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Thinking the Box

*5 Pillars of a Successful
Management Workflow System*

outside

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Introduction

A business management system is the heartbeat of your print operations.

A reputable, best-in-class system needs to deliver beyond the standard features that customers come to expect to lead their competition and grow their share of market. Estimating, order management, inventory controls...these are not special modules. These are the price of entry, not innovation.

When identifying the system that best fits your current needs and strategic goals, printers need to go beyond the standard management information system (MIS) or traditional enterprise resource management (ERP) solution to maintain a competitive edge while focusing on profitability and growth. A management workflow system (MWS) is far more than a conventional solution, going beyond the basic feature set to providing an IT-based scalable infrastructure servicing all print segments with the flexibility to expand as required by the market needs.

To reimagine what your business management system can be, let's identify the 5 pillars of a top tier solution covering the critical pulse points that deliver an executable roadmap beyond the standard features to assist your print business in not only surviving but thriving.

- * **Accessibility:** device and data engagement
- * **Automation:** streamlined processes; reduction of manual touches and costs
- * **Costing:** pricing and estimating accuracy
- * **Innovation:** staying on the leading edge of development
- * **Integration:** modular workflows and third-party expansion capabilities

Tracking real costs and managing resources is often done in a series of fragmented, multi-system processes, not streamlined, automated workflows. It's not only inefficient but exhausting and impeding overall success.

“Follow along, don’t take risks, just keep your head down and work, and you’ll achieve your dreams.”

— Said no one who runs a business and wants to succeed.

Let's dig into the 5 pillars and uncover why a flexible, scalable MWS solution is imperative to running your print business strategically while tracking success and areas of improvement with real-time data and controls through your ecosystem.

Accessibility

The power of self-service: at-your-fingertips status, anytime from anywhere

True system accessibility demands that users can navigate, interact, and understand the information within the system, when they want it, in real-time. Having the ability to view, process and monitor the status of every job order with minimal effort from anywhere and any device through a cloud-based solution with web portal access is vital for any operation to remain competitive in a world where 'now' has become standard.

A self-service solution exceeds the traditional nine-to-five, maximizing all within a process that is simple and efficient and yet allows for all possible variations.

Through a managed portal with personalized user dashboards, access is at the forefront of productivity providing:

24/7 Availability

- * At-your-fingertips controls from any computer, tablet, or smartphone across all geographies.

Consistency

- * Providing accurate data to all users, real-time job status monitoring and shop floor metrics from a single system.

Collaboration

- * Make on the spot business decisions, and better load balance to maximize equipment and course correct as required.

Security

- * Authorized security access levels, and centralized backup to secure information across all platforms.

MWS accessibility measurably increases business efficiencies in this instant gratification world, thereby boosting user satisfaction by having all their information on hand in a way that is easy to find, modify and assess.

“What technology does is create new opportunities to do a job that customers want done.”

— Tim O'Reilly

Automation

Better steps, increased efficiency. Automation is hands down your operational game-changer.

Streamlining manual business processes through each step of the entire print ecosystem – customer acquisition, job submission, web-to-print, campaign management, prepress, production, finishing, delivery, and fulfillment - is the difference between keeping pace with customer demand and failing to be competitive.

The value of automation is quantifiable in your waste reduction, resource optimization and efficient job throughput.

“You don’t automate to get rid of the human. You automate to amplify the human.”

— Great Recruiters

Reduction of errors

- * Eliminate repetitive tasks and the manual re-keying of data that is eroding your profit margin. Every user will have access to the same system and process, boosting consistency

Boosting job volume

- * Maximize your shop floor. Quite simply, more jobs on press means more margin. Automating processes can increase job capacity and customer satisfaction for a faster turnaround time

Increasing employee productivity

- * Free up your staff to work on more profitable, more strategic endeavors

Optimization of production schedules

- * Prioritize job orders based on customer requirements, shop floor capacity planning and lead times.

Job status notifications

- * Visibility aids efficiency across the entire process as every job moves through production. Real time monitoring will alert users to changes in a work order giving them the ability to track and course correct to stay on track and on budget

Your customers are driven by cost, quick job turnaround and ease of ordering; their time pressured requirements demand immediate results and intuitive print options at their fingertips. Delivering a great product is simply no longer enough. You must become more efficient, automated, and able to deliver first time every time for your customers regardless of the size, complexity, or method of their print needs.

Having a best-in-class MWS to automate and track print workflows across the ecosystem – prepress, production and post-production - to increase visibility, productivity, and improve overall confidence in the quality and accuracy of your business-critical processes is the key to success.

Costing

Business efficiency and the bottom line

Understanding your total costs is vital for informed business decisions, helping to determine the profitability of your operations and how to set prices. But proper costing is complex, and many businesses aren't doing a good job of it.

