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Web-To-Print Backgrounder

Improving Customer Communication and Prepress Department Efficiency with an Online Job Submission, Preflighting & Proofing Solution

Current Job Processing

A quality prepress operation is essential to the success of most printers in today's market. However, while the prepress department provides a valuable service, it can also be an expensive department to maintain and staff. Increasing labor costs, ongoing training requirements and pricey equipment and software all contribute to tip the scales from profit center to (essential) cost center.

Compounding the problem is the fact that today's print market is moving towards faster turn-around, shorter run lengths and lower prices; all of which tend to squeeze a printers' already tight profit margin. So how does today's printer tip the prepress scale back to profitability? One possible avenue is automation of the job submission process.

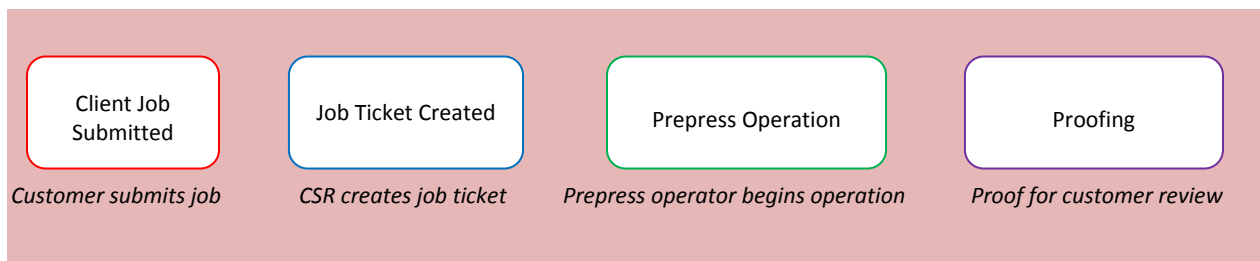
If you think about it, just getting a job into the print shop typically requires an abundance of interaction between the customer and the printing staff. The proofing process alone can sap the profit out of low-margin work. But what if this part of the process could be automated and then coupled with the prepress production system, limiting the amount of human interaction and getting to the final product faster?

If the system architecture is open, a properly programmed and configured online job submission system could greatly enhance the prepress operation and significantly reduce costs. Clients could submit their jobs on their own schedule without the need for direct operator intervention. Since the system is open, it could extend the reach of the prepress workflow, regardless of the manufacturer. And, if the workflow is capable of generating Raster PDF files, clients can enjoy the additional convenience of on-line soft proofing.

So, what would a system like this look like and what interactions could it remove from the process? To answer this, we should first examine a traditional approach and benchmark those steps.

Prepress Operation Traditional Method

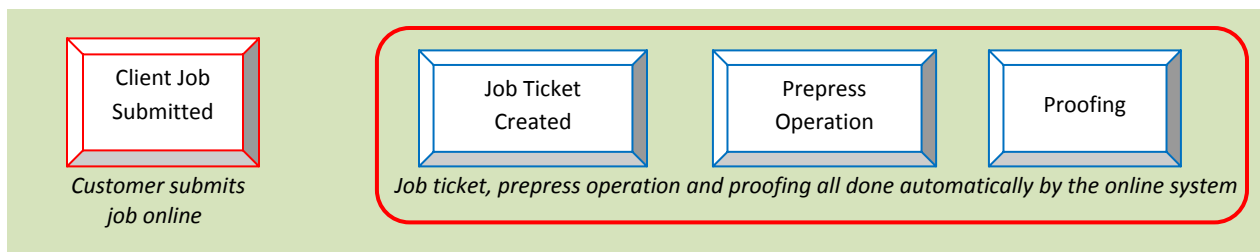
In a typical prepress operation, jobs are submitted by the client on some form of media or, through an upload to an FTP site. The client typically works with a customer service representative (CSR) or account manager who details the specifics of the request and creates the job ticket used throughout the printing process. The job and ticket are given to the prepress department and the prepress operator begins working through the job. This process may include checking the job for omissions and errors, often referred to as pre-flighting. Depending on the tools available, this could be a manual process or semi-automated. If any problems are noted, the issue is then discussed with the client. If not, the job may move as far along as the proofing step.



In the above example, there may already be three or four individuals involved in the process: the client, the account manager, and/or a CSR and the prepress operator. If hard copy proofing is involved, it may require a delivery driver, or at the very least, another visit to - or by the client.

Prepress Operation with Online Job Submission, Preflighting & Proofing Solution

With an automated job submission and proofing solution, the same steps occur; but automation moves the process without so much need for human intervention.



