

Print Service
Provider Edition

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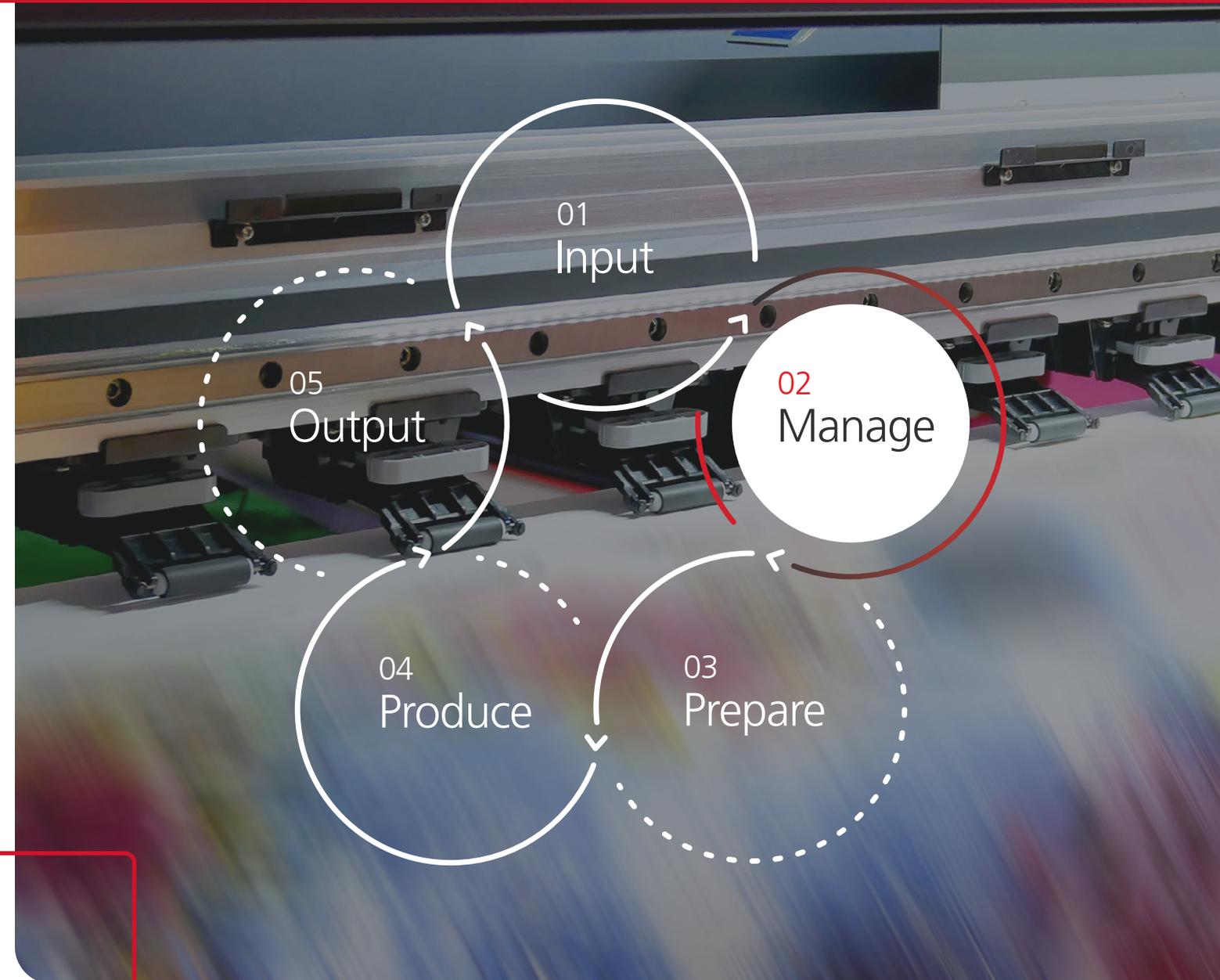
 **Manage:** Making Sure Your Jobs Fly Through Production

Manage Your Print Shop So Jobs Fly Through Production

Have you ever wondered how pilots can land an airplane without being able to see the runway until the last minute? It is because they use and trust their instrumentation. There are two basic categories of flying: Visual Flight Rules (VFR) and Instrument Flight Rules (IFR). Pilots begin their training under VFR conditions: nice weather and clear skies. As skills improve and pilots learn to leverage their airplane and instrumentation, they are certified to fly under IFR conditions, which allows them to fly even when there are adverse weather conditions.

Like pilots who rely solely on instrumentation and data to fly blind, print shops need to identify and trust key performance indicators (KPIs) for monitoring and managing print production. The altimeter becomes the relationship between the costs of supplies and sales prices. Instead of airspeed, print service providers (PSPs) may use equipment efficiency as the KPI. Profitability is like the pilot's artificial horizon to let PSPs know whether they are above or below the line for making money. The heading indicators are the business and production dashboards that guide a shop and indicate how close they are to delivering all their jobs.