In an industry where we pull in ~3% profit margins, that few of us really understand, and fail to factor it into our estimates and our total overall costs.

Estimating is a complex process that gathers specific job information along with the cost of materials, labor and equipment required to complete each print job. Every job has a unique set of people and processes that affect the overall cost of the deliverable. The reliability and accuracy of each quote requires an MWS system that understands the ins and outs of a company's operations, then provides the margins the company would like to achieve.

Any business management system can prepare a simple quote. That ability should be table stakes for any system you implement. However, traditional estimating software may not consider all the processes that are reflected in your overall costs, including:

- * **Raw materials** - paper, ink, substrates, plates, the materials required to build the product
- * **Labour rate** - cost of the employee needed to produce the actual work
- * **Machine rate** - the cost of the machine, die cutter, finisher - whatever is used to produce the final product
- * **Administrative overhead** - all wages outside of job production, utilities, rent, mortgage, upkeep, vehicles, leases, and phones

Whether you're a small or large operation, digital or offset, labels or signage, the dark art of estimating correctly to understand your overall costs and set the right pricing for the market and your bottom line can be overcome with some simple strategies:

Traditional Cost Plus Pricing:

- * The simple strategy of adding a markup to the cost of goods and services to arrive at a selling price. Under this approach, you add together the direct material cost, direct labor cost, and overhead costs for a product, and add to it a markup percentage to derive the price of the product.

“Watch the costs and the profits will take care of themselves”

— Andrew Carnegie

Market Driven Pricing

- * This method estimates the economic value of ecosystem goods or services that are bought and sold in markets. The market price method can be used to value changes in either the quantity or quality of a good or service.

There is a steep cost to not getting it right — understanding your costs and estimating accurately - for your company, your workers, and your customers. Knowing your true costs will not only assist in the implementation of process controls but the monitoring of profitable and non-profitable activity, idle capacity, resource usage and comparative data across your organization to identify areas of vulnerability.

Implementing the right MWS system provides an environment to make better decisions, ensuring competitive pricing while remaining profitable, being able to reinvest in R&D, reduce manufacturing costs, lower the overall cost of service, and ensure your overall business becomes more efficient.

Integration

Work with other industry leaders to be a best-in-class partner

Integration across business processes ensures your operation's functional information is in one place, ensuring consistency and making it easy to compare data and the impact of each pressure point on the business.

That's easier said than done.

In a perfect world, customers would only need what a single vendor offers in terms of equipment, software, consumables, service, and support.

This isn't a perfect world.

“If you don’t have a competitive advantage, don’t compete.”

— Jack Walsh

Before you invest in a print management system, look for a vendor who can provide support across multiple segments — labels, packaging, wide-format, commercial print, whilst covering marketing solutions and publishing through:

Application Programming Interface (API) Integration

- * Allows applications to talk to each other, expanding on your capabilities and investment across the ecosystem including ecommerce, web-to-print, pre-flighting, proofing, imposition, workflow mapping, and tax controls.

IT infrastructure support

- * Let your IT teams handle your network and your support needs by partnering with a partner who can bring you a functional MWS that is flexible and robust.
- * Engage in a partner who can do it for you in terms of support, providing functional data/metrics and modular management as your system grows.

The reality is there is no single-source expert in the print industry, but there are partners who have specific experience that you need to align with, so choose wisely with a vendor that has the capacity to expand their capabilities, and yours.

No MWS vendor can accomplish every function themselves, nor should they. Identify the functions you require that can be integrated into a flexible MWS system with the capacity to grow as you do to maximize your initial investment and bring on new opportunities as your solution expands. When you're doing your due diligence into a major software investment, do your API and IT support homework.

Innovation

Building workflows for future success

Customers expect a base level of capabilities to secure their business, but that isn't enough to stay competitive, let alone lead. That requires an advantage that showcases your business as a cutting-edge supplier who not only can deliver on current needs but one who understands the trends that can help your customers future requirements.

As established, the MWS is at the heart of your business. When looking to invest in or change your current system stop and make sure you're asking yourself the following during your evaluation:

- * Do they meet both your short-term needs and long-term strategic goals?
- * Do they have the infrastructure that delivers real-time information for better decision making?
- * Do they have seamless integration into third party systems offering new segments and expanded capabilities across the ecosystem?

- * Do they offer a modular infrastructure that expands as your business does based on your requirements, not forcing you to invest in something you're not yet ready for?
- * Have they continued to innovate into new segments and invest in their core?
- * Do they have the references that back up their capabilities and claims?

To remain competitive in our fast-changing environment, imitation is not innovation. It's about change and doing something in a different way than you did previously or implementing new tools to capitalize on new revenue streams and efficiencies. However, it's not about creating something new for the sake of it, but adding a solution that solves a problem, or improve a process. Having the right MWS partner is the cornerstone to being a leader in innovation.

