WHITE PAPER

WhatTheyThink

Wide Format Domination

Part 2
Strategies to Boost Print Shop Profits

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Every wide format print shop should have a clear understanding of each step in their production workflow. From the time a job is sold to the time it is delivered, there are many handoffs from one process to another. In Part 1, the focus was on how important the workflow is to build a production shop that can support the more diverse business driven by changing market needs. Part 2 brings practical advice for how to take the best steps for your shop.

Find Your Production Pain Points

Printing environments are dynamic and evolve as equipment, software, and staff change. These events are good opportunities to assess your workflow to identify, document, and improve the processes required from the point of onboarding the customer's job through to delivery and installation. Assessments:

- provide a clear current state,
- identify friction points,
- provide a basis for conversations with current and prospective vendors, and
- set the stage for planning.

Workflow assessments can be executed by the current team members or with assistance. No matter how you approach the process, create a project plan to keep the process on track to acquire relevant and actionable information.

The 80/20 rule is a good place to start. **Focus on the 20% of applications or products that equal 80% of your total order volume, not print volume.** These are the most common products you produce and represent the biggest opportunity to improve efficiency by optimizing the required processes and increasing the levels of automation along the production path. Once the top products representing the highest number of orders are known, it is time to follow the order.

Sales, Quoting and Estimating

In wide format shops, there are usually multiple sales channels. There may be salespeople who call on a regular book of clients, in-house team members who handle phone sales, and an online site where existing customers can place orders. There may be a web-to-print eCommerce site for on-go-

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These questions help to identify where process automation can add efficiency, taking some of the cost of selling off the table.

- Is there a single, standard template used by all sales channels to identify the job requirements, including available sizes, substrates, finishing options, services, and delivery?
- Do customers deliver files in their own order formats for estimating and quoting, like emails or spreadsheets?
- When jobs are estimated, are the tools integrated so that current materials costs and inventory levels are reflected?
- Are sales team members free to discount or otherwise change pricing?
- What are the guardrails on the overall process?

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ing or ad hoc sales to clients or open to the public. **MarketDirect® StoreFront from eProductivity Software (ePS)** is a starting point for streamlining customers' orders online through a customizable online storefront where customers can place orders and track the progress of the jobs without the need to engage print staff members.

Every sales channel adds challenges to the process of collecting and standardizing job information for estimating and quoting. Directing more of the work through an online storefront platform reduces the burden on customer support representatives allowing them to spend more time on more complex customer needs.

From Order to Prepress

Even with a standard product catalog, in subtle ways every order is unique. Customers may ask for variations in substrates across an order, different finishing, alternatives for mounting, or other elements that make it hard, but not impossible, to standardize.

Assess how you manage the touchpoints for:

- Order acquisition
- Processes used for job onboarding, including how files are delivered and vetted.
- When Customer Service Representatives (CSRs) get involved
- Specific color management requests
- Approval requirements for color and design
- Version management
- Campaign packages

Every person who touches a process is a cost point, and also a risk point. People make mistakes, and they can be costly, especially when caught in the latter stages of production. Walk the workflow looking for opportunities to take the cost and risk out of the equation through process optimization and automation.

Rework and Change Requests

The bane of every printer is the need to rework a job. The causes vary from mistakes in capturing the customer's original request, transcription mistakes as order information is entered into the workflow, or even problems during the print process. Rework is expensive no matter what causes it. The best practice is to find the causes for your most common rework problems and define a path to solve the issues. Automation of job order entry elements and preflighting are two common solution elements. Beyond rework, there is also the time and cost associated with change requests.

Every printer has customers who launch an order almost as a placeholder and then makes changes during production to better reflect what they want. Nothing is off the table. It may be quantities, size, shape, substrate, coating, finishing, mounting, or even installation changes. Those change requests have a material impact on the profitability of the job and delivery timeframes, especially when the work is already in process.

Review your protocols for accepting change requests and how you charge for them. Determine who usually asks for changes. Does it come through sales, CSRs, or emails from the customer? Having a solid change management system in place ensures you can minimize errors and accurately and appropriately charge customers for those changes. ePS Pace® the modular print MIS component of

the Midmarket Print Suite, uses an effective combination of change management for change orders, electronic job ticketing, and messaging to ensure staff members are informed and alerted to any customer changes.

Scheduling and Tracking

Organizations that use integrated scheduling and tracking software often find it easier to take advantage of the full capacity of the print and finishing departments. When done manually, or when automated scheduling is commonly subject to manual overrides, there is more opportunity for mistakes that cause delays in production. While it is tempting to believe that the scheduling team always sees the whole daily scheduling picture, in shops handling multiple products, substrates, and finishing options, that is a tall order.

Follow the path of jobs that you know have been delayed in production over the last 60 days:

- What caused the delays?
- How were schedules impacted?
- Who made the needed decisions for rescheduling?

Now look at how you track jobs.

- Are scheduling changes always reflected in the job tracking that the team sees?
- Is the job tracking information updated in real time?
- If a machine is taken out of service, are stakeholders notified of scheduling changes to ensure on-time deliveries? Is it a manual process?

Today's print operations have too many lines of business with too many variables to effectively manage with manual processes, time-intensive daily production meetings, or overly engineered spreadsheets. Real-time visibility into the ever-changing production schedule is a challenge only solved through a production management system like ePS PrintFlow® can be modified automatically or overridden by authorized staff when changes happen. Scheduling changes and alerts are available for all production staff through an easy-to-use, web-based view where operators can also enter data from the shop floor from quantity counts to time spent on various job tasks and material usage.

