

Workflow: Putting It All Together

Convergence of digital workflow production, management and distribution into a seamless media landscape is intimately tied to efficiency and productivity.

Remember—and many are too young to remember—when the graphic production workflow consisted of a copywriter sending copy out to be typeset (and then having to proofread it again and again); the creative persons setting up photo shoots (using film), drawing illustrations, designing a layout for approval and preparing a clean mechanical. Then the photoengraver did his magic and made a proof—often, many proofs—for approval. After approval, film would be shipped to the printer. At that point the customer and, possibly the photoengraver, would be on hand at the printer's location for a press check before the job was ready for delivery. Of course, one also had to consider the bindery, distribution and warehousing issues. And who knows when an invoice might have been issued? Whew, one gets tired just thinking about it.

The entire graphic communication process changed when desktop publishing arrived on the scene. And the workflow continues to change with the advancement of the digital world—the world of JDE, JDM, XML and CIM. A job file can be created, proofed and produced on the desktop, delivered via the Internet to be printed and shipped or distributed electronically—a rather simplistic look at an extremely complex workflow.

The Graphic Workflow Process

If you take a look at the Graphic Workflow Process (page 33) developed by the IPA Workflow TEAM, you will see there are many steps in the graphics production process from creative to premedia, prepress and output. In addition, one has to consider the business workflow. Management of the business elements is critical to an efficient and profitable workflow. Before a

job even enters the workflow, management needs to consider how the job is estimated and quoted. Once the job is won, there's job entering, planning, scheduling and invoicing with which to deal. Wouldn't it be nice to tie production and management together for an integrated workflow? Well, that's what IPA is focusing on—helping graphic solutions providers achieve workflow efficiency, from creative to delivery and anywhere in between—on the technical and management level.

Creative Impact on Workflow

Often when graphic solutions providers consider workflow, they fail to consider the creative side. They get a file from a designer and proceed to fix all the problems because “the designer really doesn't understand what it takes to get a job to print.” However, fixing problems involves added cost and causes delays. Thus, workflow management should really begin with creative; and graphic solutions providers and the industry have an opportunity to standardize how the industry approaches the design process. According to James Lockman, Working Words and Graphics, “Employing process controls for design helps increase both the quality of the final product as well as the ease with which it moves through the print process.”

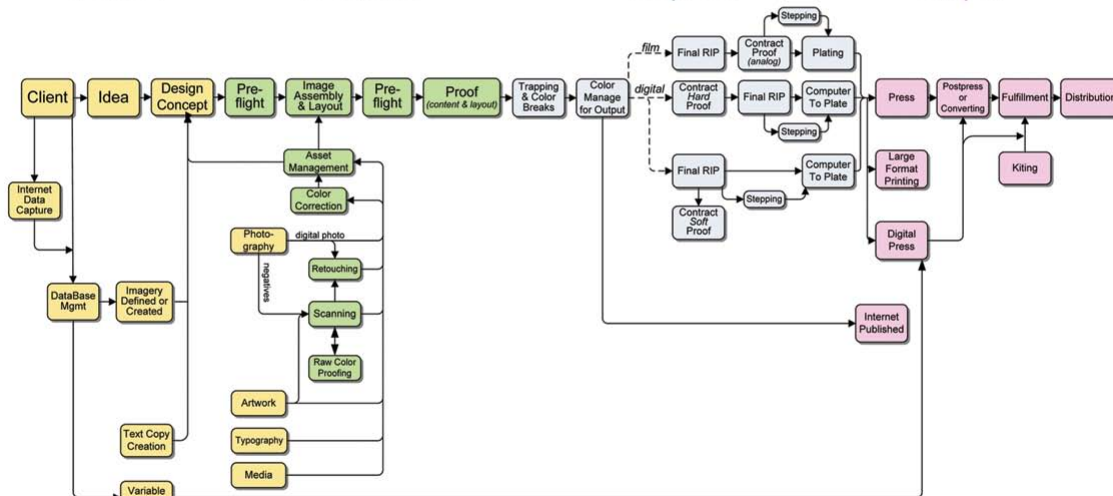
Graphic solutions providers who help creatives understand the print process can provide added value for their customers and enhance customer loyalty while getting a leg up on their competition. There are a number of tools available to help creatives produce problem-free files, beginning with design and preflighting tools. In addition, helping clients understand the PDF workflow can transform an organization's workflow at its very inception.

Creative

Premedia

Prepress

Output



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The Complexities of Premedia/Prepress

When you look at the IPA Graphic Workflow Process, you see the numerous steps in the premedia and prepress production stages. Each area has the potential to delay a job, costing money and having a direct impact on the bottom line. Because graphic solutions providers have different clients and produce jobs customized for those clients, no one workflow is perfect for everyone. Therefore, it is essential that graphic solutions providers examine their workflows and employ tools necessary to move jobs through their organizations as efficiently as possible.

