

WHITE PAPER

Mastering Efficiency

Part 1 Demystifying Wide Format Workflow

by Pat McGrew, McGrewGroup, Inc.
& Ryan McAbee, Pixel Dot Consulting

Sponsored by



Opportunities abound in production wide format printing. Since the start of this millennium, printers that focus on commercial have embraced wide format printing opportunities to add valuable contributions to their bottom line. New wide format printing businesses are also entering the market. The 2023 [US Census Bureau Business Survey](#) noted that the number of new wide format printing businesses has increased in each of the last five years.

This is a segment where profitability is often higher than other core lines of business, including direct mail, transaction, book, or commercial printing. There is also a tremendous opportunity to grow a new business or increase the share of an existing customer's marketing spend by offering new and creative product variations as well as offering product bundles and services. Everything from outdoor signage to window graphics can fit the needs of any type of business.

Evidence that the market continues to expand comes from leading market researchers like [Mordor Intelligence](#), who forecast the wide format market. **Their current view is that the market will continue to grow by a steady cadence of 4.36% per year, from \$9.62B in 2023 to \$11.91B in 2028.** [Keypoint Intelligence Wide Format Print Market Forecast](#) for 2021-2026 concurs in their public reporting. They see the **sign and display market outpacing most other markets at a rate of 5.5% per year through 2028.**

Wide format printers also have an optimistic outlook and results. The team at the National Print & Sign Owners Association (NPSOA) indicate that their members are optimistic, with 80% showing increased sales over the last year. In their November 2023 members' magazine, they also highlighted optimism in terms of continued sales growth. While the market researchers

“ We really liked that the Midmarket Print Suite had all of the modules that can grow as we grow... being able to schedule the team and look at the print flow with that live schedule... helps us get ahead of busy days. And then on the back end, there's so much data that we're collecting. It is all encompassing for us on the data side. ”

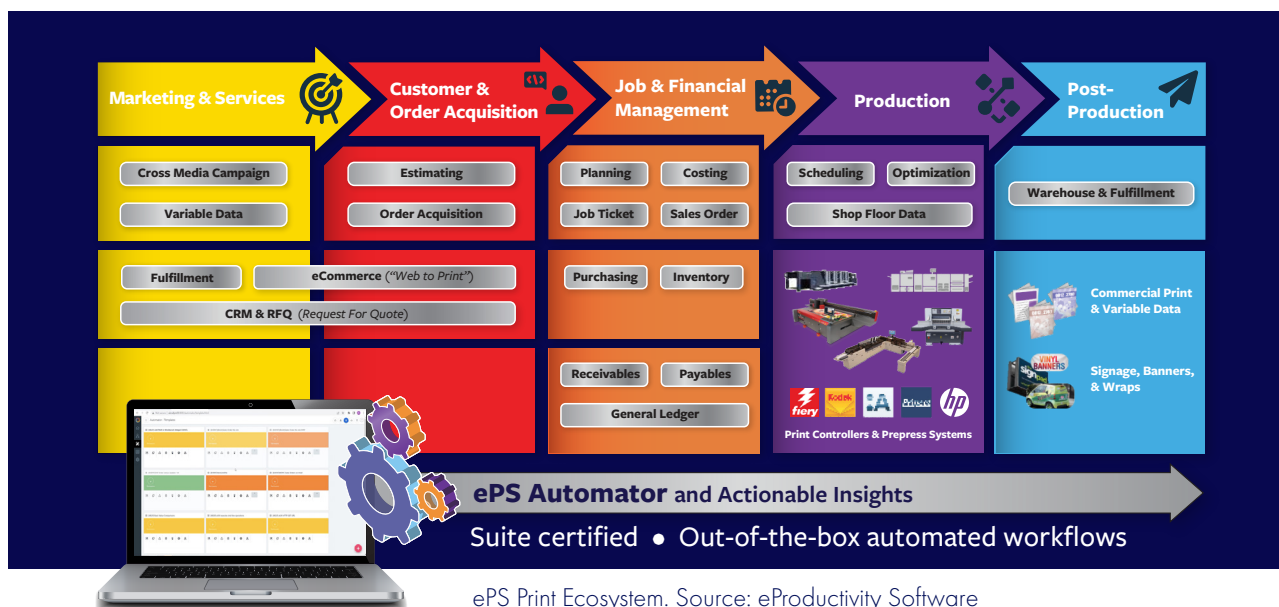
- Robert Flanagan, AZPro

and business owners predict continued growth, to expand successfully requires attention to market factors and internal capabilities.

