

Which Printing Method - Direct Thermal or Thermal Transfer?

Thermal Transfer vs. Direct Thermal: Five Key Considerations

Direct thermal label printing has traditionally been a niche technology used across several narrow vertical markets including meat, poultry and dairy. However, developments in thermal paper technology have resulted in a broader range of products that are now suitable for use in many applications across nearly any vertical market. The result has been increased interest in direct thermal as the technology choice for new or upgraded applications. What's the difference between direct thermal printing and thermal transfer printing?

In simplest terms, thermal transfer printing utilizes a thermal ribbon and direct thermal printing does not. Thermal transfer involves the thermal print head elements (dots) heating the backside of a thermal transfer ribbon to melt and transfer the compounds on the front side of the ribbon to the label material, thus creating the printed image. Direct thermal printing requires a heat sensitive label material. The print head elements come into direct contact with the heat sensitive material where the heat from the elements causes a color change in the material to create the printed image.

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