

Workarounds

Software tools and efficient workflow systems are essential to get the most of any digital printing investment. *David Pittman* details

In today's world, any tool or system that helps you extract every little bit of value out of your printing capacity is welcome to help converters maximise their throughput, output and revenue potential.

This starts at the beginning, when jobs arrive with a converter before being processed and moved through the business. Gershon Alon, HP Indigo's global manager of workflow solutions and PrintOS, identifies some of the main issues as being an increasing number of jobs that require more human attention, the need for communication with the end customer regarding job acceptance and job tracking, and the variety of jobs, whether templated or custom, and having long or very short run lengths.

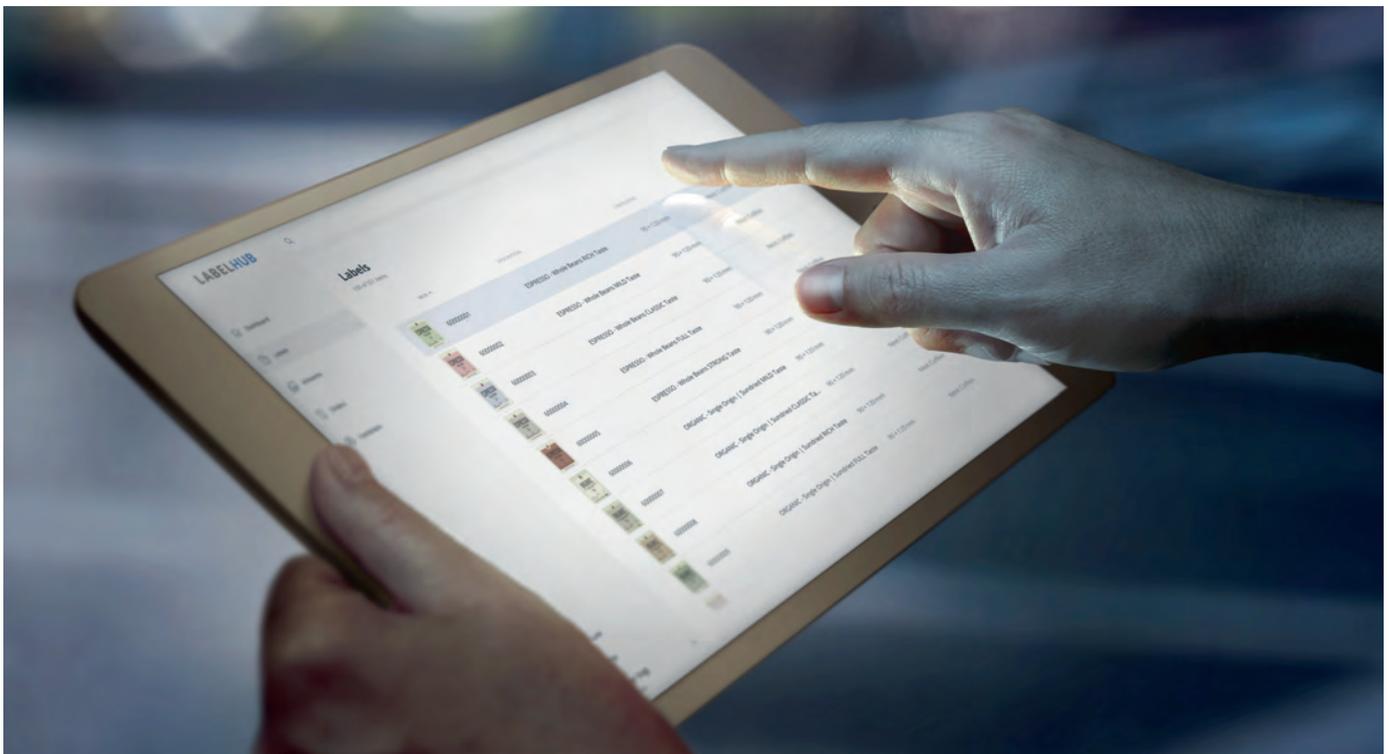
He further notes that 90% of jobs need to be modified and edited to be prepared for print, whilst there are difficulties associated with labour shortages and being able to recruit and train employees.

To tackle some of these issues, HP PrintOS is offered as a print production operating system with web-based and mobile apps to help printers 'get more out of your presses' by simplifying and automating

production. The scope of this software covers every aspect of production, such as monitoring performance, managing colour, supplies and more. Site Flow, for instance, is an end-to-end production management system designed for achieving zero-touch automation. It reduces bottlenecks, touchpoints and labour costs, whilst being device and product independent. Integration Hub meanwhile is a portal for technical information on how to integrate with HP Indigo devices and achieve cross-vendor automation. In terms of automating colour, Color Beat automates Fogra colour certification for new-generation HP Indigo presses, including the 100K, 15K, 12000, 25K and 35K models.

To fully leverage such capability, smart presses are required with in-built technology that can monitor and report on-press performance, plus have the ability to communicate with other smart devices.

Mr Alon goes on, 'The next step is the ability to integrate with the environments and reach automation. HP Indigo partner solutions are integrated through open APIs. Once optimised for digital with HP PrintOS, the final step for digital transformation is end-to-end production ▶



LabelHub is a Cloud-based Software as a Service, which simplifies and automates the label management process in a user-friendly way



Prinergy Workflow users can offer their customers a direct online portal connection between the creative packaging design process and the production workflow

management from order submission to shipping. With the growth of e-commerce more labels and packaging jobs are ordered online and submitted automatically, so converters need more scalable and sophisticated tools.'