The key to capturing these market opportunities is having a scalable and capable system to manage all aspects of the print operation from beginning to end. The [Midmarket Print Suite](#), powered by Pace MIS/ERP from [eProductivity Software](#) (ePS) puts wide format printers on the fast track to growth by optimizing the customer experience, streamlining the processes required to produce the work, managing the many variables that affect timely delivery, and capturing valuable insights and data to steer the business forward. ePS solutions have been refined over decades of real-world partnership with printers and industry partners to deliver a robust set of solutions to manage every aspect of print operations.



Midmarket Print Suite Ecosystem



Create Value with Data

For companies like AZPro in Phoenix, the **ePS Midmarket Print Suite** leverages structured data collection to drive their business decisions. Their previous solution didn't provide a clear view of their profitability or support their complex print structures. Robert Flanagan at AZPro says,

"We really liked that the Midmarket Print Suite had all of the modules that can grow as we grow. It provided everything we were looking for with a pretty small subset. We've added quite a few modules since we started, but being able to schedule the team and look at the print flow with that live schedule the team can see on their screens helps us get ahead of busy days."

"And then on the back end, there's so much data that we're collecting that lets us evaluate at the team member level if they're being productive, if

they're being efficient, we keep pretty close tabs on our pricing models and if they are working, including how fast are the quotes converting. It is all encompassing for us on the data side."

The **Midmarket Print Suite** allows Flanagan to take a proactive approach to business operations and pricing for every job. He uses the data available in the reports to monitor and update pricing based on performance to keep the business growing. A comprehensive automated workflow also enhances opportunities to expand through acquisition.

The proof is in how customers leverage the solution during merger and acquisition activity. Jonathan Wallace, owner of Wallace Graphics, is a **Midmarket Print Suite** user who runs a large print shop in Atlanta. In 2016, they acquired a wide format company to expand their operation and wanted to move those operations to their existing Pace workflow.

They worried that they might have to operate on two separate workflows for as much as a year but were able to merge the operations in under three months with few issues.

Wallace says, “Everyone bought into it pretty darn well, just because of the ease of not operating out of two systems.” They were able to acquire and integrate faster than anticipated, with fewer training hours required, because of the investment they made with ePS in 2013!

What Market Do You Address?

In the wide format production space, printers come in all sizes with diverse capabilities. Some are print specialists focused on specific sizes or substrates, while others focus on providing as many options as possible to their clientele. As the market shifts and new capabilities enter the market, some printing companies expand their business and their offerings to customers through mergers and acquisitions. In this market segment, there is significant consolidation, which is something every printer should be watching. Who you compete with,

whether you are a local or national provider, can change in the blink of an eye as M&A activity continues to ripple throughout.

While wide format printers of every size are watching those trends, paying attention to what customers are buying, how they are buying, and what work you turn away due to lack of capacity or capability is also important. **Are your customers asking for shorter runs more frequently, more versions to more delivery locations, different types of finishing, and more services? If so, you are in the mainstream! These are the changes that add complexity to sales, job onboarding, prepress, production, delivery, and installation, but they are also the areas where you can leverage workflow automation to create new revenue streams.**

Another level of complexity evolves in hybrid shops handling products in both the commercial and wide format space. There is a temptation to adopt separate solutions, but the **Midmarket Print Suite** is versatile enough to manage both.