Having, and utilizing the right equipment and processes ensure you're getting to your destination in the fastest, most efficient way.





The PSPs Instrument Panel

Modern print shops should be flying by IFR rules, which requires a print management information system (MIS) to provide the instrument panel. However, many have them but are not using the solution to its full potential. Staff often use generic tools like spreadsheets to manage print jobs outside of the approved systems, which is problematic. In most environments, spreadsheets are not shared, leading to the growth of competing information sources about jobs moving through the shop, creating bottlenecks, and removing any collaboration benefits. Is the scheduler's spreadsheet the correct one, or is the customer service representatives (CSR) the one to use? Most of these standalone tools cannot assign user rights and restrictions, so any user can delete or corrupt the information, not to mention the risk of deleting print files and job history. It is also more challenging to extract data and automate sharing with other business systems or downstream processes.

It is critical to get staff to use your print MIS because it is a purpose-built tool for managing the entire print shop.

A single record of truth for all customer and production information is a requirement in commercial print operations, not a 'nice to have'. The print MIS is the brain of the print operation and should be that single record of truth because it manages every element of customer and business data. When set up to be part of an automated and integrated environment, it captures data from estimating, quoting, costing, job ticketing, tracking, job costing, scheduling, inventory management, and purchasing. The print MIS can also integrate with other business systems, like customer resource management (CRM), enterprise resource planning (ERP), or customer business systems to streamline job onboarding and improve automation levels.

A print MIS solution is essential in other ways for today's commercial print shops because it:

- Facilitates accurate job pricing to cover production costs
- Consolidates order intake, often from multiple sources like email, web-to-print, or application programming interfaces (APIs)
- Generates job numbers and tickets to communicate production plans and job details
- Tracks the volume and status of every work-in-progress job
- Captures important shop floor production data from the time spent on each task to the amount of waste and consumables used
- Closes the communication loop with users through automatic notifications for completion and shipping
- Creates invoices or integration with your preferred accounting software to send to customers
- Provides standard or custom reports for executive leadership to verify the efficiency and effectiveness of the entire production process

Getting Off The Ground

Managing your print operation to this level of accuracy and detail requires a commitment to implement and use the print MIS as the core tool for managing operations. Moving from manual processes and spreadsheet management, or partially used print MIS solutions, to a fully streamlined and automated print production takes time and requires buy-in from management and rigorous adoption by the staff. So, where do you start?

Start by identifying the many ways that customers submit print orders. Some submission methods, like web-to-print or APIs, may integrate directly with the print MIS to automatically generate orders. Other submission methods, like email or fax, may require manual entry by staff members, but there may be options to capture email and automate routing to the system.

Then, fully commit to reducing submission methods requiring manual entry so your staff can focus on higher-level tasks while minimizing the risk from data entry errors.

Success requires trust in the print MIS, particularly the estimating engine, which is 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 include fixed expenses like equipment leases and variable costs like ink and paper. Labor rates are also part of the equation, requiring an understanding of each touchpoint in the job workflow. These costs must be identified, captured, and configured in the estimating engine. Updating your costing information in real-time is ideal, but if purchasing and inventory functions are not yet integrated, updating on a regular cadence is a best practice, particularly when input prices like materials and labor are fluctuating.



Important KPIs:

- Estimate versus actual comparisons
- Overall equipment effectiveness (OEE)
- Equipment uptime
- Material consumption (substrates and ink/toner)
- Waste levels and causes
- Labor efficiency
- Productive versus non-productive time
- Percentage of on-time vs. past due orders

Instruments Need Measurements

Over time other functions and modules can be added to extend the value of the print MIS including inventory management, scheduling, and fulfillment. There may be others based on business and production needs. After the core functions related to estimating are locked in, collecting data from the shop floor is a logical add-on. Shop floor data measures the critical data of print production that feeds your instrument panel for smooth operation. Which metrics matter depends on your operational goals. No matter which metrics are monitored, the numbers provide the data to know where you were, where you are now, and how to get to the destination smoothly and error-free.

The golden rule of shop floor data collection is to capture the minimum amount required for the maximum amount of analysis. This approach minimizes the burden on staff to enter the data when it is not available through other sources. As new equipment is onboarded, it is likely that some data can be automatically supplied by the device. Regardless of how you collect data, the critical requirement is to actually collect it. Without data, you are operationally blind and risk overburdening staff and disappointing customers by not meeting their specifications.

The Bottom Line

A well-managed production floor can improve operational execution, boost profitability, and increase customer satisfaction. Doing any of these by using manual processes and generic tools is simply impossible.

If you're a PSP stuck on spreadsheets and sticky notes, it is time to pivot and maximize the use of a purpose-built print MIS. For those already using a print MIS, it is time to leverage your data to make your operation smarter and more resilient to any potential turbulence ahead.

If you're ready to optimize your print production management, [contact us](#) for more information and how a workflow assessment may help determine your workflow needs.

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