



## ZEBRA CASE STUDY

### Zebra printer and label combinations deal Tropicana a winning hand

The world-famous Tropicana Resort and Casino is located on the corner of the famous strip Las Vegas Blvd. and Tropicana Ave. in Las Vegas. With 1,875 rooms and suites and one of the world's largest indoor/outdoor swimming pools, as well as a five-acre water park and tropical garden, the Tropicana is a Las Vegas landmark. In addition, the Tropicana casino

occupies 62,000 square feet, contains 1,303 slot machines and 32 table games and is the home of the "Casino Legends Hall of Fame," the largest and most distinctive collection of casino memorabilia ever assembled. It also is home for the Folies Bergere, which has been running since 1959 and is the longest-running production show in Las Vegas. The hotel has 106,000 square feet of convention and exhibit space, an array of fine restaurants, health club facilities and extensive parking.

#### Challenge

Billing itself as "The Way Las Vegas Was Meant to Be," the Tropicana is a legendary Las Vegas landmark. But unfortunately, things were not the way they were meant to be for point-of-sale operations at Tropicana gift shops because of poor U.P.C. label quality.

The Tropicana offers a large variety of gifts and logo paraphernalia for visiting guests, including logo clothing, key chains, glasses and mugs, cigars, candy and many other items. All merchandise is labeled and distributed to the proper location, such as a gift shop, cigar bar, general sundries store or promotional gaming location. Items are scanned when sold to help maintain accurate inventories of goods. However, the item labeling process was leading to inaccurate inventory records, slow scanning and unidentified items at the point of sale.

The Tropicana's label process included using several different types of labels - each of which posed its own set of printing problems.

- Jewelry labels (also called "barbell" or "butterfly" labels because of their shape);
- Garment tag 1 (hang tag) 3.5 by 1.8 inch (90 by 46mm) with centered 3mm notch hole;
- Garment tag 2 (hang tag) 2 1/4 by 1 3/8 inch (57 by 35mm) with centered 0.5 inch notch;
- Item marking labels 1.25 by 1 inch (32 by 25mm) die cut with 3mm gap.

The printer initially used to create labels could not print on merchandise tag material, so staff would print labels, apply them to tags, and hang the tags on merchandise - a time consuming process that took two operators a minimum of two hours each per day to print and apply labels to merchandise. In addition, the thermal-transfer printers previously used for this application were typically out of service for at least 10 minutes every time an operator needed to load new printer ribbon and label material.

Small item labeling also was inefficient because the "butterfly" or "barbell" labels typically used to identify jewelry and other small items had to be custom ordered and involved long delivery times, which required Tropicana to carry excess safety stock. Quality varied considerably from roll to roll. Even with the custom media, the printer could not consistently produce readable U.P.C. symbols on small labels.





Print quality problems often resulted in misidentified merchandise and items that couldn't be recorded at the point-of-sale. Cashiers would frequently try to scan items multiple times before giving up and entering the item as "general merchandise." As a result, inventory management became inaccurate especially for jewelry and other small items, and cigars, which look similar but vary greatly by style, brand, and price.

The Tropicana IT staff fielded between three to five help desk calls daily for label printing problems and spent more than 240 hours trying to troubleshoot these issues before deciding to investigate a new printer. After reviewing options, the Tropicana turned to Zebra Technologies.



Product storage location.



Only a desktop can fit in this area.

### Solution

American Barcode and RFID, a Zebra reseller serving the area, conducted a thorough review of the Tropicana's label printing needs and worked with Zebra to create a proposed solution. Through an on-site demonstration using a Zebra 2844-Z desktop printer that used standard label material and a follow-up pilot project, American Barcode and RFID proved it could meet Tropicana's merchandise labeling needs.

"American Barcode and RFID sent us a demonstration unit, and really went above and beyond what they needed to do to get us set up," said Patrick Leary, a Tropicana MIS administrator who had spent hundreds of hours troubleshooting the previous printers. "The ease-of-use of the 2844-Z is absolutely amazing. Non-technical people can use it, changing label rolls is very easy, and we don't have to baby-sit anybody anymore."

The 2844-Z is a direct thermal printer, so no ribbons are necessary, which saves material costs as well as time. Other standard features benefit the Tropicana. Measuring only 6.6 by 7.6 by 8.5 inches (168 by 193 by 216mm), the printer is significantly smaller than the big-box model previously used, which creates valuable space in the crowded inventory area. The 2844-Z also easily interfaces directly with the Tropicana's IBM AS/400 computer, where its inventory, merchandising and point-of-sale applications reside.

"We learned how to use the ZPL printer programming language fairly quickly. Once we did, we were floored by how simple it was to use," said Leary. "It's easy for us to modify and customize our label files, even to the software on the AS/400."

Results: Today, it's not only Tropicana's guests that are going home with jackpots, Leary reports the hotel's gift shop operations are also winning.

The label and ribbon changing process that used to take 10 minutes now can be accomplished in less than one minute, providing an immediate payoff for the Tropicana.

"Once we went with the Zebra solution we calculated we were saving \$300 per week in gained productivity," said Leary. "Now, staff can print the hang tag directly and apply it to the product. We've eliminated the extra step of applying a printed label to a tag. That saves a lot of time. Within the first month we gained back our investment through increased productivity."

(Continued)



Benefits of improved printing extend far beyond the labeling area. Patrons are served more quickly because U.P.C. bar codes scan on the first try. Inventory accuracy is up because misidentified and unidentified sales have been nearly eliminated. Clerks with little training and no IT expertise can easily load the printers and perform routine maintenance and troubleshooting. Even the Tropicana IT and operations staff has been surprised at the lack of support the printers require, and the overall impact the new printers and label supplies have made.

“Since we switched to the new printers, everything has been better, not only in my department, but in others,” said Tropicana Financial Inventory Control Manager Robert Pataluch. “The system has probably cut the time we need to take inventory in half, because of the readability of the labels we’re using. On the retail end, there are much less open items.”

“Our inventories are also much more accurate now, and that’s something we had planned to occur,” said Leary. “Our scanning accuracy is up, unknown sales are down, and we service the customer faster. There’s no more scanning something five or six times while the customer waits in line.”

It’s that kind of outstanding performance that helps the Tropicana deliver on its pledge to give guests the experience of “The Way Las Vegas Was Meant to Be.” There are few sure things in Las Vegas, but Leary thinks the Tropicana has found one in its new labeling system: “Those desktop printers just can’t be beat.”

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