Checking and fixing problem files before they enter the production process is essential to ensuring the work moves through production without a hitch and without tying up personnel and equipment while a problem is being fixed. Again, there are many tools available to automatically check incoming files; identify problems; and, in many cases, even fix them.

Of course, managing files and assets is an essential piece of the efficient graphics workflow. Whether service providers are managing only their own assets or those of their clients, the digital asset management system should allow them to do so with ease, and it should fit seamlessly into the workflow process.

Predictable, repeatable color is essential for a smooth workflow; and the role of color management cannot be taken lightly. This is where standards play a critical role. SWOP, GRACoL and ISO 12647-2 are central to

color management. Graphic solutions providers should be aware of the tools available and use them to help a job move successfully through their workflows.

The role of proofing is especially important in a graphics workflow. The graphic solutions provider has greater choices than ever in proofing. There are content proofs, imposition proofs, and contract proofs. There is the capability for soft proofing, remote proofing and hard proofing; and with changes in technology, remote proofing is becoming accepted by more and more customers. More and improved choices in proofing are allowing clients, designers, and graphic solutions providers to communicate and collaborate more effectively, thus enhancing workflow. Illustrating the quality of today's proofing systems, IPA's Color Proofing RoundUP proved that proofing strictly by the numbers can achieve great results. Based only on measurement of the IT8.7/4 target, leading proofing equipment suppliers were able to create accurate press-to-proof matches. In addition, a comparison of hard and soft proofing demonstrated soft proofing continues to improve and gain momentum. Graphic solutions providers should look at their own needs and the needs of their clients when they make proofing decisions. Whatever proofing system they implement should enhance their workflow and serve the needs of all involved.

From digital asset management to networks and servers, from color management to proofing, an effec-

tive workflow requires that all the components work together automatically. JDF has the potential to make this happen. Technology is rapidly becoming available to automate the workflow but it is up to the graphic solutions providers to understand and implement the technology that works together and is best for their individual workflows.

Output for Cross Media Publishing

Output has gone beyond what type of printing you will utilize; now the choices are much more diverse and can have a tremendous impact on workflow. In addition to traditional printing, the graphic solutions provider may be required to prepare and publish content across a broad range of possibilities and media—including web, digital and/or variable data, wide-format and ink jet printers, personal organizers, cell phones, movies, music CDs and more. In fact, today it is unusual to have a project that is delegated to just one medium. Stop for a minute and consider the impact this has on the graphic workflow process. The savvy graphic solutions provider should begin a project with the idea that content will be used in more than one medium. Cross media publishing is the wave of the future and the future is now.

In actuality, a graphic solutions provider pursuing an effective workflow should—before the job is ever started—look at the entire job, including finishing and delivery. Decisions made at the beginning of a job can avoid delays caused by backups at the bindery or the need to rework a job because the format is not correct for the Internet.

Another change in workflow is occurring in how a job is printed and distributed. Whereas in the past a job was printed at a single location and then distributed and/or warehoused, today the job is distributed in electronic form to a remote print site for reproduction near the point of final delivery. In addition, as the demand for digital printing increases so does demand for finishing and distribution. Graphic solutions providers moving in this direction need to ensure their workflows, along with personnel and equipment, accommodate and allow for addition of new services.

Business & Physical Workflow In Tandem


The job has moved smoothly from creative to output and the graphic solutions provider is feeling pretty good about his physical workflow; however, what about the business workflow? Was the organization able to estimate the job and quote it accurately and in

a timely manner? Did planning and scheduling go without a hitch? Was the graphic solutions provider able to generate an invoice immediately so it could go out with the job? All of this is part of the business workflow, and it should work in tandem with the physical workflow. When effective communication exists between production and management—with regard to personnel as well as the production and management systems—graphic solutions providers can estimate the job and provide accurate, timely quotes. In addition, they can plan a job and schedule it for each step of the production process—without having to go off-line due to lack of information—maximizing efficiency and profitability. There are a number of information management tools available and graphic solutions providers need to determine what works best for their organizations and move toward the integration of production and business workflows.

The Right People In the Right Place

How a job is sold is also changing. Change in the physical and business workflows has had an impact on how personnel operate. Many organizations are already beginning to gravitate from the traditional sales rep to CSR to production mode of operation to a project team approach with, in many cases, the traditional role of CSR evolving to project manager. Before a job is estimated and quoted, the entire team—consisting of customer, sales rep, CSR, production and possibly management and creative—is involved. With this approach there should be no surprises when the job enters production. This requires a dramatic change in how a job is sold as well as the mentality of personnel. Consultative/solutions-based selling is the new mantra, and IPA is in the process of developing programs and services to help its members in this area.

The Future Is Now

According to James Carpenter, Adstream Holdings, the graphic communication industry needs to get all technologies heading in one direction to fill in the remaining gaps in conventional print workflows and prepare for the convergence of workflow, management, and distributions that is required on a global scale. He stated, “This convergence of digital workflow production, management and distribution into a seamless media landscape is intimately tied to efficiency and productivity that corporate brand managers, publishers, creatives, and graphic services providers all need to achieve.”  IPA