



## Managing Bar Code Printers Over The Internet

### Viking Direct Relies on ZebraLink and Bar Code Printers from Zebra

Viking Direct is a provider of office supplies, based in Germany, which serves the entire European market. It promotes its products through catalogues and the majority of its customers are small and medium sized companies. The company has 600 employees in the German cities of Großostheim and Munich. A third office is scheduled to open in Hamburg later this year. Due to the bar code labelling of products, Viking has been able to meet its ambitious service objectives by delivering products within 24 hours of having received the order.

### Previously at Viking

Frank Frost is the IT team leader who provides technical support on a local basis and supervises the work of his six-member team based in Germany, Holland and Belgium. His responsibilities include training employees to manage IT issues and to resolve any problems that may arise locally.

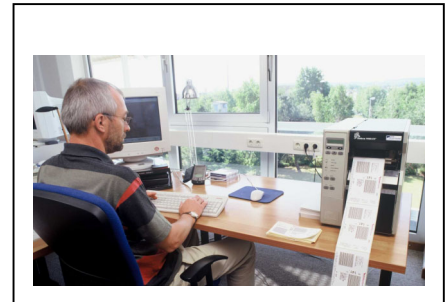
"Viking used to experience difficulties with the bar code printers that were previously in use," comments Frost. "This was mainly related to the layouts of labels, insufficient print speeds and weak networking capabilities. To add to the matter, all of Viking Direct's printers are linked to the AS/400 platform, a link that often proved to be difficult to manage."

### Selection Process

"We started looking for a more effective solution. We sought expert opinion at various trade fair exhibitions and via the Internet," Frost explains. "One of the most critical issues that we faced was how to access our printers in other regions of Europe or even the world. After all, we were looking to establish one consistent printing environment," he adds. "Ideally, the new printers that Viking required would have to provide high printing speeds, ease of use and allow operators to enter commands in their own language in order to overcome any possible language barriers."

After reviewing many different printers, Viking Direct chose Zebra's 140XIII printers because they fulfilled the criteria that Viking required. The integrated Ethernet adapter and user specific selection of languages were particular bonuses. The printers can easily be installed over the Internet and, therefore, be moved from one location to the next without difficulty. They are controlled through the AS/400, whereby label content is generated as a spool file directly from within the platform, forwarded to the printer and then printed on location. In order to reduce network traffic, logos are generally stored locally in each printer and then printed as part of each label.

The new printers are also equipped with ZebraLink, a new solution offered by Zebra that enables printers to be controlled via a standard web browser. This is made possible by a web server that is located in the operating system of the Zebra printer. Whenever a printer is configured for use in a TCP/IP Ethernet network, the network administrator can use the integrated web server to link a web browser with the printer, just as it would an Internet home page.



### Solution Technology

AS/400

ZebraLink™

140XIII™

Z6M™



“Because we are able to access each printer’s home page directly over the Internet, we can solve any printing problems that might occur more easily and quickly than ever before,” says Frost. “If, for example, we experience printing difficulties in Belgium and the person who knows how to solve this is at our Munich office, he can dial into the system and immediately find out what the problem is, react swiftly and provide assistance to his colleagues in Belgium, if necessary. One can respond quickly, modify printing commands, reconfigure or even reinstall the system simply by telling someone over the phone how to link the printer to the Internet. This provides us with much more freedom than we’ve ever had before,” concludes Frost.

## Labelling Processes

Viking called on Data Elektronik, a Zebra partner, to support them with implementation of the printers. “Viking were ready to go immediately because it was easy to connect the printers with the AS/400,” explains Thomas Holzkamm, a consultant for Data Elektronik in Eschborn.

The printers are used to produce mailing labels, shelf labels and labels that contain information on where a product is located within the warehouse. In its Munich offices, Viking prints specialised distribution labels that are only 5cm in width. The printers have proven to be almost free of maintenance and are able to stand up to the rough and dusty environment of a warehouse. The printers are in use for approximately 13 hours a day and produce up to 4,000 labels.

## Final Adjustments

As time went on, Viking felt that the labels it had been using were too small for the amount of information they needed to contain. Viking decided to order new Z6M printers from Zebra that also included ZebraLink to print labels of up to 168mm in width. The new labels are almost twice the size of the labels Viking had used previously. In addition to containing two separate barcodes and address information, the labels also contain information regarding the contents of each package.

“Our staff learned to operate the 140XiIII printers extremely quickly. We don’t anticipate any problems in implementing the new printers. We’re also seriously considering the use of yet another feature of ZebraLink that we haven’t yet activated that will allow our printers to inform us whenever there is a problem by sending a message to a mobile phone, a pager or any other type of appliance that can receive written messages. This would simplify maintenance even more,” Frost concludes.

. “One of the most critical issues that we faced was how to access our printers in other regions of Europe or even the world.”

After reviewing many different printers, Viking Direct chose Zebra’s 140XiIII printers because they fulfilled the criteria that Viking required.

