

Print Service  
Provider Edition

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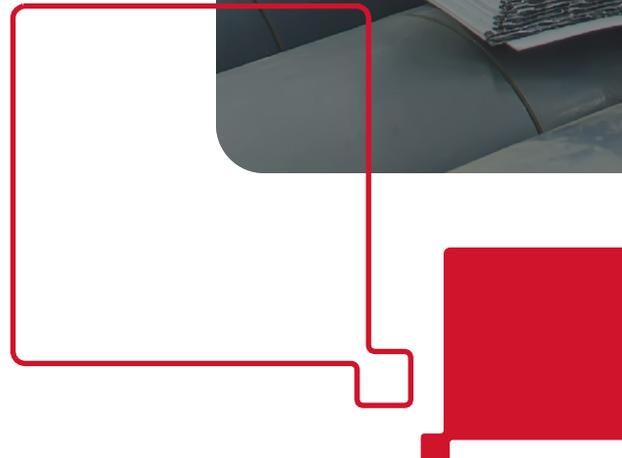
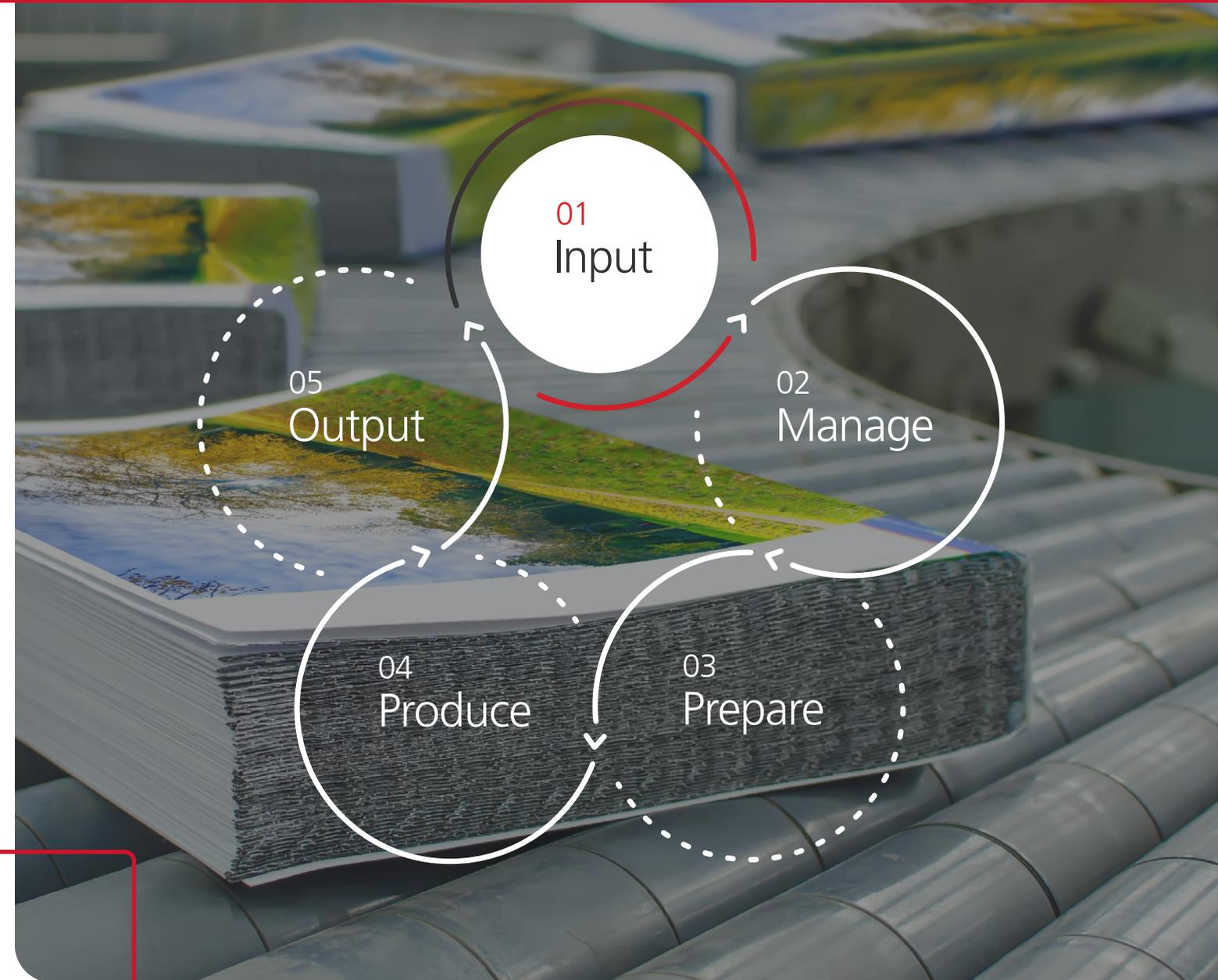
 **Input:** The Most Efficient Route

## The Most Efficient Route

Imagine boarding the plane and waiting for other passengers to jockey past each other, finding their seats and trying to stow their luggage. You finally settle into your seat, buckle your seat belt, and stare ahead at the in-flight entertainment options. To kill time or maybe just curious about how you're getting to where you're going, you flip to the interactive map showing the route to your destination. Have you ever wondered why it is never a straight line? Pilots fly in a 3-dimensional space, not a 2-dimensional map, so an arc connecting your starting point and destination is the most efficient route. When represented on your 2-dimensional map, the straight line looks shorter but is longer than the geodesic arc when you consider the Earth is sphere-shaped.

