Let Kodak Maximise Your ROI With Best Practice PrePress Workflow

The success of an investment in capital equipment can be measured against a number of predetermined targets, such as, increased capacity, improved production, business won and increased profit. However, when it comes to irrevocable black and white figures it is a quickly-achieved and clearly-documented return on investment (ROI) that underlines the effectiveness of any spend.

Precise measuring of ROI is crucial to gaining a clear picture of the full impact of what is more than likely the most expensive and pivotal buying decision your business is likely to make. It is also one that will shape and define the direction the business takes for the short to medium term.

Day-to-day, job-to-job measurement not only illustrates and supports the decision to make the business investment in the first place but it can also pinpoint additional efficiencies and operational improvements that can be introduced. These include ways to reduce paper waste, enable ink savings to cut costs, enhance job planning leading to an optimised workflow resulting in improved productivity. Such analysis provides printers with greater transparency in job costing which can lead to more accurate estimating and also enable them to present exact figures to their customers for improved understanding. All this helps create stronger and more open relationships, which is at the heart of what most business operations are trying to achieve. There are a number of ways this can be accomplished with the most important being:

1. Linking pre-press workflow to the MIS

In a recent Vision In Print survey, 62% of Kodak customers said they did not have a direct link between their prepress and MIS. The Kodak survey was designed to see how customers could improve their operation by taking greater advantage of the automation features already built into KODAK PRINERGY CONNECT Software and KODAK INSITE Storefront Software. The goal in automating the pre-press workflow is to provide a ready means for printers to communicate and collaborate effectively with designers, originators and especially with their print order customers. The aim is to follow a job from inception to finishing with minimal manual intervention; to provide predictable steps, traceability and consistent methodology that result in materials, labour and time savings and to achieve repeatable results. Automation of the pre-press workflow needs to support collaborative working in 'real time' regardless of geographic location. Automation will also improve the quality of product by allowing all parties to work concurrently with identical images thereby maximising the use of virtual proofing to reduce the overall timescale for the job.

In the UK study, despite a diverse range of printing technologies employed (traditional cut-sheet litho-, web- and digital printing), and differing marketplaces to which they are applied (advertising and brochures, catalogues, direct mail, integrated marketing communications, magazines, books, packaging and print management) the following general responses and trends were perceived:

- When CRM, e-commerce or Storefront systems were fully implemented, fewer staff were involved in sales and order management activities overall (relative to turnover per person)
- When only print-ready pdf files are taken in and scripting or rules-based automation is used in their workflow, fewer staff are used.
- When creative pre-press work is a revenue stream companies seem to have retained some conventional pre-press staff to produce plates.
- Companies that route incoming files via their MIS into pre-press seem to require fewer planners / schedulers than those routing directly to pre-press from the web or e-commerce systems.
- The majority of companies surveyed now use soft-proofing, yet some companies persist in offering conventional proofing at high expense.

Most of the respondents also take advantage of CiP3/CiP4 links between pre-press and the presses and adopt automatic imposition applications either in the pre-press workflow and/or in the MIS.

2. Fully or partially automated workflow?

Three quarters of the survey respondents want to automate order to output including Web2Print ordering and MIS costing ability. The advantages in moving towards 'joining up' email, MIS and pre-press workflow include better management access and control as well as improved customer, designer and supplier interfaces. More specifically the survey showed where 'CRM', e-commerce or 'Storefront' workflow modules have been applied:

- Communication between customers, designers and press rooms are improved;
- Bridging this gap by application of the available technologies tends to formalize communication disciplines with fewer errors and misunderstandings, sometimes staffing can be reduced;
- File variations tend to be resolved earlier;
- Opportunities for 'double keying and miskeying' of data are reduced;
- Staff skills are better deployed in managing the workflow;
- 'Joined up' MIS and pre-press workflow, result in better administrative control over the pre-press workflow and improved management access and reporting;
- Where MIS and pre-press workflow are directly linked, opportunities for scripting and automation are increased – reducing man-hours required for processing files between input and delivery.
- Automation streamlines the job data input process, and getting it right 'first time' can help in reducing the manual intervention – reducing man hours and in some cases overtime.

- Digitization of pre-press workflow allows job data to drive multiple output devices in a consistent manner ensuring repeat work can be processed in the same way as the original job.

Responses from companies polled in a US study, showed the benefits of joined up digital processes and improved planning / scheduling through better linkage with the MIS. Noted were the reductions in:

- Sales and CSR man hours through improved use of CRM applications;
- Pre-press labour by cutting repetitive tasks and double keying via scripting and macros;
- Proofing and couriers by encouraging customer input file checking and remote proofing;
- Plate spoilage by providing better control over processes;
- Make-ready man hours via automatic imposition in pre-press workflow and/or in MIS;
- Waste paper;
- Plate materials by encouraging a 'get it right first time' culture;
- Print run spoilage.

3. Using an online ordering system to link with clients

The crux of any long-term relationship printers have with their clients is communication and the more informed that is the better the return achieved. The interface between printer and the client for many companies relies on Customer Relationship Management (CRM), e-commerce or Storefront software to control the multi-level exchanges between the two. The Kodak survey found 62% of respondents did not have the functionality to integrate to any infrastructure while 65% claimed they had a web based system that proved to be no more than a browser with an upload button.

Fewer than 50% of the companies had implemented a CRM or Storefront interface with their customers. Yet those that had implemented a CRM or Storefront interface found great value, for example, in using it for web sales and service, downloading of documents, creating templates for clients, offering training and sharing of resources.

With the use of Cross Media Marketing such as Variable Print, Email, pURL's and SMS it is now possible to implement a single pre-press workflow solution to create, manage and track the whole marketing campaign activity. With more personalised communication channels available, marketing collateral can be more direct, and importantly, more effective.

Allied to this are a number of associated discrete solutions including KODAK COLORFLOW Software with Ink Optimisation, KODAK PRINERGY Rules-Based Automation Software (RBA) and late bind facility which can all contribute to substantial improvements in efficiency and productivity. When the impact of any one of these is taken in isolation, the savings may seem marginal but when combined, they quickly mount up to create a leaner more responsive, capacity enhancing production solution.

Conclusion

Perhaps not surprisingly digital is uppermost in everyone's mind and it's fitting to conclude that the survey found 75% of respondents were interested in progressing investment in digital print but highlighted the need for a viable solution delivering workflow with administration, costing and transparency tools for job flow and automation. By no means the only reason, however for many, the biggest argument in favour of a fully integrated workflow is the fact that it is digital, thereby allowing a number of traditional pre-press activities and applications to operate throughout the pre-press workflow as an integrated entity.

The full report is available from your Kodak representative or alternatively when you log onto www.graphics.kodak.com. Here you will discover the full findings of the study including the survey responses, statistical averages to help provide benchmarks. In addition, there is a self-assessment questionnaire to provide a useful framework by which to measure your own performance.

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