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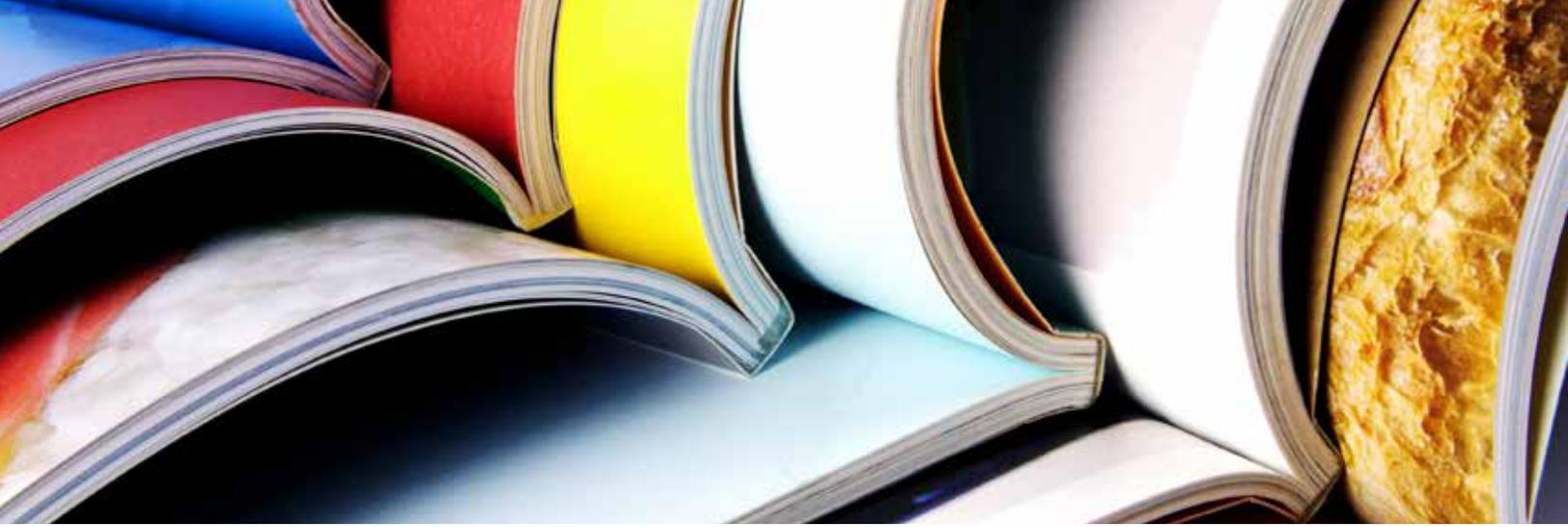
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WHY WEB TO PRINT IS A MUST HAVE TECHNOLOGY

By Howie Fenton



Traditionally, customer satisfaction was achieved by producing a high-quality product at a reasonable price while offering top-notch customer service. Unfortunately, that is not enough for many companies that are focusing more attention on the customer experience and supply chain management, which are also associated with a company's web-to-print portal. A surprising number of printing companies don't offer an online ordering portal or have not been successful in offering this service to their customers. This article's objective is to provide information for these types of companies, demonstrating the value of web-to-print software and offering practical suggestions and best practices for its implementation.

The Harvard Business Review identifies the customer experience as your customer's end-to-end journey from the moment they consider a purchase to the moment it is delivered. It extends beyond simply sales meetings or service calls to include all the interactions, from online estimates to emails about shipping and tracking information. It extends beyond the human touches (sales and customer service) to the automated interactions including on-line, mobile, billing and logistics.

One criterion used by companies in deciding which company to award the print procurement contract to is whether that company is willing to develop and optimize a customized supply chain process. The supply chain process adds automation to drive down costs, and includes special negotiation prices and an exclusive and secure web portal for ordering, reordering and customized ordering. Other advantages to companies may include:

- Reduction or elimination of inefficient internal processes
- Enhanced brand control due to the use of templates
- Customized materials based on approved templates (business cards, mailers, envelopes, business stationery, etc.)
- Reduction of inventory
- Reduction in administrative time

According to a study by Keypoint Intelligence / InfoTrends (Source: U.S. Production Software Investment Outlook, 2017):

- 44% of users own a commercial version web-to-print solution
- 11% use a home-grown web-to-print solution
- 17% do not own but are considering purchasing a web-to-print solution
- 27% do not own and don't plan on purchasing a web-to-print solution

That means that 55% offer web-to-print and 44% do not (it appears that the remaining 1% may not know or did not respond to this/these question(s)).



PROS AND CONS OF WEB-TO-PRINT

The benefits of web-to-print are powerful to both customers and service providers. It does not matter if it is a business-to-consumer order from Amazon or a business-to-business order for printing. Customers appreciate ordering any time day or night, the convenience of ordering online and from mobile devices, and the automatic responses informing them that files were received and products were shipped.

For customers, a web-to-print portal can enhance their experience. The ability to offer online estimates also improves the customer experience. Many print providers don't realize that waiting for estimates is a common complaint from customers. For over a decade, we have used surveys with assessments of in-plants and we consistently hear complaints about waiting for estimates. Fortunately, web-to-print can offer automated estimates based on standardized pricing.

