

Winning back ISO 9001

Photo: AC Labels (2010) Ltd

Barcode printer sees value in second time around

by Garry Lambert

AC Labels of Derby, England, a leader in printed barcode labels, has won back its ISO 9001 quality management system (QMS) certification, maintained since 1991, which was lost when it went into administration in 2010.



Photo: AC Labels (2010) Ltd
Peter Hartshorn, General Manager, AC Labels (2010) Ltd.

The company hit financial difficulties following a slump in phone card sales. However, part of AC Labels was bought out of administration by the Mercian Labels Group in 2010, and is now trading as AC Labels (2010) Ltd. The move has resulted in a new and leaner business structure, with the closing of the pre-pay phone card business to concentrate solely on barcode label production.

“An important milestone”

ISO Focus+ asked Peter Hartshorn, AC Label's General Manager, why the company considered it important to re-certify to ISO 9001, the implications of a new business model, and why he describes the achievement as “an important milestone”.

ISO Focus+: Why did AC Labels wish to go through the ISO 9001 implementation and certification process again?

Peter Hartshorn: The main reason was that the previous company structure went into administration, and the ISO 9001 certification was not transferable to the new business.

Re-certification was driven by our own commitment to proving that we had maintained quality standards, and to demonstrate to our customers that we are unquestionably committed to maintaining such quality, and are always looking for continual improvement. It also satisfies demands from customers that prefer to deal with companies with quality standard certification.

ISO Focus+: You mention that it is “an important milestone” – can you comment on the significance of ISO 9001 certification to your company, and the value of a recognized QMS?

Peter Hartshorn: ISO 9001 certification proves to our customers that we are working to approved standards and gives them confidence when they are reviewing their preferred supplier lists.

It also gave us the opportunity to integrate and streamline our new content management system (CMS) to ensure that the processes and procedures reflected the new AC Labels (2010) Ltd. business structure.

As all employees had taken enthusiastic ownership of the implementation of the QMS, the reward of certification was an achievement received with pride by the whole team.

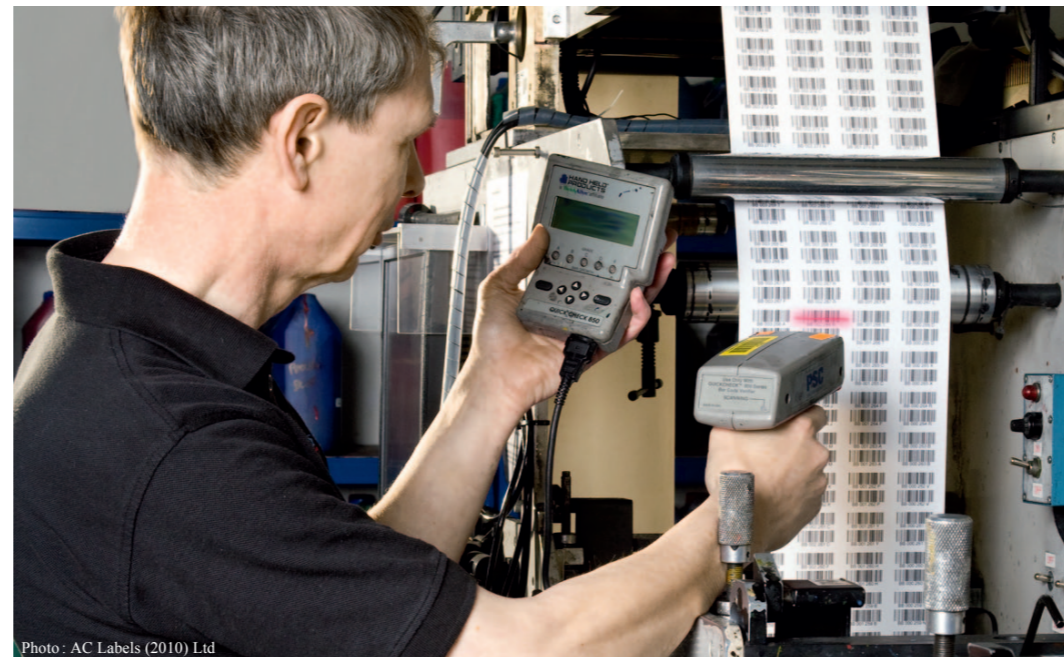


Photo: AC Labels (2010) Ltd

The implementation and certification process, and the way in which all company employees embraced it, gives us confidence when undergoing external auditing by our customer's quality control teams.

