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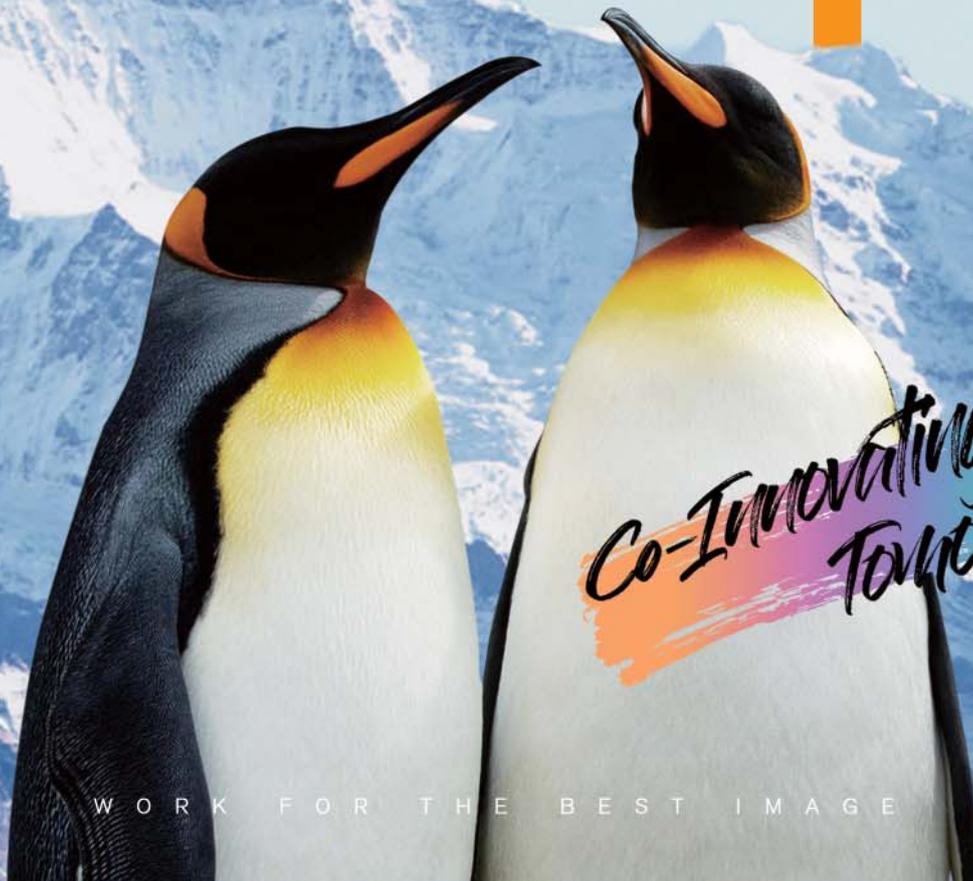
ACHIEVING BETTER QUALITY IS NO ACCIDENT

—Ninestar's Jason Wang says automation is reforming the manufacturing journey





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RT Media Staff

NINESTAR HAS been celebrating its eighteenth birthday during 2018. Eighteen years is a short time in which to write a long history. However Ninestar has managed to write itself into the history books having created many milestones. The fact that so many have been created in such a short time is a marvel in itself.

What was once a small 1,000 square meter factory has become a giant industry park covering 450,000 square meters. Its expertise has grown from remanufacturing inkjet cartridges to researching, designing and manufacturing inkjet and toner cartridges, chips and through Pantum—its affiliated company—China's first line of printers. The company then went center-stage by being publicly listed and acquiring such icons as Static Control Components and Lexmark International.

Thanks to Ninestar, the divide between OEM and Aftermarket has been changed forever. Such developments were destined to attract attention and Ninestar has gone on to change the character of the printing consumables and imaging industry. And the story has not finished yet. There is more to be written in the history books as this legend continues to create, reform and persevere as it finds new journeys to pursue.



Innovation for Intelligent Manufacturing

When one walks into Ninestar's newly automated workshops you are confronted with the metallic sound of robotic arms and machinery busily getting on with the job. A white manipulator smoothly and perfectly installs a magnetic roller into a toner cartridge in just six seconds. Then the toner cartridge is whisked away onto another automated process as it continues its journey. The whole process is completed automatically and efficiently.

"This automated production line for color toner cartridges has a high level of integration and accuracy," explains Jason Wang, the senior vice president of Ninestar Corporation and the general manager of the Printing Consumables Business Unit. "The structure of a toner cartridge is very complex. It may not surprise you that the entire automated production line needs to be debugged repeatedly until it can be made ready for mass production." He goes on to explain the investment for such an automated process is huge. Ninestar has had to overcome many difficulties in order to develop it successfully. "At present, Ninestar has 30 automatic production lines: 28 being for inkjet cartridges and

the other two for toner cartridges." Wang is pleased to announce that Ninestar now has the highest level of automation in the aftermarket. "Ninestar's smart production equipment allows our dealers to win big in the market, especially in the color supplies market. We will continue to increase our investment and expect to have five automatic production lines for toner cartridges in the near future," Wang reveals.

micro-pressure valve ink supply technology laid the foundation for Ninestar's inkjet cartridges. In 2004, the development and successful filing of Ninestar's independent compatible toner cartridge patents gave birth to the new-built compatible toner cartridge industry in China.

