EskoArtwork’s Studio Toolkit for Shrink Sleeves creates artwork for shrink sleeves (labels placed around a package or packages and shrunk around the package during production). Designers and pre-press professionals can quickly create, test, analyze, communicate, and produce designs with 3-D visuals without the need to conduct physical test runs.

Globally the shrink sleeve market is $3 billion and growing at about 7% a year. Shrink sleeves offer a larger surface area for branding and more design freedom. Plus, asymmetrical shapes and multipacks are growing increasingly popular and more complex designs are being produced, such as combinations of horizontal and vertical distortions and sleeves that make only partial contact with the container(s).

Designing and printing shrink sleeves is difficult. It is complex and labor intensive, involving a number of trial-and-error steps to get the design right, resulting in much longer lead times. Designers create grids on the shrink sleeve material, wrap it around the container, run it through a shrink sleeve tunnel, measure the distortion, and try to anamorphically size graphic elements based upon these measurements. “Developing these designs is a nightmare, so this technology saves both time and materials. It is a game-changer in shrink sleeve design,” noted one of the judges. The design is tested and usually rerun many times. There’s the real potential of damaging brand integrity if the process is not handled correctly.

“This application of the science of virtualization technology is amazing,” stated one of the judges. Studio Toolkit for Shrink Sleeves accommodates asymmetrical shapes and multipacks and works in 3-D from start to finish.

➤ The process starts in a virtual shrink tunnel. The converter creates, scans, or imports (CAD file) the container shape into the software, enters the shrink film material characteristics,
and the software digitally shrinks the sleeve around the container.

➤ Studio Designer designs the new artwork (or applies existing artwork) directly on the digital shrink sleeve model. With 3-D visuals, the artwork will shrink and distort in the same way it would in the shrink tunnel. These 3-D visuals can be shared as 3-D PDFs, images of package shots, or movies. “We use the Studio Toolkit for all new projects we receive for launching a new brand or design,” stated Matthieu Abiteboul, managing director, Ciesa Packaging, France.

➤ The design can be made more distortion-safe. Important elements such as barcodes can be moved away from highly distorted areas.

➤ With a separate tool for Adobe® Illustrator®, the operator can see in quantitative terms how much each artwork element is distorted.

Studio Toolkit for Shrink Sleeves is unique in the industry. It is no longer necessary to manually create test films. Designers aren’t working blind in 2-D, or constrained. The pre-distortion can handle much more complex cases, resulting in more creative designs on more sophisticated containers, offering greater shelf appeal—and stronger sales. “The 3-D mock-up is so realistic that our customers see up front what it will look like before anything is printed . . . The best part is there is no expense to show a 3-D mock-up,” explained Amy Manchester, lead technician, Exopack LLC Graphics Center, Spartanburg, SC.

The 3-D images accurately predicting the end result can be used to approve designs faster and cheaper than making and shipping mock-ups. Less experienced printers can enter the sleeve label market. “The time and materials savings are substantial, plus the entire process is environmentally friendly,” commented one of the judges.

Studio Toolkit for Shrink Sleeves fits into existing design and prepress workflows, saving hours of operator time and weeks of design lead time. This can generate the brand owner significant revenues if a product can be launched earlier, and save the trade shop thousands in costs.

The Center for Technology and Research

Process Controls—Test Forms: The Center for Technology and Research carries a range of test forms to help solve problems that hinder productivity—and profitability—in both digital and conventional pressrooms. Often used for troubleshooting, test forms are invaluable for identifying mechanical issues and variances of the printing process, diagnosing a printing issue, analyzing the digital front end, and optimizing press operations. For more information about the Center for Technology and Research visit www.printing.org/testforms or call 800-910-4283 ext. 786.