

Best practice in automating pre-press workflow

ViP has been working with Kodak to study this – and the outcome could benefit all of us

Printers are faced with stiff competition, shrinking margins and diverse origination methodologies. They need to reduce labour costs, production and administrative waste. At the same time, they have to meet new challenges posed by digital printing technologies, information security and asset management – all of which feeds into business continuity and disaster recovery plans. More importantly, they need to better manage and control pre-press workflow activities to achieve this.

In an ideal world, all these systems can be brought together to form a single cohesive workflow. This can radically change the way your business operates by transforming business processes, providing facts straight

to your workstation to inform management decisions on production issues.

The ViP team of Chris Springford and David Butler examined nine companies with between 65 and 485 staff employing a diverse range of printing technologies (litho, web and digital printing) and differing marketplaces (advertising, brochures, catalogues, direct mail, integrated marketing communications, magazines, books, packaging and Print management).

The Role of 'Storefronts'

Printing companies have traditionally used fully integrated, computer-based, Management Information Systems (MIS) to estimate and track job costs, manage inventory and perform accounting functions.

Increasing use of CRM and 'Storefront' systems is bridging the interface with Designers, Desktop publishing, e-mail and pre-press systems to monitor and track exchanges between these parties. Convergence of MIS, email and pre-press systems using unified workflows is causing many companies to revisit current pre-press activity. They are identifying essential features and developing wish-lists of useful attributes to integrate: functions like create job tickets, quote letters, invoices, production purchases, data collection, interactive editing and so on.

Integrating MIS

Interestingly, companies that have integrated their MIS with the pre-press workflow seem to have benefited greatly in managing the convergence between web, email, SMS, FTP, job ticket and PDF transfers of information.

People also want to work

differently, using mobile technologies, social networking links and having instant access to digital information. These technologies will increasingly require integration with the traditional MIS and pre-press workflows.

Computer integrated manufacturing (CIM) will soon become the standard in most MIS products. CIM would not be possible without JDF (an industry standard based on XML, CIP3, PPF and PJTF) that describes print jobs in terms of the processes needed to create them. This format allows users to specify the controls needed by each process. Most of the major printing OEMs (original equipment manufacturers) are producing or developing products to guide the pre-press, press and post-press systems towards this integration.

The report highlights indicative trends in the adoption of pre-press workflow automation across the companies studied.

Highlights include:

- Key attributes to consider for improving your current pre-press workflow;
- Potential for better collaboration with your clients/designers;
- Improvements in job planning/scheduling/tracking;
- Adoption of soft-proofing;
- Potential reduction in process waste;
- Impact of better input file management;
- Variable data attributes;
- Basis for developing a route map towards an integrated solution;
- Impact of using scripting/rules-based automation - to map orders into manufacture;
- linkage to project management.

Best Practice at ESP Colour

One of the companies studied was ESP Colour. It has embraced the digitisation of its business to good effect. The company has

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encouraged clients to supply PDF files directly to its MIS, which then routes them into the pre-press workflow – in exactly the right formats to suit their printing and finishing lines. They use scripting/rules-based automation as a standard approach, to map the files as they pass through the pre-press workflow, with minimum operator intervention.

Using the MIS to control and track the routing of files presents opportunities for dashboard monitoring of the workflow. This informs the management team by giving real insight into pre-press and production activity that many companies find difficult to obtain.

The report will be published at the forthcoming ViP Conference, 'Winning the war on waste'. Anthony Thirlby, ESP Colour's Managing Director will be a speaker.

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WINNING THE WAR ON WASTE

Lean techniques can transform your business

Printers, by definition, have complex processes and procedures. These often produce a considerable amount of waste. Anything that helps to reduce that must immediately impact favourably on your profitability; but it's not always easy to find the right ideas to bring that reduction about.

If that's been your experience, the upcoming Vision in Print Conference is not to be missed. Its challenging but inspiring title says it all: "Winning the War on Waste." That's not putting it too strongly. Printers, in particular, are engaged in a war – and either they will win or the waste will.

The Conference is packed with insights and ideas – not theoretical ones, but hands-on, practical suggestions whose effectiveness has already been proven. You'll leave the hall with an array of things you

can implement that can start making a difference to your business.

You'll find out how to cut costs, boost your environmental performance, and reduce material waste through the smart use of technology. The programme is full of excellent, experienced speakers who are waiting to share their knowledge with you. And the keynote speaker is Michael Heseltine, who will talk on the future role of UK print.

The Conference is on 22 November 2010 at the Lancaster London Hotel, London. If you haven't already booked your place, sign up for it today!

→ For more information please contact Geoff Sutton on 020 7915 8328 or visit www.britishprint.com