Put into the most basic terms: it's distorted reality.

The same reality distortion applies to job onboarding for your print business. One of the most common ways customers and the sales team send orders is by email. It might seem like the best route into production, but it has limitations. Email must be opened, and information extracted into specifications and job tickets. It takes the same amount of handling for phone, fax, and walk-up orders. Those processes are inefficient, in the same way a straight-line flight path would be. They waste time and money. To gain efficiency, the goal is to find the most efficient route to reduce the manual touchpoints required to capture the order details while minimizing the time and avoiding manual data entry mistakes. The best path to efficiency is to automate the interaction between the requesting customer and the print shop. Web-to-print or integrations with the customer's business systems are a place to start.





## The Common Onboarding Problem

Every job has a few elements in common with every other job that comes into the print facility.

- **Who is ordering the job?**
- **What is the work to be printed?**
- **When is it due?**
- **How will it be charged?**

Each question appears easy, but even these basics can set off a chain reaction of emails, phone calls, and conversations that consume time and resources. The problem compounds for commercial printers who work for a diverse set of customers, sell an array of products and offer many ways to submit orders and files.

Orders can arrive via email, fax, web-to-print, and requests for quotes (RFQ) submitted by the print shop's sales team. Solutions that guide customers or internal staff to enter critical information like due dates, format size, quantity, product type, and other specifications in a consistent manner are ideal. The key is to standardize the minimum information required to quote and produce the order based on the unique characteristics of the product type. For example, a business card or flyer has fewer specifications than a book or a magazine with foldout inserts.

After the order is converted into a production job, the content and data files must be retrieved and inserted into the workflow. Files may be attached to the order, submitted using secure FTP, an online file transfer program like WeTransfer, or provided as a reference to a file location on a customer server or a collaborative site like Google Drive, Microsoft OneDrive, or Dropbox.

Establishing procedures to attach the correct content and data files to the right production job is crucial to avoid costly mistakes, like printing on the wrong substrate or specifying the wrong finishing. Managing customer files using a print MIS or production workflow management system allows automation to be applied to downstream file preparation.

With so many variables involved in every job, what could go wrong is limitless.

## Eliminate The Hops

When passengers want to save time and increase the ease of travel, they book direct flights instead of multiple connections through several airports. Order entry and job onboarding are similar. In a commercial print business, the fewer hops, or additional processes, that bloat and slowdown order intake, job ticketing, and onboarding, the more efficient and cost-effective it can be.

Begin with job order entry, which captures the information needed to execute the job. People capturing job specifications creates risk because it's easy to develop a personal shorthand for everything from paper sizes to due dates—the more people taking orders, the greater the variability, delays, and potential for errors. Then, to verify or clarify, there is the usual series of email, chat, and phone conversations to ensure that the details are accurate. Those conversations may happen several times during production as each new touchpoint needs assurances about the intent of the job. Nothing in that process is efficient.

There are several approaches to normalizing getting a job onboard, putting the process on autopilot. print MIS solutions often have a web-based client portal for users to request reorders and customize RFQs. These portals are directly linked to the estimating and costing processes, guiding users to provide the job specifications needed to enter the job. Many print MIS portals also allow users to upload their artwork and data files for submission into the workflow once converted to a production job.

In the automated print shop, a web-to-print application can allow clients to select common products from a catalog of options. Internal customer service reps (CSRs) can use these same storefronts as a proxy for handling their customers. And internal salespeople can place RFQs or reorders on behalf of their clients instead of sending emails to the CSR that often lack crucial information for quoting and ticketing.

Ad hoc or one-off jobs wreak havoc on the best-laid plans for automated job onboarding. It may not be possible to capture these custom requests with your web-to-print or print MIS portal, so users may still submit details through email. The power is in creating checklists and processes so that requestors are guided to provide the information needed in a normalized format, ensuring CSRs can convert the supplied details into a job ticket.





## The Bottom Line

Think of your print production workflow like the route maps of airlines. The most efficient path from onboarding to delivery is the one with the fewest stops. It is the same for your job onboarding process. If there are too many methods to request a print, it takes longer to do the work. If the job and file information is not standardized, it makes for an awkward and slow exchange into the print MIS and subsequent workflow, leaving your job wide open for errors and reducing your already tight margins.

Fix your job onboarding so your entire print production workflow can take off.

If you're ready to optimize your job submission, [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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