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## UPGRADE MANUAL LABELLING TO AUTOMATIC



# TOSHIBA

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Whilst the technical specification of Toshiba Tec's APLEX industrial labelling applicator speaks volumes, there is no-one better placed to take us for an access-all-areas tour of its capabilities than Mike Keane, Toshiba Tec's European Products and Solution Manager, a 35-year barcode and label printing veteran of the company.

**Logistics Business (LB):** What would have been the main advances from 35 years ago to where we are today?

**Mike Keane (MK):** The ability of the machines to actually print hasn't changed, but they have become faster, more intelligent, and have a greater ability to connect with more different systems.

**LB:** Is there extra emphasis in today's dynamic supply chain on the speed and accuracy of the printing solution?

**MK:** There has always been a need to be able to print a recognisable machine code on a piece of paper, or plastic, or something that is going to accompany a product or package. It has always been very accurate, but what is changing is how many are being produced, how they're applied to the product, and where they're applied to the product. Throughout the entire supply chain, it has gone from just scanning a barcode at the checkout to being completely omnipresent. Everything is coded now, and you can find barcodes on everything and at every stage of the process.



**LB:** What drove the development of the APLEX print and apply solution?

**MK:** With the labour shortage, there is an increasing amount of automation, but businesses are looking at what productivity they can gain without having to invest huge amounts or massively change existing systems. We look at how we can help our customers to automate as and when they need to. In tandem, we also help dealers and service partners to transition from the current solutions that they are selling for manual labelling into more automated processes.

APLEX is an off-the-shelf product that works with the existing printers that dealers and customers are already completely familiar with. Anyone who can fit a cutter or a peel-off unit to a printer today can build the APLEX system, install it at a customer site and support it. The same thing is true if you need to add RFID later; we can add a module to the existing APLEX print and apply solution to turn it into RFID. This means that customers can continue to work with the trusted suppliers they have worked with for years.

**LB:** Toshiba Tec says 'simplicity' and 'efficiency' are two of the principal benefits of the APLEX system. Would you care to expand on this?



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## APLEX Print & Apply System

- » The APLEX label applicator solution is an optional add-on for Toshiba 4" or 6" industrial printers.
- » A cost-effective automatic print & apply system for a wide range of logistics applications.
- » Simple to install – APLEX is an easy upgrade from manual to automatic labelling.
- » Automatic labelling of up to 1,800 products per hour.
- » Print & apply speeds of up to 30 labels/min.
- » An impressive industrial labelling solution, which can run 24/7.
- » Field-proven robustness minimises the possibility of break-downs or downtimes.
- » 800 metre ribbons & Toshiba's ribbon save technology can result in labelling runs up to 7 times longer without ribbon replacement.

## Applications

- Ideal for pallet labels & shipping labels
- Flexible size of boxes, cartons or products on the same line
- Distribution centres receiving /shipping, cross docking
- Courier, transport and logistics

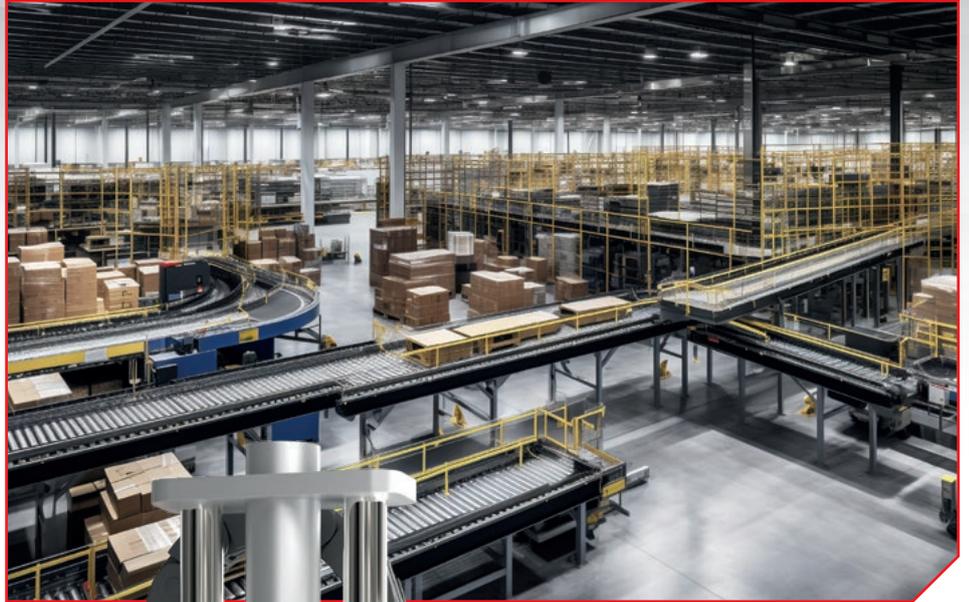
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**MK:** APLEX is very fast and easy to install; there's no need to reconfigure the operation. It's just a matter of connecting the printer to your network, connecting the APLEX to the air system, setting a sensor up to detect the goods as they come through so the printer can print and apply the label, and that's it. APLEX will help remove repetitive operations - if a customer switches from a manual to an automatic labelling system, they can redeploy their existing staff into more productive roles. As well as an increase in efficiency, there is also faster throughput, in many cases up to four times faster, saving time and costs, and producing more with the same resource.