The aforementioned PrintOS Integration Hub can achieve this by bringing together multiple systems spanning submission, printing, finishing and fulfilment, through to shipping and tracking.

The Escada corrugator control system and end-to-end Corrugated Packaging Suite from eProductivity Software (ePS), as well as its Auto-Count 4D data collection point system, all help box makers maximise their output. Escada offers flexible and modular tools that run a corrugator at the fastest speeds possible, while increasing quality; with Corrugated Packaging Suite built specifically to help businesses adapt, change and grow for the future. This is achieved by optimising corrugator line speeds and quality with integrated closed loop control systems; providing total visibility on roll stock; corrugation and plant scheduling tools; and advanced estimating and job management. Auto-Count 4D automatically collects accurate and up-to-the minute production data including counts, press status, speed and other critical information, directly from equipment.

Speed, cost, quality and flexibility are just some of the factors that brought MIS expert Cerm and LabelHub together, with their integration claimed to simplify and automate label management. Cerm creates smart MIS software targeted at improving productivity and, 'LabelHub is developed specifically to suit modern-day label printing,' according to the company's CEO Peter Vogt. 'It is Cloud-based Software as a Service (SaaS), which simplifies and automates the label management process in a user-friendly way. The online platform is tailored for digital label

and flexible packaging manufacturers and offers a unique combination of pre-press automation and a customer-facing web portal. Implementation and organisational adoption of the system is simple, easy and cost-effective.'

Mr Vogt goes on, 'In an increasingly competitive market with growing demand for fast and seamless on-demand delivery there are many challenges for label converters. Sustainability, automation, the shift to e-commerce, labour shortages, etc. But when it comes to managing client orders and processing them through the business, there are two main challenges: the ability to handle the increasing number of jobs and artworks in a fast, secure and cost-effective way; and how to move current manual workflows into digitised and automated

workflows in a simple and uncomplicated way.'

The Cerm-LabelHub integration builds on the companies' respective expertise and allows label and packaging printers to automate their 1-up pre-press workflow, eradicating manual work and associated error margins. Upon product creation in the Cerm MIS software, a pre-press job JDF with a custom extension is written and located into a hotfolder. The LabelHub platform picks up this created JDF and reads all job and associated product information before executing a series of pre-press tasks – preflighting, step and repeat, etc. The output, a 1-up product .pdf and thumbnail, is placed once again into a hotfolder that's monitored by the Cerm MIS and automatically moved to the appropriate product folder structure.

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European printing group Interket is now taking advantage of this capability, and Klaas van Tuil, who works in repro at Interket in The Netherlands, says, 'By using the Cerm-LabelHub software integration we are able to automate 90% of our digital label and flexible packaging jobs. Where we used to manually create the files for our digital printing presses, this is now done automatically. We simply upload the artwork and LabelHub does the rest.'

This will contribute to tackling one of the main challenges confirmed by Giuliano Bianchet, vice president of sales, EAMER at Kodak, which is meeting increasingly short turnaround requirements of packaging and label customers, as well as brand owners. 'Orders received by the converter must be prepared for printing and subsequent processing as quickly as possible. Therefore, a workflow solution should provide advanced, smooth file processing, enable short lead times and support efficient collaboration with customers/brand owners and handling of approval cycles.'

'Another challenge is the trend towards smaller packaging units, which reflects the steady rise in the number of small and one-person households. Printers are also faced with needing to produce a wider variety of packaging due to more differentiated consumer demand. For converters, this means having to produce a growing number of packaging variants and smaller batch sizes.

'Further challenges arise from increasing costs and supply bottlenecks of raw materials, substrates and energy. This results in the need to make the best possible use of expensive packaging substrates and to keep the consumption of materials and energy as low as possible.'

In response to such changes in the market, and more, Kodak has introduced the Cloud-based Prinergy On Demand platform which offers: 99.9% uptime, for guaranteed reliability and optimised performance; protection for Kodak customers against cyber-attacks through secure, redundant and real-time security monitoring; backups distributed across

several data centers to ensure maximum security, disaster recovery and business continuity; flexibility and scalability for companies of any size; elimination of costly IT infrastructures required for hardware upgrades or changeovers; and an always-on IT infrastructure.

Prinergy Workflow users can also offer their customers a direct online portal connection between the creative packaging design process and the production workflow with Kodak Insite Creative Workflow. This helps handling complex packaging design, proofing and approval processes faster and more efficiently, the company states.

Kodak Prinergy Tools allows pre-press professionals to inspect, correct and trap packaging artwork directly within Adobe Illustrator software. By optimising files as they enter the production workflow, Prinergy Tools speeds up cycle times and helps ensure high-quality output.

Pandora Step and Repeat software can then simplify the creation of complex, print-ready packaging layouts. In addition, PLA software is available to automate the creation of packaging layouts.

Another important trend in packaging is extended colour gamut (ECG) printing, also known as multicolour or fixed colour palette printing. 'ECG offers numerous advantages, including reduced press downtime and faster job changeovers, faster make-readies and increased press utilisation, ink savings, and reduced costs,' notes Mr Bianchet. 'Kodak enables ECG implementation with Spotless, software which replaces spot colors with accurate four-, five-, six- or seven-colour process recipes.'

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