



A. G. Barr transforms its artwork management processes with 4Pack and builds a fresh foundation for continuous improvement

CLIENT: A. G. Barr

A.G. Barr offers a diverse portfolio of brands including IRN-BRU and Rubicon – but with more than 400 packaging variants across different lines, manual artwork management simply wasn't working. They turned to 4Pack to accelerate and improve artwork management workflows.



Nicola Critchley is a business process analyst within A. G. Barr's IT team. Formerly a Brand Coordinator in R&D, she had first-hand experience of managing packaging artwork and approvals. She was the perfect choice to lead an initiative to transform the company's artwork management processes with the aid of a new software platform.

The need for more effective ways of working was raised some time ago. She reflected: *"We knew we needed to look at alternative ways to manage artwork and make it less manual, speedier, and more robust. Part of that was looking at a cloud-based solution."*

In April 2022, after a rigorous RFP process and numerous product demonstrations, A. G. Barr engaged 4Pack as its platform of choice. Nicola explained: *"The decision to appoint 4Pack came down to value, flexibility, ease of use, and aesthetics. 4Pack seemed a simpler transition that would be easier to use and offer more flexibility to shape it to what we wanted."*

4Pack is fiercely customer-centric, running a four-week Hypercare phase at the start of new relationships. Managing Director Helen Poole and Jeremy Whinnett, Head of Professional Services, were involved not just at RFP stage but throughout. The experience of dealing with them formed part of the decision for Nicola. She said *"The feel we got for 4Pack as a company was a big factor, such as how Helen and Jeremy dealt with us early on and far beyond the Hypercare phase. Jeremy visited our site on numerous occasions for scoping sessions and is still very hands-on now."*



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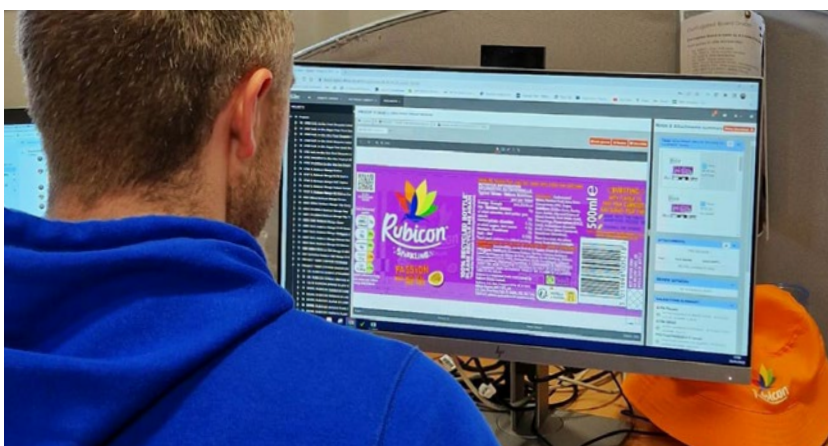
Nicola Critchley
Business Process Analyst, A. G. Barr

Multiple brands means major work

The main aims of implementing a cloud-based solution were to reduce the time spent reviewing artworks to a significant degree and facilitate a higher level of accuracy.

The main challenge was the sheer volume and complexity of managing more than 400 packaging SKUs across 15 brands. Each SKU (Stock Keeping Unit) is effectively an individual product – for example, each time an IRN-BRU 330ml can requires a new on-pack offer, it creates the need for new artwork.

Nicola commented *“Managing our artwork is complex. We worked with several internal and external design agencies, multiple suppliers, with a completely manual process.”*



Swift implementation underway

Implementation began in September 2022, and the system went live just one month later. As with all software introductions there were a few hurdles. Nicola disclosed that *“the main challenge was getting people used to the system – which was not surprising when moving from a manual process to having to follow a built-in workflow.”*

A few discoveries and changes were inevitable. Nicola and the 4Pack team worked through some unforeseen needs and process tweaks. She acknowledged: *“The workflows we had were built based on how we did things manually. 4Pack has been very helpful with the transition, suggesting solutions, and engaging with our users.”*

She continued: *“We involved Helen and Jeremy in every conversation, and they came up with many recommendations and ideas. They know what they are talking about, and are adaptable, considerate, reliable, and very diligent too. They’ve been so easy to deal with and we’ve met all our project milestones. It was quite a stress-free implementation, which is a wonderful thing to be able to say.”*

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Integrating key data

The next stage is to integrate critical labelling data into 4Pack. Artwork Labelling Information Sheets, known as ALIS, contain the key information for each packaging item to inform designers explicitly and accurately what to incorporate into new artwork. Data spans technical declarations, such as allergens and nutrition, and essential marketing copy elements.