As a service provider, web-to-print can automate manual steps in the print production process such as estimating, design, job ticketing, prepress and billing. The most common bottlenecks seen in our consulting assignments are front-end tasks (such as estimating, job ticketing and billing) and back-end tasks, such as finishing.

For example, in a recent study, it was estimated that a staff of 2.5 people could save up to 205 hours a year yielding an estimated value of \$67,000 by adding inline finishing to their digital press, which allowed for the saving of an estimated 347 hours a year — a value of approximately \$107K using the provided web-to-print solution. This study showed an estimated combined savings of almost \$175,000 which amounted to an approximate six-month payback (ROI) for the web-to-print software and inline finishing equipment. (Howie Fenton, Technical Report, "In-Plant Assessment / Feasibility Analysis of Insourcing", IMG, 2016)

There is also a feature that speeds up the production of stationary products such as business cards, letterhead and envelopes. Often referred to as a templated-based feature, it provides customers with templates of standardized products such as business cards that allow them to fill in their information and automatically see the PDF proof that they can approve immediately. This function also increases the value of the in-plant solution because it assists with maintaining a greater compliance with brand consistency for the organization.

Billing customers is another feature offered by web-to-print solutions. Most service providers allow customers to buy from credit cards or P Cards (purchase cards). For those in-plants that want to automatically bill customers through the corporate billing system, customized programming may be required for the web-to-print and MIS systems to communicate to send accurate billing information.

While the benefits of web-to-print software are significant, about 20% of users struggle with the implementation. In the Workflow Investment Survey, we divided the responses into leaders and laggards, and we discovered that 65% of leaders reported that web-to-print was their most worthwhile investment as opposed to 18% of the laggards. Since the same technology is available to everyone, the obvious question is, what do the leaders do better than the laggards that results in their overwhelming success?



HOW TO INCREASE SUCCESS OF WEB-TO-PRINT

From market research and experience it's recognized that not everyone succeeds in their first attempt with web-to-print. Previous articles and white papers for In-Plant Graphics magazine have touched on this topic. Here are some suggestions that may help improve your success with a web-to-print system.

1. Build a business requirements document

- Perform a needs analysis based on your customers and applications. Focus on the most important customers and those applications that would benefit the most from a web-to-print system. That should be at the top of your requirements document.
- Identify any bottlenecks and quality control issues and list that at the top of the requirements document.

2. Get the buy-in from staff and customers

- Without staff buy-in the staff may feel threatened and work to sabotage the effort. The more the staff are involved in the research, make site visits to other shops, and are allowed to provide feedback, the more likely the process will succeed.
- A lack of customer buy-in can sabotage the effort. Changing the way customers place their orders is a big deal. Try to find a small number that are willing to go through a beta test in which you request their feedback and then you act on their feedback. Often, they become your best customers.

3. Protect your investment

- It may cost a little more, but engage the supplier to include the installation and implementation of the software (especially if you are installing or integrating web-to-print software with your own company's servers).
- Include timelines and milestones.

4. Get it working fast or get rid of it

- The worst outcome, which we see all the time, is software that has been paid for that is not working. You have to be willing to focus for months to get this running and sold to customers.

5. Create a go-to-market strategy

- Have a plan in place to talk to your current and potential customers about the advantages of the new web-to-print system.

SUMMARY

Three final points to consider: online and mobile are associated with some of the most successful start-ups. The reports mentioned below show overwhelming evidence that online ordering is going to increase, and based on adoption rates and customer solutions there is evidence that good solutions exist and are being used.

Based on an article in the Harvard Business Review entitled “The Truth about Customer Experience,” there is a buzz in the industry about how leading companies are focusing on improving their customers’ experience. At first this was limited to Amazon and eBay, but today online ordering is crossing all boundaries. It does not matter if you’re ordering a ride from Uber, dinner from Grubhub, groceries from Amazon or business cards from VistaPrint. There is an undeniable appeal to order using mobile and online strategy.

There is strong evidence from a wide variety of market researchers that predicts that online purchasing will increase for both business-to-consumer and business-to-business applications. A new report from Forrester entitled “U.S. Online Retail Forecast: 2015 to 2020,” projects that U.S. shoppers will spend nearly \$460 billion online in 2017.

Another Forrester report (US B2B eCommerce Forecast: 2015 To 2020) predicts that the business-to-business market will grow to \$1 trillion — twice the size of the U.S. business-to-consumer eCommerce market by 2020.

According to Keypoint Intelligence/InfoTrends (U.S. Production Software Investment Outlook, InfoTrends 2017) more than half (55%) of printing companies own web-to-print software. According to Caslon (Survey of Software, 2017) the percentage of orders made using web-to-print software is predicted to grow from 27% in 2017 to 38% in 2018.

According to InfoTrends (U.S. Production Software Investment Outlook, InfoTrends 2017) the amount of print volume submitted through a web-to-print portal will grow 70% from 2017 to 2019 for commercial printers and 29% for in-plant printers.

For all print providers, whether a commercial printer or in-plants, a web-to-print system can offer a significant advantage to both the print shop and its customers — if implemented correctly.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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