

## New potential for wristbands



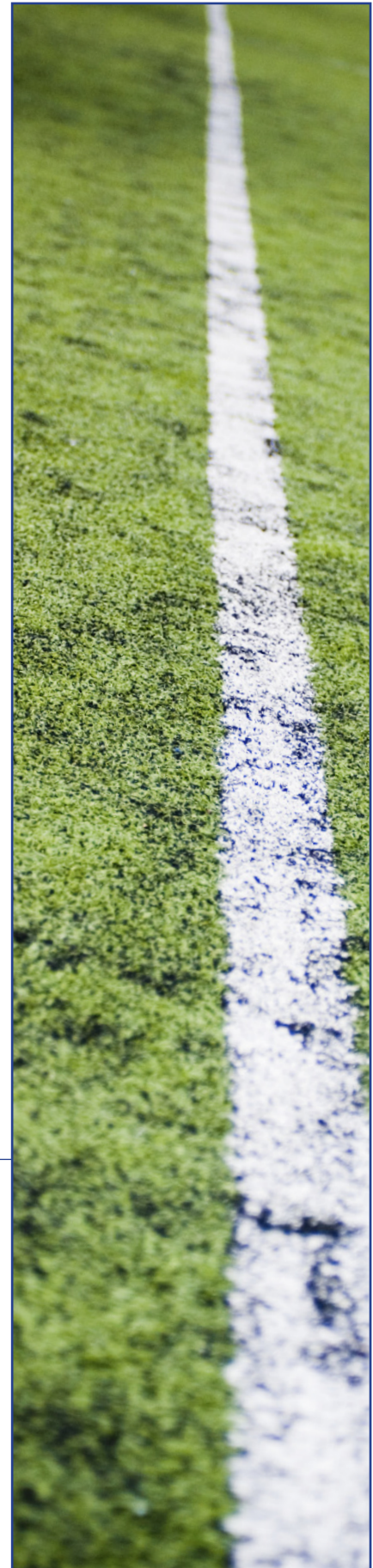
Mark Beauchamp, European Marketing Manager for Citizen Systems Europe, discusses how the latest generation of wristband printers are creating profitable new opportunities for the organisers of sports venues.

Managing the crowds of visitors that flock to sporting events, from the time they arrive at the venue until they leave the gates, is no easy task. With proof of admission needing to be individually and repeatedly checked, and transactions carried out for food, drinks and merchandise, long queues are a common sight. This can have serious consequences for organisers, with valuable revenue opportunities lost as fans are stood waiting to have tickets checked or be served.

### The increasing use of wristbands

For this reason, wristbands are an increasingly popular method of crowd management at sporting events, providing a simple and cost effective method of verifying that visitors have authorised admission into designated areas within a venue. Made of tough, waterproof plastic and incorporating features such as tamper proof locking clips, they offer a far more durable and reliable alternative to traditional paper tickets.

However, the real potential of wristbands at sports events is only now being realised. While most wristbands are simply colour coded or pre-printed with basic event details, a considerable amount of information can be stored on them in the form of a bar code. This can open up many opportunities for organisers, including the ability to take pre-payment at the point of entry for everything from admission upgrades to food and drinks, increasing ease of cash collection and considerably reducing the lengths of queues inside the venue as a result.





## Bar coding and wristbands

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Bar coding is a simple yet extremely effective method of storing information on a wristband. The barcode can be printed when the wristband is issued, and can contain detailed information of the type and amount of any pre-payments. The wristband can then simply be swiped by a bar code reader each time a purchase is made, making purchases much faster and more efficient than conventional cash or card transactions. The amount of credit held in the barcode is automatically updated with each purchase, allowing the individual to spend until their allocated credit amount is used up.

The problem for most organisations in realising this higher level of wristband functionality comes with printing the barcodes onto the wristband media. Until recently, they have been unable to print the wristbands quickly or efficiently enough onsite to allocate them and take pre-payment at the entrance to the venue. Conventional printers have proved problematic on a number of levels, being often unsuitable for handling the thick narrow media that is used for wristbands and unable to offer a high enough quality of printing to enable consistent reading of the bar codes.

## Latest printing solutions

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The latest generation of thermal print technology is offering a solution, looking set to revolutionise the use of wristbands at sporting events. The latest printers, such as the CLP-631 from Citizen Systems Europe, are allowing wristbands be printed quickly and simply on site, at low cost, with sophisticated bar codes and even photo-quality images easy to achieve.

Specifically designed for narrow media, the new wristband printers avoid the problems of jamming and sticking associated with many conventional printers. This means that employees no longer have to waste time and hold up customers while they attempt to remedy printer errors or reload displaced media. This allows admission to be carried out quickly and smoothly with no unnecessarily long queues. Furthermore, the latest printers also enable easy changing of printer media, offering users a great deal of flexibility; for example, wristbands can be quickly swapped to enable different colours or formats to be used for different events or levels of access.

The printers are extremely fast, typically being able to print a 300mm long wristband in just three seconds, saving event organisers both time and money. Furthermore, in addition to 2-D barcodes that hold vital information such as access restrictions or the number of drinks pre-purchased, the new printers are ideal for printing photo-quality images on wristbands, opening up innovative branding opportunities.



## Branding opportunities

With an unprecedented amount of sponsorship and advertising at sporting events, companies are now looking for more innovative and eye catching ways to channel their messages to spectators. Wristbands offer an exciting opportunity to do this; with every spectator at an event wearing a wristband, the medium offers perhaps greater coverage than any other format at a stadium or arena, while, as any branding on the wristbands is printed at the same time as other information at the gate, it is also an extremely cost effective and easy to implement form of advertising.

Additionally, the ability to print high quality images onto wristbands brings other opportunities, with event organisers able to improve security, for example, by taking a photograph of each individual on the door to the venue and printing the image in high resolution on their wristband. Symbols can also be printed on the media, displaying to staff in a simple and clear format, any special access privileges or drinks allowances that may have been pre-purchased. As the latest printers are capable of considerably greater printing quality than conventional models, there is virtually no limit to how the symbols can be designed, with organisers able to take control of their own bespoke systems.

Furthermore, high quality direct thermal printing removes the need regularly to load replacement ribbons, once again cutting the amount of manual intervention required of staff, and also avoiding the tangling issues associated with printer ribbons. Although direct thermal media is more expensive than that required for thermal transfer printing, the money saved by not having to buy ribbon can offset the initial outlay.

## In conclusion

This latest generation of printing technology looks set to bring exciting developments in the way in which wristbands are used to manage crowds at sporting events, with their full potential now able to be utilised. The new technology can be implemented simply and cost effectively, enabling dedicated printing systems to be set up as part of a sophisticated crowd management solution.

By using the latest high quality and robust wristband printers from leading manufacturers, such as Citizen Systems Europe, queues can be cut throughout a venue, considerably increasing potential profits and improving the customer experience, ensuring that visitors return to a venue time and time again.

## Citizen Systems Europe

Citizen Systems Europe operates from locations in the UK and Germany covering Europe, Middle East and Africa. It offers a wide range of thermal printers for industrial, retail, healthcare and mobile barcode and labelling applications. In each case, the company's products are sold and supported by a network of specialised partners.

Citizen Systems Europe is a wholly owned subsidiary of Citizen Systems Japan and part of the Citizen Watch Company of Japan, a global organisation that manufactures products ranging from its world-famous watches, mini-printers and industrial printing systems, to machine tools, quartz crystals and oscillators.

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