

# What They Think!

*Market Intelligence for Printing and Publishing*

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## **A Culture of Accountability to Learning in Your Print Business**

*Learning is the experience of trying to do something without parental supervision. It is not watching a trainer do something and shaking your head that you understand. Holding your people accountable for learning activities is the most important part of improving user adoption of new tools in your print business.*

By Jennifer Matt

Every print business is being forced to learn new ways of doing business. There are no exceptions. I am fascinated by how an organization responds to the need to learn new ways of running their business. There are meetings (lots of them), there are discussions, often in a hierarchical setting (aka the boss is in the room), there is a lot of agreement, and head nodding. Then when nobody is watching, people go back to the way they are comfortable. This isn't an exception, it's the rule and in my experience there is rarely malicious intent behind this behavior. Everyone understands "intellectually" that the world is changing around them—they aren't stupid, they are carrying a super-computer in their pocket. The prefrontal cortex (the rational part of our brain) understands this and agrees that we all need to change (learn new ways of doing business).

Then when you go back to your desk, your press, your inbox, something else takes over. It's not the prefrontal cortex, it's the amygdala (the section of the brain that is responsible for detecting fear). You don't sit down at your desk and decide you're scared so you're not going to change. It's more subtle than that. Your unconscious starts to throw ideas into your head: "if this software does everything they've talked about, I'm no longer needed here." The fear center of your brain starts to go into overdrive to protect yourself.

I know this sounds a little too much like science lecture and not enough about "how the heck do I get my people to quickly learn, adapt, and thrive in this new business environment?" But here's the thing: unconscious fear is the number one challenge we run into when implementing software solutions at printers. The unconscious part is what makes it such a challenging foe. People might know they are scared but they sure as heck aren't going to admit it. So instead of facing the real problem (fear), people get really creative about finding other "more rational" things to be against:

1. This product doesn't do 100% of the things we need it to do; therefore we should keep shopping.
2. I can do estimates better than this software because I've been doing them for 25 years.
3. Customers want to talk to me; we have a relationship. They don't want to order online.
4. Our customer service team is our differentiator; they perform miracles everyday. Software can't replace them.
5. Our business is so dynamic we can't have a software-based scheduling solution.
6. I called several other printers who are using this software and they hate it.

The thing about it is that there is always a seed of truth in all these forms of "resistance" because they

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wouldn't be effective if they didn't have some truth to them. It is critical to understand as you guide your company through the changes we are all being forced to make; your response as a leader will determine if your business has a culture of accountability to learning. The crux of this is determined by the steps that are taken after the meetings where everyone was in agreement and everyone's prefrontal cortex understands the undeniable need to learn, adapt, and evolve.

One of the most important things you can do is to remove the need for your people to make a conscious decision everyday to do the hard work of learning new things. Why is learning new things hard for people? It requires you to be a beginner again—most of us aren't comfortable with not knowing, especially those people in your organization who have decades of experience and are used to being the "experts." Now you're asking them to put their hands on a software system that is brand new to them. They are going to feel dumb. They are going to feel insecure because they are professionals who are expected to have the answers.

Don't force them to make their own decisions each day about learning. Make the decisions for them. For example, if you're implementing a new Print MIS, do not tell the estimators to play around with the system and get used to it and then go to the vendor with questions. This is a really bad set of instructions that happens all the time in implementations. You just put these people into a position where they have to overcome their fear everyday with little direction by initiating contact with the software that might replace them. Not. Going. To. Happen.

Make it really easy. Treat them like a short-order cook rather than a person you're trying to encourage to cook for the very first time. Ask them to fry three eggs per day (aka create at least three real estimates a day in the new system). What this will do is get them focused on a single task rather than the paralyzing thought that their whole identity as an expert is under attack. You want the first things

you ask people to do to be easy. First impressions of new systems are important. Lowering the initial frustration level can be a very effective way to keep the amygdala under control. You also want to require them to tell you something they like about the system. This will break the "flaw finder" attitude that is typical when the amygdala is in charge. The people with the most fear are the most motivated to find all the reasons why this thing won't work.

You have to track the short order cook's activity and you have to do it publicly. Everyday you post, email, communicate how many estimates were created by each individual and that goes out to all the estimators, the vendor, and management. Many of you might cringe after reading that sentence. I know many people I've suggested it to have. They think it's petty, they think it's like giving a kid homework and then checking his work. It is. It is exactly that. And the amygdala is like a kid has taken over your brain so this might be the best possible path. Once people realize the tasks required for learning a new system are being tracked and communicated, then real accountability is achieved.

So many Print MIS solutions go live after they tracked who attended training. Attendance at training does not mean you learned anything. Learning happens when you (without parental supervision) try to do your job on the new system by yourself. No amount of training can learn for you.

Your organization has to continue to learn. I think the most important characteristic of every new hire is their ability to learn. The pace of change is not slowing down. Learning will always be a requirement of every workplace. You can help your people mitigate their fears by breaking down the learning into bite size pieces and then holding them accountable to daily targets. After an estimator has done fifty quotes in the new system; they are in a mental state to start becoming a part of the solution (e.g. making suggestions on how to optimize the new software). Before they have learning under their belt, they are mostly flaw finders.

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