Jonathan Wallace replaced manual processes and shares his experience:

“The **Midmarket Print Suite** is able to digest the specs that we are inputting and consider all the options to print, whether it is on the Indigo, or it is wide format, or it is commercial and then choosing for us. It gives us the options based on cost - which one is the most efficient to worst, so you can see them all. And then based on workload we can move work, or based on specifications that we know, we can move it. It helps us by factoring in the presses that we have and putting a cost to the project. As long as a material can print on the device, the size works, it will choose the best press for commercial and wide format work.”

Today Wallace Graphics uses one common set of tools, no matter the type of print job!

Consider the markets you address today, and the markets you could address with your current equipment. What are the friction points that keep you from taking on new products or struggling to deliver existing offerings? By identifying your current state and your ideal future state, you can define a path to business growth because every business uses products a wide format printer produces.

Think about how you approach your customers. Is the sales team looking for new opportunities? Does the website promote what you can produce and the value it brings to the customer? Remember that outdoor signage can promote services and products offered, special sales and promotions, and the physical location of any business. **Help current and prospective clients find the value in adding signage to enhance their in-store or in-office experience through wall coverings, floor graphics, and way-faring signs enabling their customers to quickly navigate the space and make their purchases.**

And don't forget the impact wide format printed graphics can make when linked to other digital channels. Guide clients to take advantage of options like QR codes and other digital linking devices from the printed sign. Those options can lead their customers to landing pages to sign up for a newsletter, grab a coupon, or join a community promoting the business' purpose and mission, providing the type of engagement that makes you a great partner.

How Diverse are Your Product Offerings?

The opportunities are abundant and exciting for printers, but the wide format segment does present a unique set of challenges. Wide format applications come in all shapes and sizes, use a wide variety of materials (substrates), and may have complex finishing requirements. Not all wide format

jobs can be printed on the same printing technology. Some are printed on a roll and others are printed on a single piece of rigid material. The intended use of the product may require specific ink and printing technology. A single customer order might include five vinyl banners, three fabric flag banners, and ten yard signs.

Simply put, there are many variables in wide format printing to consider during sales and order taking, job onboarding, every subsequent touchpoint. The more diverse your offerings, the more pressure there is on the workflow, making it critical to have a strong print management information system (MIS)/ enterprise resource planning system (ERP) like Pace within the Midmarket Print Suite from ePS.

Because there is no normal order size in wide format shops, workflows must be able to elegantly handle a high number of smaller orders as well as long run orders. This puts pressure on every process. Whether the order is for two signs or 2,000 signs, an efficient and standard process to onboard the job, prepare and process it through the workflow, print, finish, and deliver is required to meet today's customer needs.

In today's market, the turnaround time requirements are also increasingly shorter demanding that the processes be efficient and automated to manage the work and deliver to the customer's expectations. All processes must be designed for speed, but also with an eye to the production costs.

There are steps you can take to identify how an efficient workflow can change your capacity and profit calculations. The integrated and scalable components of the **Midmarket Print Suite** create the structure needed to manage a standard print workflow:

- [MarketDirect® StoreFront](#) is a customizable online storefront for customers to place and track orders.
- [Pace®](#) is a modular print MIS/ERP solution designed to manage the estimating, costing, and production of print operations, including scheduling.
- [Metrix®](#) streamlines layout planning, cutting costs, and transforms big data into actionable insights.
- [Auto-Count® 4D](#) is a web-based management dashboard for real-time data capture and visibility into production processes, scheduling, and data collection. Also ask about PrintFlow or Pace Scheduling to increase your capabilities. In some regions, full accounting is offered. (Check with your local representative.)
- [PrintFlow®](#) is a dynamic scheduling solution that boosts profitable throughput with real-time visibility for efficient operations.
- **Process Shipper** is a component that integrates with multiple shipping carriers to streamline and reduce delivery costs.
- [PrintStream® and MarketDirect Fulfillment](#) offer comprehensive distribution management and inventory tools, streamlining operations through powerful customization for seamless collaboration.

Wide Format Domination, Part 2: Strategies to Boost Print Shop Profits provides the guidance to assess your current state and shows how each component is tightly integrated to share data for enhanced communication between departments and staff while also automating as many processes as possible.