“Innovation distinguishes between a leader and a follower.”

— Steve Jobs

The Pillar Takeaways

Think bigger: embracing efficiencies

Aspiring to meet only what is asked of your business will always deliver average results.

Thinking outside the box and engaging with partners who not only understand but can support the 5 pillars will put you ahead of your competition, building workflows for a better future. Traditional thinking will deliver standard results.

Establishing a relationship with an MWS vendor who demonstrates the ability to deliver beyond what is expected will become a trusted partner, not just a supplier, who will be just as committed to your success as theirs, and it will show in your process improvement, ability to scale and ultimately your bottom line.

Why printIQ?

To accomplish your immediate goals and set up your future success, you need to have the right system in place, one that will handle the entire workflow: a system that is automated, integrated, and accessible from any location 24/7. You need more than a traditional, rigid, and inflexible MIS to handle your workflow needs.

printIQ takes the best elements from the traditional MIS and ERP solutions and adds the accessibility, automation, costing, integration, and innovative tools that makes it a game-changing solution.

printIQ is a top-tier Management Workflow System (MWS) that exists within a cloud-based print ecosystem, flexible and scalable, meeting all 5 pillars for your workflow success.

Accessibility: device and data engagement

- * Cloud-based web portal with 24/7 user access to quote, pay, and track orders.
- * [IQ Plus Approve](#) provides a logical and easy to use framework for Proofs initiated from the production workflow and delivered to customers through the customer portal.
- * Job Track identifies milestones as the job travels through the quoting, production, and shipping lifecycle, providing a plethora of information, and reporting gains. It is delivered in a slick interface that provides a handy and simple communication tool that can be used by sales staff, account managers and customers

Automation: streamlined processes; reduction of manual touches and costs

- * printIQ is all about simplifying the rules and implementing process discipline, getting your customers and business systems to do the work for you and allowing technology, your silent business partner, to make you money every step of the way.
- * printIQ delivers the artwork and job meta data via the [IQconnect-Automate](#) module, which in turn integrates with the automation software, commencing operations such as: preflight, proofing, RIP and email workflows, with data passing back to printIQ to keep production boards updated. Communication between the systems is taken care of via APIs

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Costing: pricing and estimating accuracy

- * [Quote Intelligence](#) differs from traditional estimating software in that it understands the entire production process so it will map out all possible alternatives for the job to pass through the factory. This is done by integrating all your business rules within the pricing logic engine, with all the pricing rules based on your component inputs including labor, machines, and materials. The simplified quoting process then adds a layer of control so that those with little or no experience can produce a detailed quote whilst ensuring that they can only quote what you can produce. The quote is then linked to the file upload, job bag and all production, inventory, and shipping details.

Innovation: staying on the leading edge of development

- * [printIQ](#) is made up of 8 core modules that create a seamless, end to end estimating, ordering and production workflow encompassing everything needed for your future success in print. The printIQ team

recognize that while you may not need a certain capability now, chances are you will in the future. That's why they offer the flexibility of a modular solution, that can grow as your infrastructure requires it.

Integration: modular workflows and third-party expansion capabilities

- * printIQ integrates directly with an array of cloud-based third-party applications including, Enfocus, Esko, Infigo, Tilia Labs, Xero, XMPie and Zapier as well as shipping integration with EasyPost, FedEx & UPS!
- * [The IQconnect-API](#) module is a series of comprehensive API's that can expose many of the workflows in printIQ allowing you to produce your own custom printIQ integrations. It can extend your product offering beyond your own factory walls and into the plants of other printIQ users, connect directly with third party web applications or provide self contained widgets that allow you all the features of the printIQ simplified ordering process directly on your SEO website.

“If you always do what you always did, you will always get what you always got.”

— Albert Einstein

About printIQ

IQ is a multinational group of companies employing more than 50 staff members in 5 countries. With product, sales, support and development staff in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the USA.

In a time when print management software needs to keep up with the changing market, very few providers have an active R&D program in place. Most are offshore or working through a distributor. In contrast, printIQ is focused on the future of print, in all its facets, backing it up with an in-house development team who are accessible and focused on delivering customizations to the core product.

When combining a comprehensive off the shelf MWS with print industry experts and software development capabilities, the result of our dedicated solutions is exceptional results with a healthy return on your investment.

printIQ Far more than just an MIS.



Barb Willans

Barb Willans, Principal at Benchmarking Communications, has more than 20 years of experience in print and imaging technologies having provided services for industry leaders including Creo, Kodak, EFI, Ricoh, printIQ and others developing and executing marketing strategies that provide results.