

AIDC Memoirs

by

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When I joined Watson Label Products in 1986 and became a part of the Auto ID industry, my only familiarity with bar codes was that 12 months earlier I had landed a major contract for a Chicago area printer to supply KS-22004 Code 11 labels to AT&T. In people's minds, that qualified me as a bar code expert. Little did they know! My entire previous working life had been spent in the polymer chemical, adhesives, and printing industries – my expertise was in materials, not in bar code technology.

At my first AIM meeting I was awed by the highly talented, highly experienced engineers, physicists, mathematicians and computer programmers I met. I wondered what I, a lone chemist, was doing in this industry of data collection experts.

In 1986 the primary markets for Watson photographic and offset printed bar code labels were libraries and retail shelf marking. The contract I landed in 1988 with AT&T to supply polyester bar code labels for printed circuit boards was Watson's first major industrial order. It became clear that the opportunities for photographic bar code labels, where their excellent printing fidelity, the ability to place more information in less space, and the flexibility to incorporate a great variety of adhesives and over-laminating films in the label, were industrial applications.

Thus was launched the "Bar Codes in Harsh Environments" program. If your bar code labels fry like bacon when exposed to high heat and won't scan; if they shatter in sub zero temperatures; if they fade when exposed to ultraviolet light; if abrasion or exterior weathering cause them to deteriorate; if they won't stick to difficult substrates, what good are they? The Watson Label Products, and later Datapage Technologies technical seminars I conducted at trade shows and industry association meetings, and my trade journal articles were a better promotional effort than any advertising we could have done. For me, tackling and solving bar code environmental problems has been great fun, interesting, challenging, and profitable – two patents with my name on them attest to that. In addition, being an active participant in AIAG, EIA, TCIF and other trade associations has been educational, enjoyable, and rewarding.

In 1990 I left Watson Label Products and launched Automation Associates. The consulting assignments I was awarded were aiming me in the direction of becoming Miner Testing Laboratories, with a significant investment in testing equipment. The offer in 1991 to join Datapage Technologies provided me a way to do what I enjoyed doing without a capital investment. In 1997 I decided to take the training to become a Presbyterian commissioned lay pastor. Datapage reassigned my sales and manufacturing responsibilities so I could work part time and focus exclusively on product development.

I retired from Datapage in 1999. What with my Automation Associates consulting activities, grandchildren, small church ministry and persons between jobs consulting, and writing stories and a book for kids I'm busier now than before I retired.