Automation Case Study
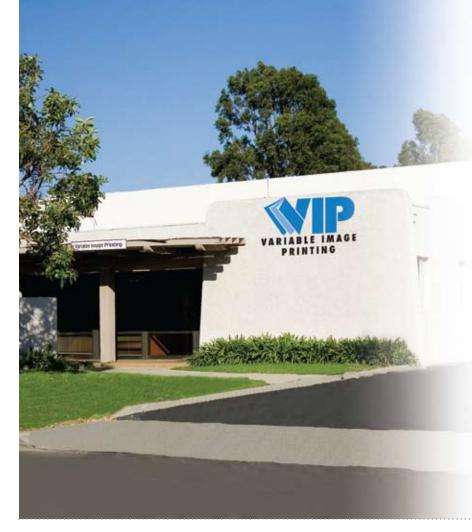
Variable Image Printing
Meeting objectives is only the beginning

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The Challenges:

- Managing a significant increase in business
- Eliminating redundant clerical tasks
- Automating the production workflow
- Integrating back end systems

The Solution:

- Avanti Graphic Arts Management System
- Xerox FreeFlow™ Web Services
- Xerox FreeFlow™ Process Manager
- One Xerox DocuTech™ 6180 Production Publisher, three Xerox DocuTech™ 6135 Production Publishers, two Xerox Nuvera™ 144 Production Systems, a Xerox DocuColor™ 7000 Digital Press, and a Xerox DocuColor™ 5000 Digital Press

The Results:

- Elimination of 20 hours/week of clerical tasks
- Improved operational efficiencies
- Tools that empower Variable Image Printing salespeople to improve customer acquisition, retention, and loyalty

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Customer Profile

Since its inception in 2000, Variable Image Printing (www.variableimageprinting.com) has continually changed, updated, and refreshed its offerings to better serve its ever-growing customer base. The company's standing, however, is best illuminated by the things that have remained constant over the years: dedication to pioneering new technologies and work processes, and an even stronger dedication to meeting and exceeding clients' print requirements.

The Challenge

Variable Image Printing (VIP) executives realized very early on that leveraging the Internet to increase and facilitate sales was going to play a major part in the company's long-term success. It was with this in mind that they partnered with Xerox Corporation to develop a "Web Storefront," from which customers can access a host of print services from VIP's Irvine location using a single, online interface. The storefront, which leverages Xerox FreeFlow Web Services technology, enables VIP customers to order and/or submit print jobs and check the status of their jobs at any time.

VIP has found that this technology has provided a win-win-win: customers love the self-serve nature of being able to order and check status 24/7, VIP can receive orders without 24/7 staffing, and print shop staff can spend their time on production devices instead of on the phone, fielding questions from customers wondering where there jobs are.

VIP staff productivity is further improved, as Xerox FreeFlow Web Services routes jobs directly to the print queue without support from customer service representatives.

The problem, is that they "created a monster." The Web Storefront took off, and VIP was having difficulties managing the sheer volume of jobs. Ken Dunn, Director of Operations, reports that "a little over a quarter of our jobs come via the Web—a number that is steadily growing." In fact, VIP produces upwards of 4.5 million impressions per month—many of which come in at $500 or less—so the only way to remain profitable is to remove human "touchpoints" from the time the job is ordered to the time it is shipped and billed.

Xerox FreeFlow Process Manager was implemented to combat much of this challenge, as it automates much of the preflight and production workflow for commonly placed orders. For instance, VIP has a customer that orders hundreds of items on a monthly basis.

Many of these jobs require the same type of prepress activities—like imposition, page numbering, or creation of print-ready PDFs. VIP prepress professionals set up several "templates" for these common jobs so those prepress steps are completed automatically and with no need for operator intervention. Using FreeFlow Process Manager to create this touchless workflow saves a significant amount of time for prepress personnel.

But while Process Manager accomplishes its mission of eliminating human touchpoints, there was still a bottleneck in the production workflow caused by a lack of automation in the back end of the business. Simply put, there was entirely too much time, effort, and cost associated with re-entering information into separate tracking and billing systems for jobs that came in over the Web.

In fact, VIP print staff spent about 20 hours every week re-keying information for back end processes. As an example, a customer would input job specifications, including everything from desired paper stock and finishing requirements to shipping and billing information into the Web Storefront. A VIP customer service rep would then have to re-enter that same information into different back end systems for job ticketing, shipping, and billing.

