Microscan helps Laser Devices hit its target for UID marking

Military and law enforcement personnel use aiming assistance products from Laser Devices to make their weapons more accurate. Laser Devices, in turn, relies on Data Matrix two-dimensional (2D) bar code verifiers and readers from Microscan Systems to make sure the equipment it supplies to the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) includes an accurate, reliable Unique Identification (UID) bar code.

Laser Devices supplies the DoD with laser and infrared aiming devices and illuminators that can be used with a variety of firearms to locate and site targets up to 450 meters away. When the DoD included the products in its Unique Item Identification (UII) program, Laser Devices had to quickly learn about the program requirements and find a partner who could deliver a solution to comply.

"We hadn't had much experience in government contracting at that time, and we were very concerned about the scope of the project and how it would impact our costs," says Joe Hotz, vice president of sales and marketing and general counsel at Laser Devices. "We thought we'd have to put together a system from scratch, which is a bit scary."

The UII program requires goods supplied to the DoD to be marked with a permanently readable UID bar code that includes a serial number and other defined data formats. The UID code must be encoded in a Data Matrix bar code symbol, which can express a lot of information in a small space and can remain readable in challenging conditions. Prior to shipping an order to the DoD, data from the UID symbol, plus additional contract and order information, must be submitted electronically to the DoD's Wide-Area Workflow (WAWF) system, which can be a tedious process.

Targeting a Solution

After attending a UID conference and familiarizing itself with the requirements, Laser Devices determined its products had to be bar coded by direct part marking, which permanently etches the symbol into the product. It also determined the best location for the code on the final assembled product happened to be on a purchased component. Laser Devices arranged to have its supplier pre-mark the component with the UID symbol, which measures approximately six by six millimeters. Laser Devices, not its supplier, is ultimately responsible for making sure the UID codes it provides are readable, and providing the WAWF documentation. These responsibilities led Laser Devices to set its sites on a system to verify UID symbols and automate the WAWF submission process.

"We were looking for something that would work for a small manufacturer," says Hotz. "There are a lot of UID solutions out there, but we didn't find very many that were complete solutions. Plus, most of the options seemed very expensive."

ITSCO Auto ID Products worked with Laser Devices to find and integrate components that met the functional needs without requiring major changes to operations or straining the budget. The recommended solution – Microscan 2D bar code verifiers and readers plus UID software from Mil-Pac Technology – has proven to be right on target.

Laser Devices uses Microscan's Data Matrix Verifier to validate that the UID symbols on the products it receives from its supplier meet the DoD's standards and specifications for symbol quality and data content. The Data Matrix Verifier is certified to the ISO/IEC15426-2 conformance standard for Data Matrix verifiers and analyzes symbols according to the DoD's MIL-STD-130M standard. It can output detailed reports on symbol quality and conformance.

"We had demos from at least two other reader manufacturers," says Hotz. "Customer service was a key issue in the decision to go with Microscan. The product's cost, value and ability to integrate with the rest of our system were also important advantages."

End-to-End Quality Assurance

Components that pass the UID verification at receiving are then sent to production. After final product assembly, Laser Devices again users a Data Matrix Verifier to verify the UID symbol and ensure it didn't become damaged or unreadable during the production process.

The next step before shipping the product to the DoD is preparing and submitting the WAWF documentation. Some DoD suppliers say that this is the hardest part of compliance, but for Laser Devices the process is simple. Another scan of the UID symbol triggers a process that automatically gathers, formats and submits the WAWF information.

"The nice thing about the system we developed is we just scan the UID into the Mil-Pac Software, which automatically creates our packing slip, shipping labels and submits the information to WAWF," says Hotz. "Having to do manual data entry into WAWF was a concern, but with this system we don't have to worry about that."

Nor does Laser Devices worry about submitting UID symbols that are out of compliance. In only a few months, Laser Devices went from having no UID marking experience to providing accurately identified products to the DoD with an automated system that runs reliably and conveniently. The quality products and service that Laser Devices received from Microscan and its partners put the company right on target for UID marking success.

MICROSCAN

Microscan Systems, Inc.
Tel 425 226 5700 / 800 251 7711
Fax 425 226 8250
Microscan Europe
Tel 31 172 423360 / Fax 31 172 423366
Microscan Asia Pacific R.O.
Tel 65 6846 1214 / Fax 65 6846 4641
www.microscan.com
E-mail: info@microscan.com
Tech Support: helpdesk@microscan.com

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