

A background image of a factory floor with various pieces of industrial machinery and equipment.

INTEGRATING TECHNOLOGY FOR BUSINESS GROWTH

THE CHALLENGE

For Keith Sullivan and Mandy Ward, the glass was both half-full and half-empty. Sull Graphics, the company they founded with their father in 1988, was seeing a steadily-increasing volume of work from their loyal customer base, and those customers were asking for a broader range of services. Sull had relied on a print MIS system to automate many parts of the workflow and allow them to meet deadlines, but the vendor of that system had been acquired and the new owners had stopped development.

"Our customers have always gotten our very best work, but producing it was much more costly and time-consuming than it needed to be," said Sullivan. "We were in danger of becoming mired in a process that couldn't adapt to our growing and changing business."

It was time for a change; Keith and Mandy wanted to make the right choice. Sull Graphics engaged an outside consultant to help analyze their process and workflow, identifying where automation could streamline production. They also needed to improve the quality of information available about each job – a need shared by virtually every department in the company.

The first priority was to reduce the number of costly touchpoints, or places in the process where staff intervention was necessary. One major area involved shop floor data, which was not always accurate, resulting in job costing errors that often affected profit margins. The sales team didn't have information readily available, resulting in calls to the customer service group and wasting the time of staff in both departments.



Based in Atlanta, Sull Graphics is a full-service print and marketing services provider with customers throughout the southeastern United States. It's a one-stop shop, offering creative design services, high-end static printing for branding and complex variable-data printing for one-to-one marketing and personalization.

Sull Graphics has established a solid reputation for precision, high quality work, coupled with responsive customer service. The award-winning company was founded in 1988.

The web-to-print system, which was handling more volume, was an isolated island of automation. Since it couldn't be integrated into Sull Graphics' existing print MIS system, staff had to rekey the information into the order management system. And because the web-to-print orders had not been properly estimated, each one required review before being invoiced. The resulting delay meant a corresponding delay in getting the invoice into the customer's hands. In addition to web-to-print orders, one administrator was tasked to create pro forma invoices and review cost information before the invoices could be sent to customers.

It wasn't unusual to see members of the sales and management teams on the production floor, making sure jobs were being done accurately and deadlines were met. "We knew there had to be a better way," said Sullivan, "and we needed to find it."

THE SOLUTION

Sull Graphics did its homework, conducting a thorough assessment of three print MIS systems. They concluded that Avanti Slingshot was the best solution to eliminate bottlenecks, minimize touchpoints and streamline operations across their entire business. Since rekeying web-to-print data was the weakest link, the first order of business was to eliminate that bottleneck.

With Avanti Slingshot, jobs generated by MarcomCentral, the web-to-print solution used by Sull Graphics, are seamlessly sent to Avanti Slingshot. Jobs that require estimating can also be converted into new orders without rekeying. That improvement alone saved the company as much as 15 hours each week in redundant clerical tasks, not to mention improvements in accuracy and efficiency.

Avanti Slingshot also streamlined invoicing, reducing errors in pro forma invoices by 90%. Sull Graphics' cash flow showed remarkable improvement, with invoices now issued as soon as the job is shipped. These improvements freed up even more administrative time, allowing staff to devote more focus to accounts payable and purchasing functions. This paved the way for additional cost savings through negotiated purchasing.

"People have the information they need at their fingertips. The CRM Job view saves me hours and hours of moaning and groaning from my CSRs every week."



Standardized job ticketing and production processes have given Sull Graphics the ability to take their already superlative work to the next level of quality. With direct access to the data on any given job's status as it moves through the shop, sales staff can devote more time to soliciting incremental business.

The previous system captured the standard data specific to each job – quantities, substrates, delivery information and the like. However, Avanti Slingshot aggregated job information for a particular customer all onto one screen, giving Sull Graphics a "big picture" understanding of each account. Now they can identify the profit margin of each customer, and spot trends in growing applications with higher margins.



