

10 Simple Steps to Make Your Next Roll Goods Trial a Success



Looking for best practices for roll goods trials? Optimize your next trial with these tips from the Micrex development team.

As an introduction, there is some good news and some bad news. First the bad news: trials are expensive, difficult and prone to failure. Now the good news: With some careful planning and attention to the “easy stuff”, you can maximize the success of your next trial.

- 1. Pay attention to the logistics: Send the right materials to the right location on time and ensure traceability by labeling rolls.** You can't run a trial unless the material is there. Have you allowed enough time for any unexpected delay? Be sure to confirm that your materials have arrived in good condition at the trial site. We have seen countless trials ruined even before they start because of logistical issues.

At Micrex every roll we run is recorded in a SQL database that is backed up twice a day. All finished rolls get labeled with a unique ID and information about the mother roll. One trial recently consisted of fourteen rolls with no distinguishing identification – all theoretically “the same”. Unfortunately, some ran well and others poorly. If we had known even the run order of the base rolls, we might have been able to correlate some change in the material which would impact the processing. One solution used by some customers is to provide their own pre-printed labels to ensure that traceability is not lost.

- 2. Make sure your material is sized to fit the trial equipment — including core roll specification.** Check beforehand that you are sending material in the correct format (e.g. diameter, width, weight, and core size). Standard core tends to be 3” (76 mm), but the strength, width, construction, and material can all impact performance. Case in point: recently we had a customer supply a 130 GSM substrate with weak cores from a prior process. When exposed to the brake pressure necessary to process the material at Micrex, these cores broke. To eliminate this point of failure, consider sending the appropriate cores with your trial material.

- 3. Think about format after trial: Tell the vendor which format you want your material in at the end of the trial.** By format we are talking about slit widths, trim, roll size, along with packaging requirements.

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- 4. Confirm that your vendor understands your material's unique characteristics.** It's also always a good idea to familiarize yourself with the vendor's process. In reality roll goods are like snowflakes: no two are exactly the same. What you consider to be a normal variation in your material could be a deal breaker in the vendor's process. At Micrex we find that customers often make assumptions that certain things will not matter, when in fact they turn out to be critical for us. An example of this is print or finish on a sheet, which can make the sheet unusable for your trial.
- 5. Go in with a plan for what you want to achieve, and what variables will be adjusted during the trial.** "Just see what happens" is a poor excuse for the lack of a trial plan. Before you even select materials, you can increase your chances for success by working out a detailed trial plan with the vendor. Our most successful customers arrive with a plan that has been discussed with us well before the event.
- 6. Don't run — stop the trial.** At Micrex we have a saying that "the trial ends when we run out of material". The opposite can also be true. If things are not going well, stopping ensures you still have material while you figure out what the issue is with the process. We have never seen success result from working late into the night. Instead, stopping and regrouping on the problem can be the fastest pathway to success — before running out of material.
- 7. Communicate throughout the trial.** Trials are by definition opportunities to learn and explore different options. But they only work if the entire team communicates and knows what is going on. In this way, you can take full advantage of the development team's expertise.
- 8. Pay attention to the trial learnings upon completion.** You can always learn something from a trial, even if it seems to be a total failure. You will find out more about what your material can and can't do — invaluable for future product development efforts.
- 9. Be sure that your finished materials are returned in good condition, in a timely manner and to the right place.** It is easy to avoid having trial material get lost or damaged with proper labeling, etc: specific shipping instructions coupled with clear marking is key.
- 10. Look for quick turnaround time.** Successful customers and vendors work together to accelerate the time it takes to plan and execute a trial. We are constantly amazed by how companies will take months to accomplish something that should take days. Finding a way around institutional roadblocks is vital to successful product development.