

Shrink Sleeve Technical Information/FAQ Guide

Supplied by Cambridge Label

What is a shrink sleeve label?

These highly attractive labels are printed on a flexible shrink film that reduces in size through the application of heat. Once the film shrinks, it conforms tightly to the shape of the container or product, creating a sleek label and product package. With a 360-degree display of brilliant artwork and text, custom shrink sleeves give products maximum aesthetic impact and marketing exposure.

What are the benefits of shrink sleeves:

- 360-degree graphics
- Gives the upscale illusion of “direct printing” onto cans or other containers
- Added durability – all the ink is reverse printed on the inside of the shrink sleeve, meaning the ink never comes in contact with moisture or the outside environment

How are shrink sleeves applied?

Once printed, shrink sleeves are formed into a tube, and then slid over the product’s container. To shrink the material, the container will go through a heat or steam tunnel. Some shrink sleeves are applied by hand, which means the sleeves would be supplied as cut individuals, with a person manually applying the sleeve over each container. However, many shrink sleeves are applied by machine, meaning they receive the sleeves in roll format and an application device slides the sleeve over the container.

What is a slip coat?

If the shrink sleeves are to be machine applied, they need a slippery silicone coating on the inside of the sleeve to ensure they slide onto the container. Please confirm with your client whether the shrink sleeves are to be applied by hand or machine as this slip coat is critical for machine application.

What is a shrink sleeve’s layflat size?

Once the shrink sleeves are printed, they are then formed into a tube. The width of the tube is technically referred to as the “layflat” and it is measured in millimetres because it is so precise. For example, when printing labels for beer cans, the layflat width of the tube ranges from 106 mm to 110 mm (depending on who is doing the application of the sleeves).

What is artwork distortion?

When you have a shrink sleeve that is going onto an oddly shaped container, sometimes the artwork will need to be 'distorted' so that once the shrink sleeve shrinks onto the container, the artwork and text is still legible and graphics looks as they were intended to. To distort the artwork prior to printing requires sophisticated software. At this time, we do not have the software but are looking at getting it for the future, based on demand. When you have a container with a relatively circumference, artwork distortion is not required.

What material(s) are shrink sleeves printed on?

There are two primary materials shrink sleeves are printed on: PETG (pronounced "pet-g") and PVC. The difference between the two lies in their shrinkage values. PETG is the most popular because it has a higher shrink rate than PVC. PVC is slightly less expensive, but is more rigid and shrinks at a lesser rate, and sometimes does not shrink as cleanly. For these reasons, we print our shrink sleeves on PETG.

What questions should I ask my customer?

1. Try and get an artwork file, shrink sleeve files are complex and for us to quote accurately it is best to see an artwork file.
2. Are the shrink sleeves to be hand or machine applied?
3. If the shrink sleeves are to be machine applied, what is the inner-diameter (ID) of the core that they require? (For shrink sleeves, core IDs vary from 3", 5" and 6")
4. If the shrink sleeves are to be machine applied, what is the maximum outer-diameter (OD) of the roll they can accept? (This typically ranges anywhere from 14" to 16")
5. What layflat width (in mm) do they require?
6. Have you done this project before? Could we please get a sample?

For more information:

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