Our business runs more efficiently.

ISO Focus+: Is the Mercian Labels Group also ISO 9001-certified, and did they influence your decision to re-certify?

Peter Hartshorn: Yes, the Mercian Labels Group holds ISO 9001 certification, awarded in 2006. But it was our intention from day one to implement and regain ISO 9001 certification – a task that we achieved in just nine months with no major or minor nonconformities found during the assessment.

Streamlined procedures

ISO Focus+: Why did it take you nine months to recertify – didn't you have quality manuals and procedures in place from your earlier certification, or did you have to rebuild your documentation to satisfy the certification body?

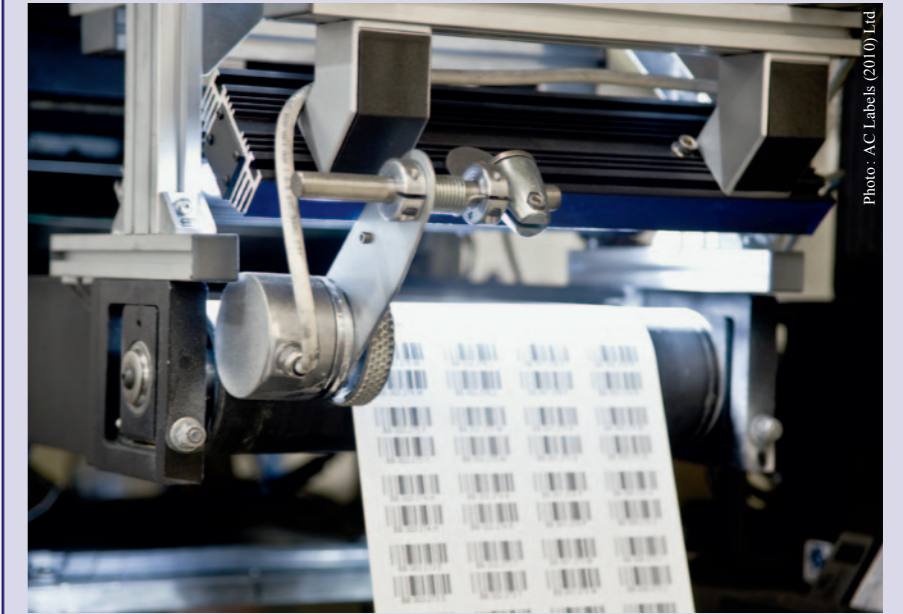
Peter Hartshorn: We were not allowed to bring the manuals through to the new business but we continued to work to the same procedures. As the business model

Printer David Badman uses barcode verification software to scan printed sheets for accuracy during a sample pre-production press run.

AC Labels at a glance

AC Labels (2010) Ltd., is a market leader in the United Kingdom for the printing of variable data barcode self-adhesive labels, supplied to the National Health Service and to records management, warehousing and logistics customers.

The company's in-line high-speed variable data print engine coupled with a flexographic printing press enables cost-effective medium to large volume barcode label production runs. An ISO 9001-certified barcode verification system and multiple scanning checks throughout the print process ensure data integrity and barcode readability every time, for end-user security.



An inline barcode camera reader checks every barcode label as the press runs.

had changed from a company of 54 staff to only nine we took the opportunity to streamline the procedures and used consultants to help us do this.

Second time around we had the input of all employees. Previously the system implementation had been carried out by the QC manager and small elements of input from employees, but then we had many more employees and printed a wider variety of products.

We went through every single process with the employees to ensure that the procedures met the criteria required and any unnecessary elements were removed. This in turn made all employees feel that they were a real part of the construction of the new manual, and that's why we were so proud to regain our certification.

ISO Focus+: What are the benefits of operating an ISO 9001-based QMS?

Peter Hartshorn: One of the benefits to the company of operating a QMS that conforms

to ISO 9001 is that every employee works to the one standard, ensuring minimal quality issues, which in turn relates to a secure and profitable business.

It also helps ensure that our business runs more efficiently. We investigated every process, eliminated any unnecessary paperwork, and modeled our system around the streamlined processes. ■

Garry Lambert is a British freelance journalist based in Switzerland.



AC Labels won back ISO 9001 certification thanks to the total commitment of the whole team.