In-Plant Printer Edition

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Manage: Print Runs and Faster Performance

Managing Your Print Runs for Faster Performance

Have you or someone you know ever decided to run a marathon?

Whether they are a competitive athlete or a novice runner, each must create a plan to improve their physical fitness and endurance. Part of this strength and conditioning requires knowing and tracking personal performance. Keeping track of times and distances run are simple ways to monitor progress. However, as training continues, runners add metrics like cadence, stride length, and distance covered using their heart rate as a baseline for evaluation. A lower heart rate means performance and endurance are improving. These numbers and evaluation techniques are to know how well they have performed in the past, how they are doing now, and what areas still need improvement with the goal of completing a 26.2-mile marathon.

Today's in-plant printers support the print needs of companies and institutions while under constant budget and resource constraints. Like runners preparing for a marathon, in-plant print operations must manage their business workflow and track key performance indicators (KPIs) to know the order and print volumes, in addition to capacity, service level agreement (SLA) performance, and costs. Knowing these variables is critical to providing effective print services for the organization and keeping the print work in-house.

Investing in The Right Tool for the Print Production Marathon

Unfortunately, many in-plants use generic tools like spreadsheets to price and manage print jobs which is problematic for several reasons:

- First, multiple staff cannot use the tool at the same time, creating a bottleneck and removing any collaboration benefits.
- Second, there are no user rights and restrictions, so any user can delete or corrupt the information, not to mention the risk of deleting the entire file.
- Lastly, generic tools are more difficult to extract and automate the information for use in other business systems or downstream processes. For these reasons, it is best to manage the in-plant operation using a Print Management Information System (MIS).

A print MIS is the brains of the print operation and should be the single record of truth for all customer and production information as it manages every element of customer and business records covering estimating, quoting, costing, job ticketing, tracking, job costing, scheduling, inventory management, purchasing, and, in some cases, accounting.

A print MIS can also integrate with other business software like customer resource management (CRM), enterprise resource planning (ERP), or eCommerce portals to provide valuable data at the corporate level.

A print MIS solution is essential for today's in-plant printers by:

- Providing accurate job pricing for departmental chargebacks and to cover production costs.
- Consolidating order intake, often from multiple sources such as online forms, eCommerce (Web-to-Print), and e-mail.
- Generating job numbers and tickets to communicate production plans and details.
- Tracking the volume and status of every work-in-progress job.
- Capturing important shop floor production data from the time spent on each task to the amount of waste and consumables used.
- Closing the communication loop with users through automated notifications.
- Sending departmental chargebacks or invoices to recapture operating costs.
- Creating reports for executive leadership to prove the efficiency and effectiveness of the in-plant, effectively proving its worth.

Jumping off of the Print MIS Starting Line

Managing your in-plant operation to the level of accuracy and detail requires a commitment to implement and use the right tools for managing your operations. Moving from manual processes and spreadsheet management to streamlined and automated print production takes time and requires sponsorship from management and rigorous adoption by the staff.

Where to start?

First, start by auditing every way print orders arrive at the in-plant. Some submission methods, like online forms or web-to-print may integrate directly with the print MIS to automatically generate orders. Other submission methods, like e-mail, may require manual entry by staff members. The key is to work to automate, reducing the number of submission methods that require manual entry so staff can focus on higher-level tasks while minimizing the risk from data entry errors and duplications.

A good start requires trust in your solutions and processes, particularly the estimating engine, the foundation for order taking, quoting, and job ticketing. Estimates are built based on costs – all the costs that can occur as a job progresses from onboarding to completion. These costs include fixed expenses like equipment leases and variable costs like ink and paper. These costs must be identified, captured, and configured in the estimating engine, ensuring orders can be priced according to the operating model of the in-plant and support chargebacks and cost recovery.

Important KPIs:

- Estimate vs. actuals
- SLA - delivery performance
- Overall equipment effectiveness (OEE)
- Equipment uptime
- Material consumption
- Waste levels and causes
- Labor efficiency

Running The Numbers

Over time other functions and modules can be added and integrated to extend the value of your business management system. To maximize your investments, ensure that any additional solutions such as inventory management, scheduling, fulfillment, and others are based on the organization's needs and can be integrated into your automated processes. For example, after the core functions related to estimating and job management are locked in, collecting data from the shop floor is a logical add-on. If your Print MIS is the brains of your organization, shop floor data is the heartbeat of print production that can manage and monitor your organizational KPIs.

No matter which metrics are monitored, the numbers provide a performance path to know where you were, where you are now, and how to get to the goal.

The Shop Floor

The golden rule of shop floor data collection is to capture the minimum amount of data required for the maximum amount of an impactful analysis. As the industry progresses, investments are made, and new equipment is onboarded, the likelihood that some data can be automatically supplied by the device is increasing.

Regardless of how you collect data, the critical point is to collect it. Without data, the in-plant is operationally blind and risks disappointing customers and raising concerns for continued funding.

The Bottom Line

A well-managed in-plant can delight customers, provide essential services, and justify the value brought to the organization. Doing any of these using manual processes and generic tools is simply impossible for long term success. For in-plants stuck on spreadsheets and sticky notes, it is time to boost your print operations with the right tools. For those already using a print management system, it is time to leverage data to make your operation smart and essential to the organization.

If you're ready to start managing your in-plant operations with automated efficiencies and leveraging key data from your shop floor, contact us for more information and how a workflow assessment may help determine your workflow needs.

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Headquartered in Tokyo, Ricoh Group operates in approximately 200 countries and regions. In the financial year ended March 2019, Ricoh Group had worldwide sales of 2,013 billion yen (approx. 18.1 billion USD).

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