Innovation has also been applied to Ninestar's business model. The acquisition of SCC and Lexmark between 2015 and 2017 upgraded its industry chains giving Ninestar the strength to pursue new opportunities—many thought to be impossible.

In Wang's opinion, the rise of the Internet of Things, the ability of artificial intelligence and other emerging information technologies has triggering profound changes for many

industrial companies willing to embrace change. Ninestar has been one such company committed to transforming its R&D, manufacturing, industrial form and business models accordingly. The current huge investment into automated production is clear evidence, providing Ninestar with a powerful weapon to realize its future development.



Wang explains innovation is the key ingredient. He claims innovation has become the spirit of Ninestar and is embedded to the point of excellence. "Innovation has been the 'secret ingredient' since our beginnings, eighteen years ago." In 2002, for example, Ninestar was the first to develop universal inkjet cartridge chip encryption technology to achieve the sustainable development, manufacture and supply of universal inkjet cartridges. Then, in 2003, the first development of cartridge



Never forget our initial intention

According to Wang, Ninestar's development into automated technologies originates from its relentless pursuit of product quality.

Manufacturers, distributors and customers alike know Aftermarket printing consumables vary in quality. Ninestar's QC team has found traditional manual operations cannot avoid inconsistency and unreliability. Every human on the process line is different and each performs differently. So the final product will also vary. "We must provide our customers with a consistently reliable product," Wang explains. "We expect every item on the same production line to be consistently the same. They cannot vary. We have moved to automation as it is very difficult to achieve product consistency using traditional manpower." Wang goes on to explain it is difficult to employ and maintain good workers in China's bustling manufacturing industries. "Qualified products have strict workshop environment and manual skill requirements. At present, the employment situation in China is not able to meet those requirements. At the same time, our customers have increasingly higher expectations and requirements in terms of product quality. We believe the automated production line is the best solution to ensure product quality."

Automation is not just equipment. It's a systematic and complex project. It means software and equipment must work together while integrating many fields such

as electromagnetics, electricity, computers and network communications. It is only possible when a strong company platform can provide solid technical support. In order to achieve truly intelligent automation, logistics, warehouse management, high-end manufacturing, post-maintenance—among many other processes—need to be integrated, placing a huge challenge upon the manufacturing department and even the entire company.

According to Wang, the ongoing success of Ninestar's automation systems rely on the innovation that continues to go into equipment automation and system information. The resulting benefits are obvious: production and manufacturing processes have become better standardized and improved, which results in improved product quality.

Ninestar commenced ink cartridge automation in 2012 and toner cartridge automation in 2013. "To date, Ninestar has invested more than 100 million yuan (US\$15 million) on developing automation. It has completely transformed production from the traditional 'screwdriver' or handmade processes," says Wang. As the Aftermarket leader, Ninestar has been solving the stability problems of compatible products by transforming from low-tech, low-input, low-threshold to high-tech, high-input, high-threshold manufacturing.

For the past 18 years, since operations commenced, Ninestar has learned product quality is the cornerstone of an enterprise's

success. In addition to introducing automated production lines, Ninestar has also invested heavily into equipment that can test raw material quality before it reaches the assembly process. Its printing consumables laboratory, set up in 2004, is a multi-functional, comprehensive experimental base that integrates developing, proofing, testing, storage and measuring. This laboratory has continued to add sophisticated, comprehensive and accurate, state-of-the-art measuring instruments and testing equipment. To date, the investment has run into the millions of dollars (US) in order to maintain quality—from raw materials to production, from finished products to shipping—with every process.

"Providing quality to our customers is neither a slogan nor a tagline," Wang adds. "It's simply what we do. It has been our intention all along."

Concentrating Upon the Future

Today, Ninestar is a leading company in the supply of third-party printing consumables. Its qualified products with proprietary technology are well recognized by the global market. "Automated production has become the best tool Ninestar possesses to achieve the balance between quality and efficiency." According to Wang the investment into automation has been a success. "Ninestar will increase its investment in automation. Thanks the fine efforts of our staff, Ninestar is well positioned to write new chapters in the history of this exciting industry." ■



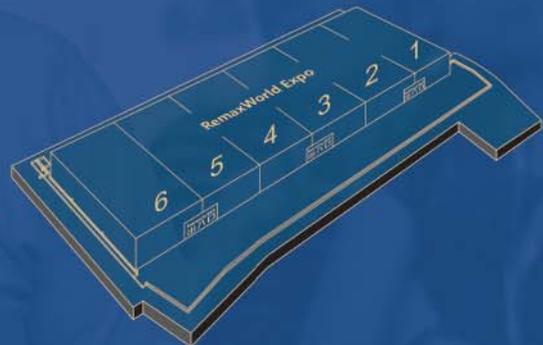
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