PRINT MIS PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT: AVANTI SLINGSHOT®

BY: JENNIFER MATT

The selection of your Print MIS system is an important one; making the right decision requires you to take a rational approach to assess what is most important to your print business. Often print software decisions are made based on a binary approach to feature comparison; product X has more features than product Y. The problem with this approach is that features are not questions that can be answered by a simple yes or no. Each software company takes their own approach to solving the challenges of running a print business. Understanding the approach and finding alignment between solutions and your print business is a key factor in making the right Print MIS decision.

The features that stood out in the Avanti Slingshot solution are not exclusive features to Slingshot but the approach to the solutions caught our attention. Avanti Slingshot has the option of licensing a complete integrated warehouse management module. All Print MIS solutions have basic finished goods inventory features but most move to recommending a separate solution once you're looking for real "warehouse management." There is nothing wrong with an integrated solution; it's just easier and incurs less technical debt (the care and feeding of your technology stack) to have less solutions in the long run. Slingshot's approach to warehouse management system comes from the fact that key leaders of the company came from the warehouse management software space.

As more and more printers look to extend their value proposition beyond the printed page; fulfillment is a natural evolution. Avanti customers will have a smooth upgrade path that simple entails enabling and implementing the Slingshot warehouse management module. Compare that to a new 3rd party product that requires integration, implementation, and then separate care and feeding (technical debt that has to be paid by your already stretched technical resources). This is a great example of asking more than yes/no questions when you're purchasing Print MIS software. Do you support finished goods inventory? is the question that should start a whole conversation about how the vendor went about solving the challenge and what expertise they bring to the solution.

Avanti's warehouse management solutions includes advanced features like the ability to logically route the picker through the warehouse using zones and wave picks. The interesting part of an integrated warehouse management system that was built specifically for the print industry is that it specifically solves for the fact that the printer is both the manufacturer of much of what's held in inventory as well as the logistics / warehouse provider. Support for print production for replenishment is built right in, while a generic warehouse management won't make that assumption and likely won't solve it very elegantly.

Another area of growing complexity and need for automation is scheduling. Every printer has the challenge of optimizing their scheduling to deliver for their customers while optimizing equipment utilization. As more and more printers are diversifying (larger sets of diverse equipment), the need for software to do the "math" of scheduling is growing. Avanti took a familiar path to the scheduling challenge; a finite capacity scheduling module that in the right hands can produce optimal scheduling across many presses. The challenge is "in the right hands" requirement. There are lots of scheduling solutions out there and there are lots of people working around them because they are either too hard to configure or the people in charge of scheduling are reluctant to gain the comfort to let the computer do the math.

Avanti recognized this lack of adoption and built a second way to schedule that requires less of a drastic change to the way schedulers are doing their job today. Rather than continue to push and live with low feature adoption; Avanti created a quick scheduling/sequencing tool that matches closer to the way people are working today. By moving the way people are working today out of spreadsheets and back into Slingshot, Avanti is keeping Slingshot as the trusted system of record and preventing the instant "out of date" nature that happens when you export data from your Print MIS and then try to manage a dynamic print business with isolated and un-connected data.

Often the most optimal solution from a computer science standpoint is not operationally possible with the resources you have in your print business. So much software has been built in this industry without enough "ground truth" assessment of "can the people working in print businesses actually use this?" This is an excellent example where Avanti choose to support two alternatives to scheduling. If you have the people and the complex needs of finite capacity scheduling then use that, if you don't have the people to take that on - then use the sequencing approach which incrementally moves your people towards an approach to scheduling that is connected to the Print MIS and data-driven.

Probably the least favorite period in a print business' technology life is the implementation of a Print MIS. It is a really challenging time because you are being asked to run your business and simultaneously replace your system of record. Anything the Print MIS vendors can do to make this easier on printers goes a long way to improving the success rate and hopefully decreasing the amount of time that the print business is doing double duty (running their existing business and implementing a new Print MIS).

As much as all printers feel their print business is unique, there are commonalities across the industry. There are only so many printing presses, finishing equipment, paper stocks, etc. Avanti has invested in the continuous library building of virtually everything that goes into an initial Print MIS implementation. There is no reason to repeat the setup of a common press at every implementation, setup once and then re-use again and again. This is important because there is often a paralyzing sense of overwhelm when you consider a new Print MIS has no data in it. A library of common elements gives you a head start and moves the implementation along faster. It also is a great place to capture best practices. The is a good example of how critical it is for the implementation team (professional services) to be connected to the software development team. The implementation team is the eyes and ears of the software; they get to witness user's first impressions of the software.

When the communication flows from the implementation team to development; ideas like a library of templates, devices, stocks gets prioritized because software development isn't only about making new features. The software has to also consider the value to the customer of increasing the speed at which they can get up and running on the new system. The three aspects of Slingshot that we feel are strengths in the industry are; integrated warehouse management, multiple approaches to scheduling, and the on-going investment of libraries for expediting Slingshot implementations.

Editor Jennifer Matt is an industry expert focusing on how software continues to impact the business of print.

In preparing this article, the editor conducted original, in-depth research on Avanti's Slingshot Print MIS product. This Product Spotlight describes what the editors feel are the product's strengths in the marketplace. Avanti reviewed the final article for accuracy but had no editorial content.

www.avantisystems.com
1.800.482.2908
AskAvanti@avantisystems.com

avanti
WE HAVE ANSWERS®