Instead, the system accepts the job, notifies the client that it has been received, creates a job ticket, pre-flights the file, creates a soft proof, and notifies the client that the proof is available for viewing on-line. Since the system handles so much of the routine interaction, the CSR and prepress operator are free to handle “exceptions” that do not fit the automated solution requirements.

Carrying the scenario further into the production process, the client can approve the soft proof online and the system will then automatically release the job into the prepress stream, notifying the prepress department of the job’s approval.

Job Processing with Web-to-Print Solution

Xitron PRINTERnet

Realizing the challenge faced by our customers, Xitron developed an online job submission, preflighting and proofing solution called PRINTERnet to provide a productive, affordable solution for printers looking to automate their systems.

PRINTERnet establishes a stronger link between printers and their clients. Job submission is easier, faster and automated. The system accepts jobs, preflights them and delivers a status report to the client. Once a job passes preflight, a rasterized soft proof is automatically sent to the client. Because it is so automated, PRINTERnet is able to accommodate job submission 24 hours a day!

Using PRINTERnet is very simple. Clients access PRINTERnet through a standard web browser. The client logs into PRINTERnet, clicking a link to submit their file. After uploading, a basic job ticket appears and the client completes the information. Since the job ticket is completely customizable, printers can obtain the information they feel is most important in accepting a job for production.

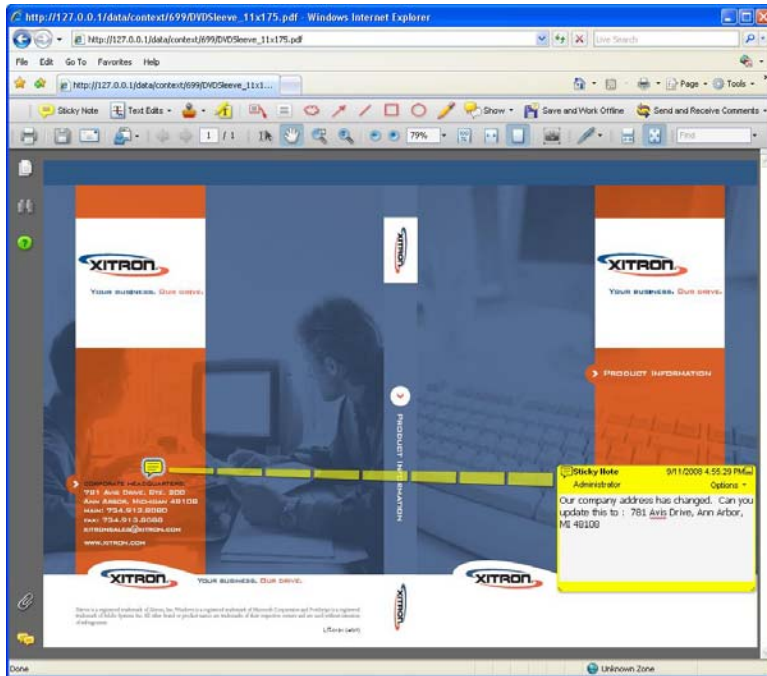
The screenshot shows the 'Edit Job Ticket' form in a web browser. The form is titled 'Job Ticket Form' and contains the following fields and options:

- Job Name: [Text input]
- File Type: PDF (dropdown)
- Number of copies: 5000 (text input)
- Binding Style: Cut Sheets (dropdown)
- Document size: PostCard (dropdown)
- Width: [Text input] inches (dropdown)
- Height: [Text input] inches (dropdown)
- Colors Used: CMYK (dropdown)
- Type of Printing: Offset (dropdown)
- Paper Stock: House White (dropdown)
- Due Date: 10/2/2008 (text input)
- Type of Proof: Online (dropdown)
- 2-Sided printing:
- List spot colors: [Text input]
- Shipping/Special Instructions: [Text area]

At the bottom of the form, there is a 'Save Job Ticket' button. A sidebar on the right contains links for 'Jobs', 'Resources', and 'Settings'.

Easy to complete, customizable job tickets are filled out by the customer when the jobs are submitted.

When submitting a PDF file, PRINTERnet's integrated preflighting library automatically preflights the file according to the printer's standards. If the file passes, PRINTERnet submits the file to the soft proofing stage. There, the workflow creates a rasterized PDF while PRINTERnet emails a link to the client. By clicking the link, the client is able to review the soft proof. PRINTERnet supports Acrobat annotation, which means the client can make notes on the file and send those directly back to the prepress department for modification or correction.



