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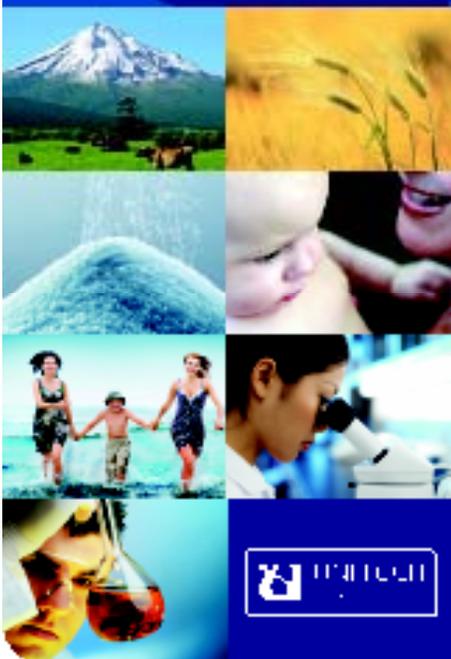
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## Coding refresh for Charlie's Group

To meet demand from Coles and Woolworths, niche juice processor Charlie's Group doubled its output and changed production processes at its manufacturing site in Renmark, South Australia. Research led it to Matthews Australasia for coding equipment, including a packaging automation software solution, that will meet its needs well into the future. **Samantha Schelling** writes.



**CHARLIE'S GROUP IS** a niche producer of pure juices in Australasia. Established in New Zealand in 1999, the first product rolled off the Australian lines in 2008. It now exports to some 15 countries, with South-East Asia a particular focus for growth.

The company manufactures and markets a range of premium "not from concentrate" beverages. Beginning with just orange juice, there are now four product ranges under the Charlie's brand – juices, smoothies, quenchers and water – along with the Phoenix Organic label, which Charlie's acquired in 2007.

In addition to its pure products, the company's quirky branding has helped garner a strong following. To capitalise on this, Kym Baldock, general manager of Charlie's Australian operations, says the company has long-term goals to increase its presence both in the route market and the major supermarket chains in Australia.

"It was also part of our long-term plans to increase efficiencies as well as our production throughput – and we've done that," Baldock says. "We started supply to Coles in 2010, we then revised our structure and capabilities to get into Woolworths – which we did in 2011. We are very pleased to have extended our distribution, given that it is not always easy to do. Now we have a good standing with both of the major chains."

### PRODUCTION CHANGES

As part of its plant upgrade, Charlie's Group installed a new automatic packer and palletiser. It also installed a Fox IV 2010 Repeater Label Printer Applicator (LPA) from Matthews Australasia.

"We needed a new printer for our cartons, but also wanted something that would provide other options in the future for automated control," says Baldock. "[Before installing the Matthew's printer], we had a manual case overpacker and a label applicator at the end of that line, which was causing us a whole lot of grief. The Fox IV applies a label to two sides of the carton – the front and side – and really works well.

"We'd had a Linx [printer] from Matthews for a while, but took the opportunity to upgrade that at the same time. We also changed the inks because we changed manufacturing methods to produce a much cooler, bottled product."

The Linx 4900 continuous inkjet (CIJ) printer marks a best-before code and time code on PET bottles across the Charlie's range, with five bottle sizes ranging from 300ml to 2L, as they come out of the labeller.





BELOW LEFT AND ABOVE: Juice drinks from Charlie's Group manufactured at its Renmark site in South Australia.

"Previously, all products out of this manufacturing site [in Renmark, SA] went to New Zealand, so it all went in dry containers. Now, most of our product is made and distributed chilled to Coles, Woolworths and much of the route market in Australia," says Baldock. "To do that, we had to change to a wet-bottle ink so it doesn't smudge when it's applied."

**ONE EYE TO THE FUTURE**

Charlie's Group also installed Matthews' iDSnet Express, a packaging automation software solution, linking the LPA and CIJ printers. This allows it to centralise the management of its product identification, increase coding and labelling efficiencies and eliminate errors.

"At the moment, the iDSnet is doing a very small part of the job that it can, just in connecting those two together," Baldock says. "In the longer term, however, we want to look at a number of other process-control features – cap fitment, tamper, fill levels, label alignments, all those kinds of things.

"There are a number of on-line repetitive activities that when iDSnet is used to its full extent will mean improved control and better presentation.

"We'll progress to that next step when we upgrade our other ancillary equipment. It's a 'walk before you run' type of thing, but everything is there now, set up to do it when we're ready."

**PRODUCTIVITY IMPROVEMENT**

Baldock says efficiencies and productivity have improved at the Renmark facility as a result of the installations, but he insists there is more to come.

Every product in Charlie's Group's 33 SKUs goes through the new coding equipment.

"We have five different bottle sizes, but our main product is a 1.5L juice," says Derek Pfitzner, Charlie's Australian production manager. "Our production capacity on that bottle went up 50 per cent."

"That was all part of the upgrade," Baldock adds. "We made a number of changes to increase capacity and throughput, and improvements to quality. We aimed at a 50 per cent throughput increase with the 1.5L bottles to produce enough product to service all our customers – particularly with the addition of Woolworths' national distribution.

"With the increases in production capacity you don't want to be let down with coding – you need something that will keep up and be accurate. What we have now achieves this." 



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