For more information on Avanti's Graphic Arts Management Syste, visit

http://www.avantisystems.com/

For more information on Xerox FreeFlow Web Services, visit

http://www.xerox.com/digital-printing/workflow/freeflow/web-services/enus.html

For more information on Xerox FreeFlow Process Manager, visit

http://www.xerox.com/digital-printing/workflow/freeflow/process-manager/enus.html

The Solution

The challenge of having too much work is a good problem to have, but a problem nonetheless. To overcome it, VIP looked to Xerox Corporation, their trusted digital printing advisor, for a recommendation.

In the Fall of 2007, Xerox brought in Avanti and its Graphic Arts Management System, a comprehensive tracking and accounting system, Optimized for Xerox FreeFlow, to eliminate VIP's immediate challenge of having to re-key information into separate systems.

Mission accomplished… and then some

The Avanti Graphic Arts Management System instantly met its core objective. With Avanti, all information input by a VIP customer on the Web Storefront is captured and integrated into back end systems automatically. In essence, the information input by the customers themselves "follows the job" through prepress, production, shipping, and billing.

VIP executives were immediately satisfied with the system, but removing 20 hours of redundant clerical tasks was just the beginning of the advantages gained by leveraging Xerox and Avanti technologies.

Seeing the "big picture": Many systems capture job-centric data. That is, a print vendor will know all the information that pertains to a single job—quantities, delivery information, etc. But with Avanti, all the job information for a particular customer is captured, giving VIP salespeople a "big picture" view of their customers. As an example, salespeople can see how profitable customers are by comparing the cost of producing the jobs versus how much they are sold for. Illustrating a customer's business case back to the customer is an important and powerful tool for salespeople for loyalty and retention as well as to initiate new sales activity.

Informed decision-making: Avanti tracks what types of jobs are coming into the shop, which empowers VIP to make informed business decisions. If VIP executives see that they are producing a large number of niche finishing applications, such as embossing or foil stamping, they can make the determination to purchase that equipment rather than sending those jobs—and profit—to a finishing partner.

Touchless accounting: When the job is shipped, the Avanti system integrates directly with VIP's General Ledger / Accounts Receivable / Accounts Payable system, which has eliminated nearly 40% of the labor associated with the billing process (as well as inaccuracies caused by human error.) Additionally, because the invoice is generated automatically upon job completion, it is sent earlier, prompting faster payment.

The future is bright

Now that a sound infrastructure is in place, VIP is planning on continuing to build business through its Web Storefront. They are currently undergoing a re-branding effort with a new Website, new sales collateral, and new salespeople to keep the ball rolling. In addition, VIP is expanding the solution to include their San Diego location, which is a true testament to the success of the program, considering the amount of work that has to be performed to redesign current workflows and re-configure the print shop floor.

The effort is expected to be well worthwhile. Based on their experience at Irvine, Ken Dunn expected to see their investment returned in three years. Dunn explains that "based on how the Avanti and Xerox solution has helped us allocate resources and headcount, however, we believe we're going to see our investment returned in just over two years."

But on top of the return on investment, Xerox and Avanti have given VIP a strong presence in the Web-to-print marketplace and a serious leg up over their competition.

Benefits at a Glance

- Immediate elimination of 20 hours/week of redundant clerical effort

- Integration of back end systems, including job ordering, job ticketing, shipping, and billing

- Satisfied clients who prefer the self-serve nature of Web-based job submission and status checks

- Comprehensive job-centric data capture, enabling informed equipment, configuration, and operational decisions

- Enhanced customer-centric data capture, leading to an improved ability to meet client needs and, in turn, improved customer acquisition, retention, and loyalty

- Return on investment within two years

- Faster, more accurate billing processes, which accelerates time-to-payment by two weeks over the old process

Xerox equipment:

- One Xerox DocuTech™ 6180 Production Publisher, three Xerox DocuTech™ 6135 Production Publishers, two Xerox Nuvera™ 144 Production Systems, a Xerox DocuColor™ 7000 Digital Press, and a Xerox DocuColor™ 5000 Digital Press

Software:

- Avanti Graphic Arts Management System

- FreeFlow™ Web Services

- FreeFlow™ Process Manager

Feedback from the front lines.

"Repeat online orders take about 75% less time to process than they did traditionally and the job tickets created by the system ensure finishing is consistent since we can store production information about the job in the template."
 –Kevin Lite, Press Operator

"With all the ticketing already built into templates, it makes it much easier to batch jobs for production. Before, we had to manually ticket each job, release it, and change the stock as needed. Now, we can load one type of stock, release a queue, and only the jobs that are eligible will print automatically."
 –Terrence Birdsong, Press Operator

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For more information
visit http://www.partner.xerox.com/xeroxbusinesspartners

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