The team at AZPro solved their change management challenges with the Change Order function in Pace.

Flanagan says, "the change order is the story of the job. There are certain places it can interact financially with the job, but for the most part, it just provides a narrative so that our design folks can document client change requests. The change order system allows us to keep that narrative so the account manager can have that meaningful conversation with the client: we started here, we provided that, but now you have changed your mind. It's going to incur additional costs to keep changing this or you can go with what we originally started with."

Déjà vu Moments!

It takes being part detective and part talk show host to coax information from the people and processes used to achieve daily production. Walk the workflow to find the pain points and begin to identify and prioritize the processes that need improvement. Be prepared to find some processes in the current workflow that are circular just to be safe outliers while others are circular because there is little interaction between teams or ineffective use of existing solutions. Look for opportunities to reduce the number of people performing tasks.

For Wallace Graphics, the automation opportunities enabled by the **ePS Midmarket Print Suite** allowed them to redeploy valuable talent in their organization. After the acquisition of the wide format company, they found they had up to 12 people entering job information to keep the systems updated. Now there are two people responsible for entering the jobs into **Pace**.

Identify your redundancies and loops made to build confidence. These cost time and money that can be better used to improve efficiency. With your documented pain points in hand, it's time to look at the processes and your opportunities for efficiency.

Process Improvement for Efficiency

Wide format print shops come in all sizes. The team at NPSOA identifies their member shops as having anywhere from a single employee or as many 100 employees, with an average of 10. That range of potential team members begs for as much automation as possible for growing shops.

Once pain and friction points are understood, it's time to solve for efficiency. There are many possible paths but start with your priorities. Is your shop currently running on manual handoffs or partly automated? Either case means there are great opportunities to automate for efficiency. Is your shop using end-to-end automation? You may still have options for improvement!

Take a step back and look at opportunities to enhance the efficiency of your production workflow. Most manual processes can gain efficiency by leveraging available software solutions. Those solutions are best when they are automated with integration points that leverage available workflow and MIS data elements. As more integration and automation is added to the workflow, most shops find that approvals from customers are easier to get and there are fewer errors that cause reworks.

When integration allows data to be shared and synchronized across all production touchpoints, every process can be more efficient, especially as the levels of automation increase.

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Where to Focus

There are so many things going on in an average wide format production shop that it may be hard to know where to focus your efforts. Review the information acquired while walking the workflow and reviewing the friction points. Assign priorities based on where you can save the most time and money but keep an eye on your entire operation.

Typical operations that benefit most from automation and optimization focus on these key areas of print production:

- **Job onboarding:** acquiring the order, capturing the customer requirements, and inserting those specifications into the print workflow.
- **Order management:** ensuring job resources are available, production milestones are hit, and delivery/shipping deadlines are met.
- **Shop management:** managing physical resources like materials and staff, production schedules, and collecting shop floor data for informed analysis.
- **Delivery and completion:** optimizing the shipping method and costs, completing installation, and ensuring speedy order-to-cash through job reconciliation and account receivable.

Increase Complexity and Versioning of Customer Orders

Orders can be placed by customers using their customized online storefront; however, they can also deliver a spreadsheet of mixed job types that can be quickly imported for estimating in **Pace.** The import capability reduces the burden and time of estimating from hours to minutes while allowing customers to submit complex orders.

Smart Use of Resources

Materials represent a large portion of the total job costs in wide format printing. Add to that the num-

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ber of substrates that are used and the shop floor can quickly be clogged with partially used rolls and palettes. With Pace, shops can manage inventory levels and receive prompts suggesting partial rolls that can be used to maximize usage and material costs.

The Last Mile – Installation

The Midmarket Print Suite's POGO (Print on the Go) application is the perfect companion to help manage installations via internal staff or external contractors. The single, on-the-go app provides relevant information to the installation including locations, contacts, and tools required. Installation times are collected, and the installer can take photos and sign off at completion.

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Build a Better Workflow with the Midmarket Print Suite

Wide format printing is a diverse and complex industry. Businesses serve a wide range of verticals, producing a variety of applications, using a variety of technologies. This diversity makes it essential for wide format printing businesses to have a scalable and integrated solution to automate and effectively manage their operations. The **Midmarket Print Suite** meets the requirements. Its components address the primary challenges of managing customers and production: customer relationship management (CRM), production management, cost management, and profitability management.

By automating and streamlining these critical business processes, the **Midmarket Print Suite** can help wide format printing businesses improve efficiency, reduce costs, and increase profitability.

The **Midmarket Print Suite:**
- **Improves efficiency** by automating many of the manual tasks involved in managing customers and production, freeing staff to focus on more strategic initiatives.
- **Reduces costs** by helping businesses control costs, providing insights into production costs and profitability.
- **Increases profitability** by improving efficiency, reducing costs, and increasing sales.
- **Scales** as the business grows.
- **Integrates** with your existing systems, making it easy to implement and use.

If you are a wide format printing business looking for a scalable and integrated solution to automate and effectively manage your business, then the **Midmarket Print Suite** is the ideal solution for you.

Midmarket Print Suite
Ecosystem

ePS Print Ecosystem. Source: eProductivity Software