In-house Printing in a Faster, Changing World

Key Points

- The cost and speed of digital printing have long been its main drawcards, but now with huge advances in digital quality and flexible, finishing capabilities the shift away from offset is gaining momentum.

- Digital printing has responded to the call for not only faster turnaround but cost efficient shorter run-lengths, print-on-demand and personalisation of informational documents.

- To remain competitive and conspicuous, educational institutions can broaden the expertise of its print facility beyond just printing to include cross media offerings.

- The development of print automation technology has allowed the print room to streamline production processes with far-reaching benefits across all departments.

- Web-to-print software allows administrators, teachers or students to easily submit print jobs using an Internet browser. Its role in process automation is critical for profitability.

- In-house digital printing can help meet the two major requirements of technology by every organisation.

The drivers behind in-house printing

There has been a major shift in how printing is regarded by organisations in every sector. Where, once the printed document dictated workflow, now it complements it.

Now that the document is driving business operation, changes in the way it is used, accessed, delivered, shared, secured and stored, have resulted in a number of technology and print related trends shaping the working environment.

According to research by InfoTrends[i], business leaders want two major changes from their technology: they want it to drastically lower the cost of delivery for mainstream, day-to-day IT and they want to know how their IT departments can help meet the ongoing commercial challenges across the whole organisation.

In-house digital printing operations are emerging as viable way to deliver organisation-wide efficiencies and to pave the way for competitive differentiation and innovation. Although digital production solutions are nothing new, recent advances in the technology have made a big difference to the way it is regarded and utilised. The cost and speed of digital printing have long been its main drawcards, but now with huge advances in digital quality and flexible, finishing capabilities the shift away from offset is gaining momentum.

As technology continues to facilitate anyway anyhow anywhere information access, four main trends have emerged to drive the demand for in-house digital printing operations and how they are leveraged:

Trend 1: Shift from offset to digital

In 2010, an InfoTrends[ii] study found that those who rely on in-house print centres expect turnaround within 48 hours for run lengths up to 4,999. Like the external print provider, the focus of the in-house printing operation is to provide the best, most responsive service to its clients. The advantage of the in-house centre is its proximity and its exhaustive understanding of the organisation and the wider implications associated with failing to respond effectively to demands for fast turnaround.

In addition to greater demand for quicker turnaround times, the expectation for more complex finishes and more engaging and conspicuous materials has also increased. Digital, with its superior variable data and in-line finishing capabilities looks set to continue its unwavering climb in popularity over offset. In fact, by 2018 it is predicted digital printing will equal 50% of the global offset sector. The volume of all offset prints will have fallen by 10.2% across the world between 2008 and 2018, while digital print volume is forecast to grow by 68.3%[iii].

Digital production processes allow frequent, last minute information updates and as a result, eliminate a great deal of printed waste. Digital printing has responded

insight

to the call not only for faster turnaround but cost efficient shorter run-lengths, personalisation in marketing and transactional documents, and print on-demand.

The new technology behind digital print is better than ever before, so the true-high quality colour that was always so elusive to offset's competitor, is now possible and "true red" is now finally a digital reality. In fact, due to the steadily rising popularity of digital, it is predicted there will be a continuing decline of digital black and white printing and the use of digital colour will become more common[iv].

Trend 2: Shift to Cross Media

If students, parents and industry partners can – and prefer – to access information from a variety of channels, schools and universities that want to remain competitive and prominent, need to find a variety of ways to reach them.

Cross media applications are tipped to become one of the fastest growing production tools. To keep up profitability, many print providers and in-house print facilities have already diversified their services portfolio beyond just printing to cross media offerings. Just as institutions can no longer afford to offer their stakeholders generic, hard copy mail outs, neither can print providers afford to limit their offerings. They also need to coordinate and consult throughout the entire setup for this mailing to include for example a personalised URL (PURL) that takes the recipient from print to the web, or a QR code that the recipient scans with their mobile phone to offer more information via the web.

An increasingly important aspect of cross media outreach is personalisation. Personalising a document so that it addresses everything from the individual recipient's name, gender, demographic, past results to their subject preferences, is a powerful demonstration of the relevance of the communication.

A Pira study found that personalised marketing leads to 31% greater profits compared to general marketing materials, and that customers also become more loyal through personalisation, leading to greater allegiance – customer loyalty can often rise by over 40%. Not surprisingly, InfoTrends' research indicates more than 70% of in-house printing operations own variable data software capable of personalising documents.

The print department is ideally positioned to evolve from the role of supplier into proficient, highly valuable control point by offering consultation and a managed marketing supply chain that delivers results.

Trend 3: Print Automation

It has been well documented that by streamlining the workflow, an organisation can make bottom-line boosting cost savings, efficiency and productivity increases and reductions in human intervention and error.

The development of print automation technology has allowed the print room to streamline production processes with far-reaching benefits for the whole organisation. Automating print production with job tickets is simple and straightforward, and includes the automatic setup of output devices as well as fully automated inline finishing.

Traditionally, finishing was considered the major bottleneck area in the print production workflow due to its complexity and labour-intensity. Latest developments in inline and near-line finishing equipment for digital printing – such

as collators, binders and folders – are now automating the setup to reduce make-ready, especially for repeat or same format jobs.

Due to their integral role in the automated workflow in-house printing operations are being called upon to share the valuable data it has access to – the volume of print jobs, invoices, customer communications, and marketing pieces - that can drive operational efficiencies by informing management decision-making.

Trend 4: Web to print

Web-to-print software allows users to easily submit print jobs using an Internet browser. Its role in process automation is critical for cost efficiency. Web-to-print is fast evolving into web-to-finish and web-to-product in organisations investing in their own comprehensive online printing capabilities based on all-inclusive, fully automated workflows.

Education institutions are well placed to leverage web-to-print solutions further as online portals for creating, archiving, managing and deploying communications between teachers and students, or between the school and students and parents. Such portals might even provide certain variable data printing capabilities that enable non-print or non-design staff to create, customise and order personalised documents.

Maximising the value proposition of web-to-print requires a firm dedication to the process, the development of an easy-to-use interface, and promoting awareness of the tool to those most suited to using it.

Conclusion

Organisations that make the decision to operate their printing in-house, enjoy not only faster turnaround times and long term cost savings, but superior in-line finishing, on-demand and variable data printing capabilities. Recent advances in digital quality and integration with web and data capture technology are compelling arguments for those contemplating bringing the print centre in-house as well as a broadening of the role of the production centre.

The in-house printing operation is uniquely poised to understand and meet the demands of its administration and teaching staff and the organisation's document processes. By strategically involving the printing department more closely with the institution's workflow automation processes; procurement; marketing strategies and student, parent and stakeholder relations, the organisation can benefit from expertise that has the potential to make the organisation function better and communicate more innovatively.

Or putting it simply: in-house digital printing is an attractive proposition for those wishing to drastically lower the cost of day-to-day IT and to meet the ongoing commercial challenges across the whole organisation.

[i]   InfoTrends 2010 "Future Proof Investments in Document Technology

[ii] InfoTrends 2010 "Future Proof Investments in Document Technology

[iii] Smithers Pira, 2013: The Future of Offset vs Digital Printing to 2018

[iv] InfoTrends 2012: U.S. Production Printing & Copying Market Forecast: 2011-2016

[v]   Smithers Pira, 2012: "The Future of Variable Data Printing to 2017"

[vi] InfoTrends, 2011: Production Print Services in North America: an Evolution in Progress

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