Proofed files may be annotated by the client to provide additional feedback for the Prepress Department.

Email notifications between PRINTERnet, the client, and the prepress department keep everyone updated on the status of the job as it migrates through the system. PRINTERnet completely streamlines and organizes the entire communication process, which makes the prepress department much more productive.

Job Steps Utilizing PRINTERnet

Step	Description
Job submission	Print-buyers submit files from a Web browser
Job Ticketing	The print buyer fills out a customizable job ticket.
Preflighting	The automated preflight fixes common problems and sends the print buyer a report of any problems.
Soft-Proof	After passing preflight, the system requests and delivers a soft-proof from the print-production RIP.
Proof Annotation	The print buyer may mark up the soft-proof with specific directions for the prepress department
Notification	PRINTERnet notifies client and printer at critical stages.
Communication	Any email correspondence is saved with the job.
Job Approval	The client's approval of the job is transmitted to prepress. The job, already on hold in the production workflow, awaits release to final output.

While a quality prepress operation is essential to the success of most printers in today's market, that operation must be cost effective, providing profit with minimal cost or investment. By automating one of the most labor intensive facets of prepress production, PRINTERnet helps provide an advantage many printers seek. Limiting the amount of human intervention in the job submission process, PRINTERnet can easily save several thousand dollars that will go right to the bottom line.

PRINTERnet Summary of Capabilities

PRINTERnet solutions include a wide array of features and capabilities to support and enhance a printer's prepress department activities including:

Automatic Job Ticketing

PRINTERnet provides a simple user interface where basic job ticket information is entered by the client. This information is then submitted along with the job to your CSR or prepress department.

Integrated Preflight

Automated preflight, based on industry standard Enfocus PitStop library, is performed automatically by PRINTERnet. A preflight report is generated and emailed back to the client. If the file fails preflight, your customer will be able to see where the errors occurred, make corrections and submit an updated file.

Automated Notifications

Automated email notifications may be setup so customers and prepress departments are updated with the progress of the job as it goes through PRINTERnet. The notifications help to keep the job flowing with minimal intervention of your CSR or prepress department.

Workflow Integration

PRINTERnet is designed to integrate with Xitron's Navigator GPS and Xenith workflow solutions. In addition to Xitron's own workflow solutions, PRINTERnet will integrate with most of the popular workflow solutions on the market today.

Expandable

PRINTERnet solutions include the ability for up to four (4) concurrent users to be submitting and proofing jobs online. As your needs expand and more clients are submitting and proofing jobs online, you can increase your capacity to accept more simultaneous online users.

Integrated PDF Option

Most users will submit PDF files, however, if you have clients who submit PostScript files, an integrated PDF Creator option may be added to PRINTERnet that will accept the PostScript and create a Certified PDF.

Frequently Asked Questions About PRINTERnet

Q: Will I need a special internet connection for PRINTERnet?

A: The PRINTERnet platform requires a “static” IP address to the internet. A static IP address is one which is not subject to change and provides a specific path to the PRINTERnet platform. Most business class internet services offer static IP address capabilities. The Printer will need to contact their internet service provider to obtain a static IP address before any installation or training may begin. Depending on the internet service provider, this may take anywhere from 4-5 days to a few weeks.

Q: What are the operating system requirements for a PRINTERnet server?

A: PRINTERnet requires Windows XP Professional.

Q: What are the server platform requirements for RIP Manager?

A: PRINTERnet platform requirements vary according to the volume of work. Xitron provides a standard configuration with a 2 GHZ, Core 2 processor with 2 GB RAM, 160+ GB disk drive, CD/DVD ROM drive and an LCD display.

Q: Does PRINTERnet replace my existing RIP or workflow?

A: NO. PRINTERnet enhances an existing RIP or workflow but does not replace these applications. While PRINTERnet has some of the tools which may also be found in a workflow such as the preflighting capabilities, PRINTERnet does not provide final RIP connectivity to drive any output devices.

For Xitron Navigator *Elite* workflow users, PRINTERnet is offered as an optional module that utilizes the existing capabilities of the workflow. By utilizing the existing workflow tools and investment, PRINTERnet becomes a relatively inexpensive upgrade.

Q: Does PRINTERnet work with both Mac and PC?

A: The PRINTERnet application itself requires a Windows operating system while the interface for the customer and prepress department is via a web browser from both Windows and Mac operating systems.

Q: What if I already have a website?

A: PRINTERnet can be customized to match your existing website. It will look and feel like one big website with new functionality.

Q: What if I already don't have a website?

A: PRINTERnet does not require an existing website to work.