The digital transformation meets automation at Precision Printing

AT A GLANCE

Industry: General Commercial Printing and Photo Specialty

Business name: Precision Printing Co. Ltd

Headquarters: Barking, UK

Website: www.precisionprinting.co.uk

Precision Printing

CHALLENGE

- Grow a traditional commercial printing business in the online age by developing digitally printed applications in new markets with higher gross margins than conventional print.

- Retain and attract enterprise customers that were moving away from physical media.

- Offer competitive, printed products that deliver the impact and immediacy of online media.

- Make it easy for consumers to order products ranging from commercial to photo specialty either online or at retail.

- Streamline all aspects of production workflow to enable efficient handling of input, printing and finishing as well as ordering, tracking, accounting and fulfilment.

SOLUTION

- Two HP Indigo press 5500

- An HP Indigo 7000 Digital Press

- Three HP Indigo 7500 Digital Press

- HP SmartStream Production Pro Print Server

- HP Print Care comprehensive cover for all presses.

- LasermaxRoll Systems PageReady™ inline cut, trim, collate stack and feed finishing line with FinishReady™ controller.

RESULTS

- Penetration of new, high-growth applications in the photo and commercial web-to-print market.

- Capacity to automatically handle a broader range of commercial and photo products using B2B2C model.

- Increase in turnover from £5.5 million in 2005 to £14 million in 2011 – the period digital presses have been installed.

- The digital component of Precision Printing's turnover represents 60 per cent of revenue.

- The company's digital business is growing at a rate of 60 per cent per year.

- Press uptime increased by six per cent thanks to Print Care.

- During the November 2011 - January 2012 peak season, the company handled 35,000 jobs per day, necessitating 24/7 operation and the hiring of 120 additional staff to handle fulfilment.

> "PageReady solves the print-on-demand finishing problem. It's very efficient and we're using it inline with one of our HP 7500 Digital Presses for postcards, greetings cards, leaflets and flyers."
>
> — Gary Peeling, managing director, Precision Printing Co. Ltd

"Digital transformation" has a tangible meaning at Precision Printing, London, UK. Established in 1966 as a stationery company serving the area in and around the City of London, the company continues to operate four conventional B2 sheet-fed presses.

In 2005, Precision Printing moved into digital with an HP Indigo press 5500. The immediate success of that resulted in the acquisition of a second one later the same year. Subsequently, it beta tested and bought HP Indigo 7000 and 7500 Digital Presses, later installing two further 7500 Digital Presses.

Managing hundreds of thousands runs of one

Precision Printing's digital printing capacity enabled it to handle 35,000 orders per day in the 2011-12 peak photo season.

"We had to supplement our staff of 130 people with an additional 120 temporary staff to handle the fulfilment of all the orders," says Gary Peeling, managing director, Precision Printing.

Managing such volumes raises a myriad of logistical issues: printing that number of jobs – mostly postcards, greetings cards and calendars in runs of one – is challenging enough, as is finishing and fulfilment, but what's needed to make it all work effectively is an efficient, end-to-end automated workflow.

Precision Printing's proprietary "OneFlow" is an open system that integrates with the company's Adobe® Apogee X system and the HP SmartStream Production Pro server to provide a complete XML solution that automatically processes jobs as they're received and tracks them, using JDF and/or barcodes, through to the point where jobs are packed for delivery.

"Apart from being a production and administrative necessity, this level of automation is key to driving down the cost of print," Peeling explains. "Our average digital print order is £2.30, but the margins are the strongest in the business."

Responding to consumer and enterprises

One of Precision Printing's new customers is the recently launched Hue-two Ltd (www.huetwo.co.uk). An online service that offers full wedding stationery products, Hue-two is leveraging Precision Printing's solution for B2B2C customers printing products ranging from invitations, RSVP cards, orders of service, table plans, place cards, menus, cake boxes and favour boxes to wine labels and guest books. Designs can be chosen from a large and growing number of templates and printed in PANTONE® colours chosen by the couples to match exactly the colours they have chosen for their special day.

"Digital print needs to be dynamic. Wedding stationery is for a specific, very special occasion and timely delivery is critical," Peeling says. "It's not enough to be able to print an order of one or a few dozen, customers need to receive them on time and in the colours they expect."

Immediacy is also a critical factor for other types of enterprise customers.

"For too long, web-to-print was really web-to-nowhere," observes Peeling. "What needed to happen was to find the way to integrate both the enterprise input with the print service providers' system and have a way to automate the process through to despatch.

"When a consumer contacts an enterprise's call centre or website for information about a product or service, the relevant details are submitted, triggering a 'print event' where the enterprise's system sends the request to us. We process it automatically, print the required product and send it out, often the same day."

The speed and impact of immediate, relevant and personalised print goes beyond responses to queries:

"Direct marketing using email – even when personalised - used to have a greater impact than it does now," Peeling explains. "However, printed, personalised marketing materials can generate higher response rates.

"Another growth driver that we're experiencing in this consumer space is in photo publishing: photobooks, calendars, postcards and greetings cards," said Peeling.

These B2B2C models, whether for commercial print or photo-oriented products, require seamless end-to-end production workflows to handle the volumes, and that means maximum automation.

Automated digital finishing

Precision Printing is currently beta testing the LasermaxRoll Systems PageReady™ inline page finishing solution. Operating inline, it cuts, trims, collates and stacks documents, automatically adjusting cut and trim sizes for each document. The FinishReady™ controller is integrated into Precision Printing's OneFlow software and job information carries the cut and trim parameters.

"PageReady solves the print-on-demand finishing problem," says Peeling. "It's very efficient and we're using it inline with one of our 7500 presses for postcards, greetings cards, leaflets and flyers."

By removing most manual make-ready, PageReady™ delivers a reliable, fully digital finishing solution.

Seeing beyond the solution

Peeling is looking beyond the mere fact of fully automated digital production of commercial and photo products and analysing what it means for Precision Printing and other digital PSPs.

"With a fully automated end-to-end process, from ordering to fulfilment, it will be possible to know the cost per copy of a job regardless of run length. One price fits all print pricing will become possible," Peeling says.

"Moving into digital print has completely transformed Precision Printing. In 2005, our turnover was £5.5 million. In 2011, it was £14 million – that's all digital growth. Digital printing now contributes 60 per cent of our revenue and it continues to grow at a rate of 50-60 per cent per year.

"Digital has put printed media back in the communications loop and promises the future relevance of printed products," Peeling concludes.

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