



Choosing Your Code Format

Do not be afraid if this is your first adventure into equipment for bottling your products. You probably already know you need to put some sort of code on your container, but you may not know the three most critical decisions: what, where and how. Different industries, companies, state agencies and countries require different codes.

WHAT information do you want to communicate to consumers of your products and the various people who will handle it through your production and delivery chain, such as:

- Exp (Date)
- Batch (Number)
- Best if used by: (Date)
- Lot #: (Number)
- Bottled on: (Date)
- Internal code: A code no one but your company can understand; typically for reference, routing, tracking)
- Country of origin: (Country)

WHERE do you want it placed? Or where will your consumers require it to be placed? Will it be on the side, shoulder or bottom of your container? Perhaps your customers require it on top of the cap. If you are packaging large quantities of generic product, and will private label them later as your orders come in, you may need a batch number printed on the container under the label. Many companies print the code directly onto the label (see Hot Stamp Coder).

HOW you code is very relevant to WHAT and WHERE you code, as well as other factors: line speed, environment, container, color, number of changeovers per day, etc. First, let's examine the methods:

Method	Advantages	Disadvantages	Future Costs
Hot Stamp Coder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very easy operation & maintenance • Low initial investment • Excellent reliability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited placement (label only) • Cool-down time • Character changeover time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replacement ribbons • Lost characters
Inkjet Coder - Drop-on-Demand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Code on bottle capacity without high price 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ink is slow to dry, smears easily • Cartridges can be costly • Requires frequent cleaning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost of production down-time • Cost of cartridges
Inkjet Coder – Continuous	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Code anywhere on bottle on cap • Multi-line capabilities • Large codes with fast changeover, memory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cheap models clog, get messy • Self-cleaning models are pricey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ink & solvent • Maintenance & replacement with less expensive models
Laser Etching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No fluid cost • High speed capabilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very high initial price tag • Particulate removed must be captured • Fairly new technology, evolving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Filters & power supplies

Your brand giants typically use laser coding to etch the code right into plastic bottles. They invest dollars on the front end knowing they will earn it back quickly with high volume and low cost of consumables. Most large regional bottlers use an inkjet coder to print onto the bottle. This is usually done with black ink on clear or white bottles, but sometimes you will see pigmented inks, such as yellow ink on black bottles. A code printed onto the label is placed by a Hot Stamp Coder. This method is similar to an old-fashioned typewriter, requiring foil ribbons and characters purchased separately according to your needs.

You are a consumer and you probably do not choose to buy or not to buy a particular product brand because you like or dislike the code on the container. But admit it; you probably check the expiration and sell by dates on all sorts of packages. We suggest that if you do not know what code you want or are required to put on your containers, just go into your local retailers and study your local/regional competitors' products. You can even look around your own home or office to find good examples for comparison. Your objectives with this exercise may vary, but at least focus on the WHAT, WHERE and HOW. Also think about what you like or dislike. Just because one or more competitors are doing it a certain way does not necessarily mean you must as well. Remember that consumers and government agencies may not care about the WHAT, WHERE and HOW provided the code is there and visible.