

New Opportunities for Digital Print with Web-to-Print Solutions

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Abstract

New opportunities with web to print applications: in digital print fast turnaround time is very important. Different web to print solutions help to reach this goal by handling requests, offers, job submission and billing via the internet. Additionally some of these applications offer a lot of functionality to reach higher customer loyalty e.g. by template services or complete new applications e.g. create online or offline consumer applications for postcards, albums or calendars with pictures taken with digital cameras. Features of different solutions and their value for digital print providers will be explained.

In Digital Printing time to market is one of the most important things! Web-to-Print is one possibility to achieve it. During the last years web applications gained more and more importance. What can they offer today? Different approaches are available:

- An **order management tool** for automated fulfillment of static, short-run, and versioned print jobs. In simplest terms, the web-to-print application allows a print provider to use a personalized web site for accepting orders from his customers.
- Fast and convenient **job submission**: It can be used instead of file submission on an ftp site or by CDs via mail or courier services.
- **Reordering** of jobs: By having the customer's job and job information readily available, it makes it easy for customers to reorder and submit jobs. The printer now has a good chance of getting the repeat business from this customer and can even deliver additional services such as fulfillment.
- **Templating systems** which allow the customer to use templates for repeating jobs which have to be printed in different versions. The customer or his distributors or employees can create individual documents according to the layout given by the template.

Challenges for the Print Service Provider

It is now up to the print service provider to find a solution which fits to his requirements and to implement it. The concern of a printer who invests into web-to-print applications is to get a web-driven workflow up to speed in an efficient timeframe. Specifically the intend can be:

- Create an integrated, collaborative workflow to deliver short-run, versioned, and quick turnaround applications at low cost and high quality

- Expand their capabilities or leapfrog their competition and start a higher value-add digital business
- Collaborate and interact more efficiently and profitably with his customers
- Generate new high-value applications (e.g. personalization, customization, versioning, and/or full variable data printing), increasing customer loyalty and satisfaction
- Decrease time-to-market
- Increases productivity, minimize downtime and reduce costs

From Simple Job Submission to a Fully Integrated Online Templating Workflow

Web-to print solutions can address very different needs, but in any case a very important part of a web-to-print tool is the window to the outside: A branded storefront web site (one web site for each company or group) for achieving efficient communication with customers. Using the customers or an adequate branding increases customer satisfaction and market place due to higher identification. Branded storefront means a pre-structured web site that supports shopping cart capabilities (select and purchase) where the site can be configured to include the customer's logo, images, brand, business rules, and capabilities – individually for each customer or customer groups.

For reordering of jobs shopping cart functionality is required: an on-line catalog system that provides a centralized repository of documents, forms and files that may be placed at the user's fingertips for easy ordering. Jobs shall be searchable by users. Access should be assigned based on user groups and assigned categories within the catalog. Specific users can be given rights to add or remove documents to the online catalog.

A catalog function enables the customer to reorder jobs. A shopping cart functionality is important, because it is a tool customers are accustomed to using on the Internet. It makes it easy for users to experience the power of online print ordering by providing a simple storefront and shopping cart user interface. A long-lasting relationship and higher profit for customer and printer are the targeted result. The printer becomes a document service provider.

Job submission via web reduces the time to start a print job. No mail or courier service is required. The job is uploaded by the customer and the responsible person at the print provider gets automatically an email which informs him. Depending on the format of the job a conversion to PDF can in some applications be done on-the-fly. The

upload of native files is a very convenient service for customers who are not very familiar with PDF/job generation for print – e.g. office and corporate application user.

To reduce errors and miscommunication with the customer an integrated job ticket that let the print provider configure the print ticket to reflect the capabilities of the services he offers in his print center is very helpful. So the customer can only order what the printer – formats, substrates, finishing etc., can fulfill and errors by transferring info from the customer to the printer are eliminated.

Some Web-to-print solutions are workflow system-integrated solution designed for web-job submission and ordering only. Others also support versioning of cataloged documents. This is an ideal solution for commercial printers that want to offer a wide range of web-to-print services to numerous clients.

A template-driven variable document feature that provides an integrated facility for creating templates (from native application files converted to PDF) and managing variable data print items like business cards, stationery and letterhead, as well as more complex items like sell sheets and advertising material can generate more orders and higher customer loyalty. The print shop can publish standard business forms via their online catalog.

Some solutions require custom integration into a customer's Web site. These are ideal solutions for high-end marketing applications that require significant versioning and design controls. A fully integrated solution with a custom store front or integrated into a customer web site can of course cost significantly more.

A very sophisticated feature is a pricing engine for automated pricing. It will be configured to match the printer's production equipment, consumables and user community.

It allows generating automatic price quotes for users based on the job submission and individual job settings like finishing.

The pricing can be calculated especially for an individual user based on their assigned facility and the price group associated with that facility. Prices can be updated easily. Quotes and additional charges can be updated by the print provider and mailed back to the print buyer for approval.

Ordering with credit card invoicing improves the "time to cash" and makes it more secure for the print provider. The term, time to cash, refers to how long it takes someone who has provided a service to get paid for

that service. When print buyers pay online via credit card, the transaction is processed immediately. Compared to a typical print transaction that involves invoicing and check processing, this is very fast. In the credit card scenario, time to cash is certainly improved over traditional invoicing.

Server or ASP Solutions?

Many web-to-print solutions are available in two configurations: as a server solution installed at the print provider or as an ASP (application service provider) configuration that is hosted on a third-party's system. In a server configuration the printer buys the software and installs it according to his needs and supports it with his own IT power. He is independent of 3rd parties. In an ASP configuration the printer pays a monthly subscription to use the services installed at a 3rd party server center. For the end customer no differences are visible, the services are the same. It is the choice of the print provider. Does he have a strong IT infrastructure in place and feels comfortable about supporting it or does he prefer to focus on his print business? In an ASP configuration the printer and his customers have usually web access to the hosted site 24x7 – except for standard maintenance – in a server configuration this is very much depending on the capabilities of the IT department. Another question is, does the printer already know how much storage he needs or does he want to grow his business step by step. In a server solution the storage is limited by the printer's server capacity. In an ASP solution he can rent additional storage on the fly (usually by a call) according to his needs.

It is a challenge for the print provider to select the right tool which brings most value to his business. Companies like NexPress offer consultancy to find the best solutions.

Biography

Sabine Roob has a master's degree as an engineer for printing technologies. Since 1985 she worked for Dr. Hell, Linotype-Hell, Heidelberger Druckmaschinen and NexPress in different jobs, mainly as Vice President Product Management for workflow products and Chief Engineer for Print Solutions and Services at NexPress. Since June 2004 she is responsible for Customer Development in the European region at Nexpress GmbH, Kiel, which includes the European demo centers and customer trainings.