Like most business owners, Keith wears many hats. With the wealth of information now available from Avanti Slingshot, he can spend more time managing and growing the business based on hard data. Since implementing Avanti Slingshot, Sull Graphics has moved to a new larger facility, added a new 40-inch press and expanded their direct mail capabilities.

THEIR FUTURE IS BRIGHT

After using Avanti Slingshot for about a year, Sull Graphics management decided to take the next step toward their long-term business goals. With the help of an Avanti workflow assessment, the company identified more areas where automation and information can support growth.

Having data that they could trust, Keith and his senior team now are focusing on new ways of automating their fulfillment operation and managing inventory. Another area on the agenda is expansion of Avanti Customer Relationship Management (CRM) which will support the sales function by providing valuable insight into what customers need, enabling quick reaction to customer requests and anticipation of future needs. CRM promises a richer array of sales tools that will combine historical production data from the core system with a complete record of customer contact and sales opportunities.

Seeing the benefits of integrating the MarcomCentral web-to-print systems with Avanti Slingshot has driven the next step of workflow automation. Direct integration between the Sull Graphics production workflow software, Kodak Prinergy, could eliminate even more touchpoints and enable the direct capture of precise data as a job moves through the shop.

THE CHALLENGES

- Human error and bottleneck caused by the need to re-enter data manually
- Substantial cost to manually share data between disparate systems by re-keying
- Process delays causing slow billing and collections
- Job costing data limited or unavailable resulting in estimates based on guesswork
- Limited fact-based decisions about new service offerings and/or equipment acquisition due to lack of data

THE SOLUTION

- Avanti Slingshot Print MIS system core modules
- Change orders
- Shop floor data collection
- Web-to-print integration
- Shipping integration with Fed-Ex and UPS

THE RESULTS

- All jobs – including large format and marketing services – estimated in a single system
- Improved margins based on a clear understanding of costs and profitability at the job level
- Elimination of 10-15 hours per week of clerical time to enable revenue growth without adding staff
- Accurate, automatic and fast invoicing improved cash flow substantially
- Decreased turnaround times that support an increase in volume from 400 to over 500 jobs per month without adding staff
- “Big picture” understanding of each account that identifies the profit margin of each customer, and spots trends in growing applications with higher margins

THE FUTURE

- Planned implementation of Avanti Slingshot CRM will provide direct access to customer data for sales reps, saving time for multiple departments
- Automated inventory management
- Continuous fact-based process improvements to the business
- Integration of Kodak Prinergy and Avanti Slingshot can increase data accuracy and reduce the need for staff intervention

“Our number one priority is the same as it’s been since day one, and that’s quality. We’ll continue shipping our very best work to our customers and, with Avanti Slingshot, we can do it more quickly, accurately and profitably.”

- Keith Sullivan, Owner/President, Sull Graphics

BENEFITS AT A GLANCE



A single system unifies all aspects of the business, including large format and marketing services



Accurate, automatic, fast invoicing improves cash flow



Clear understanding of profitability at both the job and customer levels



Implementation of rule-based processes increases velocity of jobs through the shop, and bolsters profitability



Increased monthly volume of jobs from 400 to over 500 without hiring new staff



Company leadership able to focus less on day-to-day operations, and devote time to growing the business and interacting with customers

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WE HAVE ANSWERS®

At Avanti, our goal is to help you deliver more jobs, in less time, with the confidence in knowing that every aspect of your shop is integrated into one powerful platform.

Award-winning, JDF-certified Avanti Slingshot allows for the sophistication required by today's Marketing Service Providers. The platform is able to manage multiple lines of business, handle large/grand format, digital and offset print, as well as mail and fulfillment workflows.

Connect islands of automation, eliminate breakpoints in your workflow, and get the information you want – when you want it, and where you want it – easily, with Avanti Slingshot.

From order entry through to production and billing, Avanti Slingshot enables you to work more efficiently, control your costs and move more jobs through the shop with ease.

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