**LB:** What sort of businesses would benefit most from this system?

**MK:** Effectively, anybody who's manually sticking labels on parcels, products, or anything. We sell a lot of printers today with inbuilt peel-off modules where the printer automatically peels the label, but somebody still has to stand there, pick the label off and stick it on. A lot of these manual systems remain because they are part of a reliable overall process that people don't want to change. But if a business that's currently using manual labelling needs to increase its output, or to become a bit more efficient, APLEX can take away some of those repetitive tasks such as sticking the label on the



box as it comes down the conveyor, or at the end of the line where it's being packed. Wherever you need to automate, it can place a label onto the product without a human being have to act as the sticker.

APLEX covers a wide array of today's standard applications using 4-inch or 6-inch wide printheads. It can apply up to 30 labels per minute. For carton labelling, 30 per minute is a high production level. So, at the end of the production line, where things are being packed into boxes, APLEX will cover most applications. The solution is also highly suitable for pallet labelling applications with a throughput of no more than two pallets per minute.



**LB:** So, what does Toshiba Tec bringing to the party?

**MK:** We've been there from the start when the industry first started doing location coding in warehousing and distribution, and over the last 35 years we've been supporting customers to do this with our technology. It is now moving to remote connectivity, with more and more systems being able to interact with the devices to provide the information. The devices themselves then have become increasingly clever to understand things like different languages and understanding data from different systems.

**LB:** In a crowded marketplace, where do you think Toshiba Tec has the lead?

**MK:** We have the reputation in the market for being the most reliable and robust printers. Businesses cannot afford their logistics systems to break down. They need that label to go onto that product that is going to their supply chain. If that stops working, the whole system falls over. But how robust is the technology? This is where we really come into our own – recently I had a question come in about one of our industrial machines that we discontinued in around 1993 or '94 and it's still working in the field.

**LB:** This must contribute to a strong total cost of ownership (TCO) argument.

**MK:** We drill home the TCO to all of our dealers, in terms of the reliability of the product, how easy it is to use the product, how easy it is to change the media... all these things that take time. The design of the machines is incredibly user friendly and intuitive. For example, putting new labels or ribbons in is really easy. The system has been

designed to minimise this time as much as possible. On a competitor's machine, you may take one or two minutes for a changeover, whereas ours takes a few seconds. Furthermore, our top industrial machines have 800-metre ribbons, meaning the machine runs for longer so it doesn't have to be changed as often. As well as robust design, the lifetime of printheads and platens is incredibly long, which all feeds into a TCO that is arguably the best in the market.

**LB:** Why should a customer choose Toshiba Tec over a competitor, and what are the values associated with the Toshiba brand?

**MK:** Our company philosophy is to develop the most reliable products, creating value with our customers in mind through state-of-the-art technology and in collaboration with our loyal partner network. All this is part of what we call Monozukuri - our commitment to create our products with pride and passion and keeping our customers in mind all the time and everywhere.

Toshiba Tec is a separate corporation owned by Toshiba. So we've got the same DNA and the same logo, and the same rules that govern Toshiba also govern us. We have about 700 dealers across Europe supplying machines and local support to end users. If one of our dealers or suppliers come across something they can't handle remotely, or through the training we give, or through the support mechanism, then it's escalated back to us. For some of our customers, if necessary, we will even bring engineers over from Japan, Indonesia, or India to solve the problem.

We have the reputation as one of the most reliable manufacturers, with the best field support and the best after-sales support. We will guarantee ongoing parts and support for several years. If you invest in a machine today, you're still going to have full support for years even if we discontinue it tomorrow. We try to build in as much longevity as we can. If somebody buys one of our industrial printers and needs to automate in the future, they can use APLEX with their existing printers.

**LB:** Thank you, Mike. Logistics Business wishes you and Toshiba Tec continued success through 2024 and beyond.

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## Label smarter to keep your shipments moving.

- » Ultra-reliable industrial printers
- » Smart labelling software solutions
- » Cost-effective label automation
- » Off-the-shelf printer supplies
- » Flexible linerless labelling
- » Mobile label printers



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