

Inventing a new recipe for success

Eliot Harpertakes a knife (and fork) to the concept of workflow in a print factory, and finds the right ingredients to make it all work.

Workflow is hardly a foreign term to the printing industry. Today, it's hard to browse through an industry magazine or vendor web site without seeing "workflow" appearing in some incarnation. It really seems that we're spoilt for choice, with a smorgasbord of workflow solutions available from a host of different vendors and suppliers, all whipped up together like a multi-flavoured ice-cream, served with a ubiquitous JDF cherry on top.

Despite this abundance of workflow solutions, there's still much ambiguity in what the term "workflow" actually means. Many consider workflow to be some sort of curiously complex software used to prepare digital files for print, while others believe that workflow is an optional and somewhat unnecessary component of print production. The reality is that the workflow concept is far from complex, has a far broader reach than just print production, and applies to all printing businesses today. All printers have workflows and use them every day, many without even realising it.

Workflow is the very essence of providing print products and services. A helpful analogy is to compare the print industry with restaurants — some are independent, while others form part of a larger franchise network. These restaurants may vary in size, but they all serve a common

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audience and offer a similar product or service. The printing and finishing equipment are the ovens, pots, pans and utensils that we use to produce a product, while the ink, toner, paper and other consumables are the ingredients.

The key to running an efficient restaurant with a quality product and service lies within the recipe. A good recipe will make best use of the available equipment to prepare and cook the ingredients in a logical and efficient manner. The recipe is critical for the successful production of a quality product and the chef depends on it to deliver meals efficiently. In our industry, our recipe is workflow, the very process that we follow to create and produce products using our equipment and resources.

But our customers aren't patient. They're not willing to sit around making polite conversation while they polish off another bottle of the house red.

No, they want their food immediately. And they're not going to phone in and make reservations either. Customers are walking in off the street or even sending their order online, and they all want to be served quickly. The portions aren't a typical restaurant size either. Customers aren't ordering the family feast or picking at the all-you-can-eat buffet cart, they've gone straight for the degustation menu, ordering lots of small dishes that vary in ingredients and cooking style.



With all these orders flowing through the kitchen, recipes need to withstand customer demands. High quality products have to be produced in an efficient manner, while accommodating for special dietary requirements and other requests. Each recipe should eliminate every unnecessary intervention from chefs, which ultimately slow the process down.

If your production floor is often too reminiscent of a TV episode from *Gordon Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares*, then maybe it's time you took a closer look at your workflow. Try following the steps of a print job across your production floor, starting from the generation of the order, through to job creation or file preparation and on to print production, finishing and fulfilment. Count how many times the job is handled along the way. Is there opportunity to add solutions that automate job production and minimise the requirement for human intervention? Would it be helpful if you could connect the different stages across your workflow?

If the answer is yes, then you really need to take a closer look at available workflow solutions to build your recipe for success. Bon Appétit.

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