RLS meets Inergy's requirements and automatically gives the tank a serial number. Only the administrator can change this number, because there are a number of different serial numbers depending on the product that is to be made. "Something else which is particularly important about this software is that the individual tank weights also are held in the system and these are quality checked directly," says Klaus Sterker, managing director, RLS, who is in charge of implementation for this project. "Our software connects the ODV thermal printer to the scale, providing the quality and process assurance Inergy needs."

As tank production and assembly records have to be kept for a specified time, the software writes a report file for each individual tank, which the administrator can print out on demand.

Confidence is good, checking is better

Tanks are put on scales and weighed. If they weigh within tolerances, two identical bar codes are printed out with the same serial number, which are read by the ODV control unit. If both labels pass content and quality tests, staff on site can see on the computer screen that the labels are correct, and paste them to the tank in the position required. "ODV checks the quality and content of printed bar codes online then the data is sent to the program to be analysed and recorded in a file," said Grahl.

Intelligent problem-solving

If a fault is reported because of incorrect serial numbers or unreadable bar codes, the printer takes both labels back in and prints over them with a checkered pattern so there is no way the incorrect labels can get to the production chain. Another clever detail is the weighing program. Should a tank be well over or under weight, no serial number label is printed, as it is clearly non-standard.

"Printronix printers are the only ones in the world which offer this cancel option," said Sterker. "If a tank weighs even slightly out of tolerance, the tank gets a label with a serial number, but without a barcode, and is marked showing that its weight is not okay. It is then set aside and recycled."



User-friendly and secure

Inergy has multiple users for its print solutions. In order to be sure that printing runs as smoothly as possible, each user is given specific user-rights. For security reasons, the printer requires an employee's bar code ID to be read before the printer will work. This identifies the printer operator and is used to determine user rights for that employee.

Customer Feedback

"We're very happy with the quality and outstanding performance of Printronix's ODV solutions. Thanks to the outstanding support of Klaus Sterker at RLS, the complete solution has proved to be ideal for our requirements. Finally, we have a complete system at a reasonable price that functions according to our standards, without coming up against any technical barriers. We're looking forward to working with Printronix and RLS in the future."

Manfred Grahl
Manager Information Systems and Services

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About Inergy Automotive Systems

Inergy Automotive Systems is headquartered in Paris and employs 4,500 people worldwide. As the number one maker of plastic tanks for the automotive industry, the company has 25 plants in 19 countries, which made more than 12 million plastic tanks in 2007. Putting it another way, one in every five vehicles worldwide is fitted with an Inergy tank. Inergy has research and development centers in North America, Europe and Asia, and so is ideally positioned to meet future environmental challenges and new high-tech solutions. For more information, visit www.inergy.com.

About RLS GmbH

RLS GmbH was created from the KS Drucksysteme company in 2002, and draws on more than twenty years of knowhow and practice in bar code label printing. Using its extensive experience, RLS GmbH implements complex projects quickly and easily, even when they involve cutting-edge technology. Its product range covers print systems, bar code checking systems, scanners, software, labelling systems, consumables and special applications such as printing on glass. In addition to advising customers individually, RLS focuses on after-sales support, and has specialised in servicing, maintaining and repairing print systems. This is a systems company which aims to find the most efficient solution for each customer and support them optimally. For more information, visit www.RLS-GmbH.com.

About Printronix Inc.

Since 1974, Printronix Inc. has created innovative printing solutions for the industrial marketplace and supply chain. The company is the worldwide market leader in enterprise solutions for line matrix printing and has earned an outstanding reputation for its high-performance thermal bar code and fanfold laser printing solutions. Printronix also has become an established leader in pioneering technologies, including radio frequency identification (RFID) printing, bar code compliance and networked printer management. Printronix is headquartered in Irvine, Calif. For company information, see www.primtronix.com.

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