

Modern Strip Packaging Automation Boosts Productivity, Accuracy, and Your Pharmacy's Bottom Line



Mick Blazier
Pharmacy Director of Operations
~ Everspring

PRIMARY INTENDED OUTCOME

Closed-door and long-term care pharmacies are relied upon heavily to provide and deliver medications safely and accurately. Their patients often have complex medication regimens, making dispensing an opportunity for increased efficiency and productivity. Automated strip packaging allows pharmacies to address customers' needs while expanding their business reach and becoming more competitive against chain and mail order pharmacies. Customized packaging features also improve adherence as well as ease of use for patients and their caregivers.

Noritsu Pharmacy Automation offers the latest in pharmacy automation technology, including strip pouch packaging systems that reduce labor and boost efficiency. Custom multi-dose medication packages address the specialized needs of closed-door and long-term care pharmacies and help patients reach compliance goals.

THE CHALLENGE

In the age of online pharmacy giants, today's closed-door pharmacies must function as distribution warehouses, while remaining focused on successful patient health outcomes. To grow a strong customer base, pharmacies constantly strive to improve accuracy and increase capacity.

CASE STUDY

Everspring
Pharmacy

Pill and NDC Management

*Tools Which Help Deliver
Continuous Production*

When interfaced with EverSpring's pharmacy management system, Noritsu's software helps the pharmacy generate a pill report that is continuously aggregated and monitored, helping to identify the fastest-moving medications that are in high demand across facilities and patients to better optimize production.

The NX strip packager then utilizes active cassette and tray management to better dispense medications in an uninterrupted workflow. In advance of a batch run, the number of NDC's allocated as cassette-loaded drugs can be placed (expandable up to 1,000 unique NDCs), thereby minimizing the labor previously required to be delivered manually via tray.

At the same time, a pharmacy also needs to manage labor costs and reduce operational hours. To accomplish these goals, high-volume pharmacies are challenged to find the right equipment that can automate drug packaging efficiently and reliably while ensuring accuracy.

THE DECISION

Automated pharmaceutical packaging technology is a growing industry, aiming to address the needs of an increasingly large population of complex patients and the pharmacies that serve them. Numerous manufacturers are vying for prized pharmacy space. "I was in the market for new automation," said Mick Blazier, Pharmacist-in-Charge at EverSpring Pharmacy in St. Louis. "There are a number of big players in the field, of course. Another pharmacy that I had a relationship with used Noritsu, so I also included them in my search."

EverSpring exclusively targets long-term care, including assisted-living facilities and developmentally disabled group homes, so Blazier's interest in improving the pharmacy's adherence packaging was strategic. During the course of his research, he met with a handful of pharmacy automation market leaders, including Noritsu. "I was most impressed with what Noritsu offered, both in terms of their machinery and their customer support." EverSpring ultimately made the decision to purchase two Noritsu NX 400 strip packagers as well as their NV-3 medication detection machine.

THE RESULTS

The addition of Noritsu's technology resulted in substantial improvements in EverSpring's production time, workflow, and overhead costs. "We were running 16-hour days on average; sometimes we were so behind, we had to run 20 or 24 hours a day with the older machines," said Blazier. "The new machines decreased our run time to an average of 10 hours a day and increased our output by 25%, while decreasing our payroll hours by about 50%."

CASE STUDY

Everspring Pharmacy

EverSpring's new packagers combine lower labor costs and improved features. Custom-labeled medication pouches provide important information in clear, crisp detail, making it easier for patients and caregivers to read.

The Noritsu equipment also allows EverSpring's staff members to make more efficient use of their work time. When the outdated machines filled pouches, they still had to be hand-checked by a pharmacist for safety. With the addition of medication and pouch detection through the MDM workstation, a digital image and associated data are archived for every pouch ever produced.

"A pharmacist sees all of [the images] on screen and can visually inspect a blown-up image of each pouch if necessary," Blazier said. The MDM workstation has reduced staffing needs by two FTE pharmacists and also allows seamless connectivity between EverSpring's existing pharmacy management system and eMar administration.

EverSpring's accuracy has also benefited. "The combination of Noritsu equipment we selected has tremendously cut down on medication errors leaving the pharmacy," Blazier said.

THE CONCLUSION

Ultimately, customer service was the main driver in Blazier's choice of Noritsu Pharmacy Automation, and he has not been disappointed.

"They had an onsite presence here for two weeks after the installation, and we are always communicating with Noritsu about ways to make the system even better," said Blazier. "If we ever have a problem, they either log in remotely to take a look immediately or send one of their dedicated field techs here within a couple of hours."

As pharmacy growth continues, Blazier acknowledged that EverSpring would turn to Noritsu again for additional packaging machines.

"They are so efficient, and the support is that good."