Bringing artwork management and data management together will bring key processes further into alignment and help A. G. Barr find fresh efficiencies. Nicola stated *“We always aim for continual improvement, and 4Pack are always upgrading and improving things. We can keep looking at what’s available to see what else we can bring in for additional benefits.”*

A. G. Barr distributes globally, so international artwork is also flowing through 4Pack. Integrating ALIS data will help to further accelerate the process of translation and adaptation of artwork for overseas territories. In addition to using inbuilt translation of key terms such as ‘Best Before End’, the company will explore other potential in the 4Pack translation functionality.

Compliance in a changing world

Naturally, A. G. Barr must protect its brands, so compliance with brand standards is an important consideration, said Nicola: *“It’s really important that everything is correct on every product – there are strict brand guidelines for things like font size, colours and logos.”*

Despite this, requirements change often. In this highly competitive consumer space, things are in a constant state of flux. Nicola gave examples, saying *“We’re always changing elements that affect primary packaging such as a can or bottle label, or secondary packaging such as a printed case film or tray.”*

The regulatory environment creates further compliance requirements for packaging and labelling and is also always evolving. Stressing the importance of this, Nicola observed: *“We must meet many legalities and compliance standards in our labelling – information must be correct for consumers. A lot of effort goes into making sure our packaging is 100% accurate.”*

Creating circularity

Sustainability and environment are very important to A. G. Barr. Taking responsibility around its packaging is seen as a key aspect of its ‘No Time To Waste’ environmental sustainability programme.

Nicola sees 4Pack as a key enabler: *“Having 4Pack has helped us develop a more efficient and dynamic artwork management process. We can more easily handle the packaging improvements we are making now and in future. Barr Soft Drinks packaging is now fully recyclable – this needed the addition of on-pack recycling messages, while our 1 litre cartons contain plant-based plastics and carry the Carbon Trust logo.”*



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One of the most significant change drivers is the introduction of the Deposit Return Scheme (DRS), which affects all drinks manufacturers selling in Scotland. As a national brand, A. G. Barr must get its response right. As a founder member of the DRS scheme administrator, Circularity Scotland, it also sees DRS as an important incentive which will help a circular packaging ecosystem emerge.

There are numerous operational and logistical challenges arising from this. Nicola explained the impact on packaging: *“The impact of DRS from a packaging perspective is that we will now have Scotland SKUs which are different from England SKUs. It will drive different artworks to incorporate the DRS logo, new barcodes and other factors, and will add many more SKUs to manage.”*

Anticipation of this expansion of artwork workloads was a key driver for the introduction of a new system: *“Readiness for DRS was one of the requirements that we asked of 4Pack – we needed the system to be in, live and ready to go before we had to start processing DRS artwork. We succeeded.”*

Well underway and looking ahead

4Pack has not only already brought more consistency and auditability to the company’s packaging artwork management but brings flexibility to adapt to future changes. Nicola observed that *“A. G. Barr is always expanding in some way. As we increase our brand portfolio in the future, we can easily integrate them into our processes with 4Pack. There are also other modules in 4Pack which we will bear in mind around issues such as product data management and digital asset management.”*

The positive experience of the 4Pack rollout has influenced a separate decision to implement the system for FUNKIN Cocktails, another of A. G. Barr’s brands. Nicola said *“Implementing the same system will be beneficial should the future bring more integration. They are now in the process of building their own workflows ready for testing.”*

Reflecting on the journey so far, Nicola is confident that things are moving in the right direction: *“Although it’s still early days, we can see that having 4Pack will bring benefits in governance, cost, compliance, and time savings. 4Pack was absolutely worth investing in.”*

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