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**Opinion Piece**

**See us at Labelexpo Europe 2025, Stand 3A-47**

# **Where ink meets intelligence: why a data is the key to competitiveness in label and package printing**

In today’s label and packaging industry, the real power of ink isn’t only in the container – it’s in the data that surrounds it.

A data-led organisation is one that bases its decisions, operations, and strategies on reliable insights rather than gut feeling or past practice. For packaging and label printers, this culture is now essential. Supply chains for packaged goods are fast-moving, highly regulated and service-driven. Converters that use data from suppliers, production, logistics, and customers can make smarter, faster, and more accurate decisions – and that directly impacts competitiveness.

## **Why data matters in package printing**

Data underpins transparency, agility, compliance, collaboration, efficiency, and repeatable quality assurance. It helps printers prove traceability in audits, reduce makeready times, optimise material use, and respond quickly to customer demands. In short, data is the foundation for resilience and growth.

But when it comes to inks - especially when spot colours are used - data has traditionally been hard to capture and share using conventional planning systems. Ink management is non-linear, involving formulation, mixing of ingredients, returning leftovers from the press, re-use, and disposal. Different software systems may fail to talk to each other, creating silos. As a result, valuable information about ink usage, costs, and performance can be trapped in isolated databases.

## **The challenge and opportunity of ink data**

In the ink kitchen, the importance of accessing formulation data has long been understood: retrieving recipes for orders can dramatically cut makeready times. Yet new developments mean printers can now go much further.

When ink data is connected with production, order, supplier, cost, and environmental data via an organised, updatable, and interoperable system, it becomes strategic intelligence. This is the essence of the latest ink management software programs - the [*GSE Ink manager*](https://gsedispensing.com/products/ink-management-software/gse-ink-manager/) suite being an example. With the help of these programs, converters can plan more accurately, control costs, comply with safety and sustainability requirements, and monitor performance across the facility.

## **The data maturity journey**

To unlock the full value of ink data, printers need to build reporting and analytical capabilities step by step. Think of it as a staircase of data maturity – each level strengthening the organisation’s ability to capture, share, and apply information.

### **Step 1: Standardised reports – the foundation of compliance**

The journey starts with predefined reports, such as PDFs generated from the ink management system. These provide consistent documentation for:

* Traceability audits
* Dispensing reports
* Order protocols

Such reports, available via clear menu options and standard filters, create a common reporting language across departments and ensure compliance with food safety and quality standards such as SQF and BRCGS.

Use case: A quality manager retrieves an ink traceability report in seconds for an upcoming customer audit.

### **Step 2: Custom grids – real-time control on the shop-floor**

As confidence grows, the next step is to create customisable grids: Excel-like views that let teams filter, group, sort, and hide columns to match operational needs. Every database element – orders, components, returns, stock – can be configured by the user.

Use case: A supervisor groups ink consumption data by machine and date to spot variances in process efficiency.

### **Step 3: Automated reporting – consistency without effort**

At the third level, reporting becomes proactive. Advanced software programs allow teams to create custom layouts, schedule automatic distribution by email, and choose output formats such as XLS, CSV, or PDF. Reports can be role-specific, ensuring each stakeholder receives the right information without manual effort.

Use case: An operations manager receives a Monday-morning summary of return-ink volumes by department, generated and delivered automatically.

### **Step 4: Real-time SQL export – integration with the business**

The top level of maturity provides maximum agility. Real-time SQL export databases capture every logistic event – from base ink delivery to press return – and make it instantly accessible without touching the live system.

This enables seamless integration with business intelligence (BI) tools such as Power BI or Tableau, or with costing, planning, and quality systems.

Use case: A business analyst runs a live query of colour corrections over the past 24 hours and correlates it with downtime data to identify root causes.

## **Empowering ink Intelligence, step by step**

Smarter reporting isn’t simply about investing in tools – it’s about building team capability. Each step, from compliance reporting through to full BI integration, creates more visibility, alignment, and speed.

With real-time insights into ink usage, traceability, and performance, printers can strengthen customer trust, control costs, and accelerate decision-making. More than that, they can turn ink data into a competitive advantage that supports wider business goals, from sustainability to profitability.

This is the definition of ink as intelligence – driving efficiency and agility in operations and providing the platform for successful business strategy.

**Ready to take the next step?**

Wherever you are on your reporting journey, moving up the data maturity staircase will bring greater control, smarter decisions, and stronger competitiveness. The question isn’t *whether* to embrace ink intelligence – it’s *how soon you begin*.

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**About GSE**

GSE delivers robust, fast and smart dispensing equipment, software and services to minimise ink-related waste in the printing workflow. With 50 years’ experience in the industry, the company has an installed base of 2,300 systems worldwide. The company is based in Brummen, the Netherlands.

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