THE PROS AND CONS OF WEB-TO-PRINT
AND 7 STEPS TO ENSURE SUCCESS

by Howie Fenton

When web-to-print services were originally offered in e-commerce solutions, they were nothing more than curious novelties. Today, offering web-to-print services has become an essential part of an in-plant's arsenal. While the advantages are significant, there are challenges as well. In this article we will talk about both the advantages and challenges, and outline a strategy to help avoid the typical stumbling blocks.

The benefits of web-to-print are undeniable. Customers appreciate ordering any time day or night and the convenience of ordering online and from mobile devices. They also like the automatic responses that inform them that files were received and products were shipped. In-plants report increasing sales and making more money from those sales. During my tenure with the National Assocation of Printing Leadership (NAPL, now part of IdeaAlliance), I worked on the study, "***Web-to-Print: The Promise, the Potential and the Reality,***"[1] and our research revealed that 58% of respondents reported that sales increased and 55% reported that profitability increased after investing in web-to-print.

As a service provider, web-to-print can automate manual steps in the process such as estimating, design, job ticketing, prepress, and billing.

For customers, it can enhance their experience. The gold standard for online ordering is Amazon.com, which allows ordering at any time and provides greater feedback including emails with tracking information when the job ships. As a former manager of a 24-hour Kinko's, I can tell you that you'd be surprised to see how many customers come in at strange hours.

The ability to offer online estimates also improves the customer experience. Many print providers don't realize that having to wait for estimates is a common complaint from customers. For over a decade we have conducted surveys that include assessments of in-plants, and we consistently hear complaints about waiting for estimates. Web-to-print software eliminates these delays as well as the complaints.

There is a feature that eliminates designers' time to customize standardized products such as business cards, letterhead, and envelopes. Often referred to as a templated-based feature, it provides customers with templates of standardized products that allow them to fill in their information and automatically see the PDF proof that they can approve immediately. This also increases the value of the in-plant because it provides greater compliance with brand consistency for the parent organization.

[1]Andrew Paparozzi, Joseph V. Vincenzino. Web-to-Print: The Promise, the Potential, and the Reality. NAPL, 2013.

THE CHALLENGE OF WEB-TO-PRINT

While the benefits of web-to-print software are significant, about 20% of users struggle with the implementation. One of the most interesting findings from the **NAPL Workflow Investment Survey**[2] was that more than 140 companies said that web-to-print was their most worthwhile investment, while more than 40 companies reported it was their least worthwhile investment.

The NAPL study "Web-to-Print: The Promise, the Potential and the Reality," found 58% of respondents said that less than 5% of their customers were using it, 51% reported the clients were using only a limited number of features, and 22% reported integration and implementation issues.

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?

CASE HISTORIES

Kelly Hogg, the Director of Printing and Copying Services at the University of Virginia, purchased a web-to-print solution in 2008 with a hardware purchase. At the time of purchase, there was an IT employee on staff who started the implementation, but left the University shortly afterward. Then another person with IT experience was tasked with the project from a satellite facility. That person worked on the project for a short time but then left. Over the years, the vendor and other staff tried to get the system working but were unsuccessful, and the software sat unused until another hardware vendor agreed to assume the maintenance contract.

According to Hogg, "I am optimistic now. We have about 95% of the work done and expect to be able to start beta testing in about a month." When asked what he would do differently, he said, "You need to have people dedicated to get the software up and running. You need to have an internal champion and a motivated vendor. Having a vendor or an internal person work just a few hours a week doesn't cut it. If I had to do this again, knowing what I know now, I would negotiate with the vendor to include a 'Go Live' date and milestones in the contract. If those were missed for any reason we should be able to request a refund."

[2]Howie Fenton, Andrew Paparozzi. Workflow: Where, Why, and What Companies are Investing,. NAPL, 2014.

Rocky Reynolds, the supervisor of Reprographics/Mail at Citrus College, in Glendora, CA has worked through the challenges and ultimately reaped the benefits. Reynolds' first attempt with web-to-print was in 2002 but he struggled to get a PDF print driver to work. The second attempt was in 2006 when a new system was purchased, which also failed. The manufacturer agreed to refund the investment in the web-to-print solution and recommended another solution.

Reynolds vowed that this time he would do things right and decided to engage his top 25 customers, including his most demanding users, to discuss what he was trying to accomplish and get their feedback. He spoke with customers on the telephone or in person. During the following eleven months, he worked with these customers in a beta test in which he requested feedback and addressed their requests. Although requesting feedback from your toughest clients is challenging, the results more than pay for themselves as the biggest critics became the biggest fans of the in-plant.

As the beta testing ended, they promoted the new service with postcards that were included in every print order and mailed to all customers. The themes were: "It's coming," "It's almost here," and the third was, "It's here." To help customers understand how to use it, they created a brochure and a floor banner with the same infographic used in the brochure. Today, 80% of the jobs come in through the web-to-print portal, and work has increased 17%. For more information, Reynolds recounted the story in a webinar for _**In-Plant Graphics**_[3] in March 2015.

[3]Rocky Reynolds. "The Road to Web-to-Print." In-Plant Graphics Webinar (March 31, 2015).

SUMMARY

The advantages of web-to-print are undeniable. Customers appreciate that they can order at their convenience and monitor the progress more closely. Based on an article in the Harvard Business Review entitled *The Truth about Customer Experience*,[4] there is a buzz in the industry about how leading companies improve their customers' experience. As evidenced by Amazon and eBay, a fast, friendly, and easy web-to-print solution can improve your customers' experience.

Another advantage to web-to-print is that in-plants can streamline production in design, estimating, customer service, prepress, and billing. And lastly, the percentage of work over the web portal is predicted to grow. According to an article in WhaTheyThink.com by Barb Pellow from InfoTrends, "Over one-third of printing is currently being purchased via the web. By the end of 2017, this value is projected to approach 43%."

But not everyone succeeds in their first attempt when implementing web-to-print. We have surveyed, worked with, and interviewed dozens of people who struggled but eventually succeeded in their implementations, and we have identified six steps to help avoid the typical stumbling blocks.

1. Perform a "needs analysis" based on your top applications, bottlenecks, quality control issues, and predicted growth.

2. Research the options with staff, get their feedback and visit sites using the software.

3. Involve your customers in the process and get their feedback early and often.

4. When negotiating the contract, include implementation criteria and milestones, with a provision for a refund if it is not working within a reasonable timeframe.

5. Get it working or return it for a refund.

6. Beta test it with select customers, request feedback, and implement changes.

7. Create a go-to-market strategy.

[4] Alex Rawson, Ewan Duncan, Conor Jones. The Truth about Customer Experience, Harvard Business Review, 2013.

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