

Tag Specifications: Uncovering, Solving Hidden Obstacles

by PAUL MANDEVILLE

To specify a customer's tag order cost-effectively while maintaining high quality standards, it is essential to gain a full understanding of the needs or uses of the tag being requested. Current technology provides greater choices for designing and producing tags, which can sometimes lead to greater confusion when specifying them.

There are some basic questions you can ask customers to help ensure you provide the best possible solutions to their tag needs. The answers to these questions also will enable you to provide outside tag suppliers with the information necessary to produce your customer's tags without errors or unforeseen additional costs.

What are the dimensions of the tag?

Tags can be manufactured in one of 12 industry standard sizes (#1 through #12) or practically any size in between. The most cost-effective size range usually is from #1 (1³/₈ x 2³/₄ inches) through #8 (3¹/₈ x 6¹/₄ inches). Tags exceeding size #8 are considered oversize within our industry and usually cost more to manufacture. Even so, some tags just have too much information printed on them to fit within a standard size. We have produced tags as large as 10 x 14 inches.

What kind of stock or material is required?

We most often receive requests for paper tags. Paper tag stocks fall into two basic categories: uncoated or coated. Uncoated tag stocks are white, manila or colored dyed-in-the-pulp (DIP). White and manila stocks typically are available in 100-, 125- or 175-lb. weights, while colored DIP stock usually is available in 125-lb. weight. The DIP colored stock is similar in

appearance to vellum bristol or index stocks.

If you tear DIP stock and look at the fibers, they are the same color as the material itself, i.e., red DIP is red all the way through. DIP stocks typically are less expensive than coated stocks, have a coarser surface and appearance, and are less rigid.

The next category of requested materials can be more confusing: synthetics. There are numerous types of synthetic materials in the market today with new ones being developed on a regular basis. Although they are known by many different trade names, the most popular materials requested for tags include spunbonded olefin, polyethylene, polypropylene and vinyl. The best material for a particular tag can be determined by examining its end use.

Most synthetics exhibit properties for weather, chemical and tear resistance. However, some will perform better than others in certain circumstances. For example, polyethylene films are very strong in comparison to their mil thickness, especially those that are cross-laminated (consisting of many opposing layers of film). This makes them suitable for applications that require extra material strength, such as use in industrial environments.

Where cost is more of a factor, polypropylene films usually suffice. Although the film is not as strong as others are, it is quite suitable for applications where rough handling will not occur. Spunbonded olefin film has been around for many years and remains a mainstay in our industry. It is very durable and weather-resistant, and through the years it has found many uses, from tagging shipped goods to seafood. All in all, your best bet is to discuss your cus-

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tomers' requirements with your tag supplier so you can confer about the most effective material solution.

How will the tag be printed?

The majority of tags are printed on one side with just one ink color: black. However, today's printing technology enables cost-effective tag printing using multiple ink colors, even four-color process, on both sides. For such jobs, it is helpful to provide information on the exact ink colors to be used and, for multiple-color jobs, whether the ink bleeds or traps. It is always best to refer to a Pantone matching chart.

What type of finishing is required?

Most traditional tags are manufactured with top-clipped (angled) corners and a fiber-patch-reinforced hole. Corners also might be rounded or left square. The hole can include a metal eyelet for extra strength, or it might call for a Mylar strip reinforcement instead of a fiber patch.

Another very popular feature is to include perforations and consecutive numbering. Perforations run vertically or horizontally on the tag. Often, tags include printed consecutive numbering on the stub that's created as the tag is perforated. Numbers typically are available in different sizes (or heights) including the standard 1/8, 3/16, 1/4, 3/8 and 1 inch. Variable-data print systems can create even larger numbers and can match consecutive bar codes.

Bar-coded tags are becoming more popular in applications where the end user requires real-time information tracking, such as inventory and warehousing operations or even valet services.

Does the tag need any attachments?

Typical tag attachments include wire, looped string (with open ends), knotted string (with tied ends), knotted elastic string, metal rings, and diamond or oval hooks. Wire is used for extra strength and is available in different gauges, such as 26, 23 or 21. The 26-gauge wire is the most commonly requested and is used in many industrial applications.

The heavier gauge wires are specified where extra stiffness is required, such as tags that will be attached by insertion through dense materials. Looped and knotted strings are popular for many industrial and retail applications. Elastic strings are commonly found in temporary applications, such as luggage identification tags. Metal rings typically are used in the automotive industry, and diamond and oval hooks can be found in the recycling and fence industries.

Are there any special packaging requirements?

Typically, tags are packaged 250, 500 or 1,000 per box. However, tags often are required to be banded or shrink wrapped in 50's, 100's or some other quantity. This information might result in the necessity to involve additional opera-

tions and to purchase special boxes or cartons. This will affect the cost of the project. It is helpful to know this information up front so there are no surprises when it comes time to order the tags.

Most importantly, what is the total quantity?

In most cases, we find it necessary to quote tags in a range of quantities, such as 1,000, 2,500 or 5,000. The quantity is key to determining the unit cost (price per thousand) of the tag. Most tag manufacturers can accommodate order quantities from a minimum of 1,000 tags up to millions of tags.

If you ask your tag customers this series of sound questions, you're likely to uncover any hidden obstacles well before they become costly problems. Eventually, you'll start coming up with your own prespecifications, which you'll find will give you a better final result in terms of both cost and quality. ●

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