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# Seven Keys to Success: The Hidden Issues behind Web-to-Print

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What Are the Secrets to Successful Web-to-Print? What do you need to know? The term *Web-to-print* is used freely now by everyone within the graphic communications space to describe the online purchase of print. Web-to-print solutions provide a website for print job submission, from design and print ordering to online job proofing and approval process, including shipment tracking. Accounting features are all-inclusive now with the ability to provide real time estimates for your clients, as well as credit card payment for immediate credit card processing. Variable-data printing options, personalized URLs and landing sites, marketing dashboards and reporting, as well as integrated fulfillment offerings are features of more sophisticated solutions.

## **What Are You Waiting For?**

According to The Industry Measure, among commercial printers and trade shops, 24% offer Web-to-print solutions of some kind. With the explosion of Internet adaptation, many printers are still developing their home page and haven't yet developed a more sophisticated print portal for their clients. As more printers develop online services and want to provide not only a print portal for their clients but also market client-branded sites, the opportunity to provide a Web printing linkage (beyond an FTP site) for your clients becomes a business imperative, equal to owning the manufacturing devices for production.

According to Scott Perry, prepress manager at Metropolitan Printing Company, a mid-sized commercial printer offering color digital services

and direct mail in Portland, Oregon, "For us, the threat of losing a long-time customer by not having a Web-to-print solution in place was a much greater reason to have it than the obvious production-saving benefits we would gain."

Overwhelmed? While the vendors in this field will be happy to sell you their software and professional services, as well as a full-service maintenance agreement, you may still have concerns (and rightfully so!) about how easy E-procurement is to implement, and the skills and resources required. Here's what you need to know to eliminate bottlenecks and costly expense overruns later in the game.

Just as when you initially decided to enter more wholeheartedly into the graphic communications marketplace, you probably began with a business plan. While some are successful "flying by the seat of their pants," most successful entrepreneurs have a documented business plan which includes marketing. John Foley, president of interlinkONE, a marketing services software provider, said, "Think about your name and your message, how you can provide more of a marketing look and feel. You need to redefine your business plan, and plan to strengthen your marketing plan by creating print and Web opportunities with your new software solution. This alone will enable more effective conversations with the chief marketing officer and other key decision makers."

## **Your Business Plan**

Your business plan should include a comprehensive marketing plan, as well as financial analysis of the hardware,

software, and people required to offer this new service. Additionally, consider whether your staff can support the customization for your Web-to-print service or whether you need to purchase professional services from your vendor. You should try to identify as best you can your additional requirements prior to implementation, and receive a price quote up front so you can plan your financial investments according to your business priorities and expense. The professional services investment alone may disqualify a particular vendor, so this is important information.

How will you create market awareness of your new services to your clients? If you have a strictly print production website, will you meet with clients face-to-face and provide training on how to upload jobs, or will you hold webinars for branded sites' offerings? Will you send postcards, email messages with a link, postcards with PURLs (personalized URLs), or perhaps a newsletter with Web addresses or links? Whatever your plans, the benefits of a consistent marketing effort are always intrinsic to the success of your business plan.

In your business plan you will need to consider ways to charge your clients for the new services you are offering. Will you charge them monthly or charge them for storing previous orders? How will you add this new service to your current business operation plan—will you open a new department or include this in prepress services? Your good business operating plan will determine the success of your ability to earn back your investment on new software and grow your revenues over time.

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## **Valuable People**

Whenever you start a new business service offering, it is always challenging to get your staff on board. Perhaps you have someone with an entrepreneurial spirit or a technical resource that has shown strength understanding software; these are excellent resources to tap into. Implementing Web-to-print requires the willingness to become a change agent within your company, and all levels within your organization will be affected by the new business model. Sales people will need to develop their talk track; production will need to establish a traffic cop and workflow; and accounting will need to load pricing tables, validate estimating, and ensure information can be uploaded to invoices.

While it might be tempting to have an individual on staff assume the role of technical manager in charge of implementation for Web-to-print, to maximize productivity you may consider making this a full-time specialist position. Scott Perry concurs: "There's no way an implementation such as this can be handled by just one person, let alone half or one-third of a person's normal work week. We have been discussing making this more of a full-time position within our company."

Your Web-to-print implementation specialist can oversee workflow as a traffic cop and support software updates. While in the past it was necessary to understand HTML, today's Web-to-print technology has code written on top of the HTML that makes it easy to plug in items such as pricing, text, or templates. More advanced full-time specialists may provide further detailed customization to the site as needed.

## **Implementation Timeline**

While I have talked with some companies who say they implemented their Web-to-print solution within three months, other E-procurement implementations are known to take longer. This may depend on the

resources available and the technical expertise, but if you want to customize the software with additional features, functionality, and workflow integration it may take longer. You should set a realistic timeline with the vendor and clearly define roles and responsibilities for implementation. Of course, if you decide to implement client branded sites, with continued practice your implementation can become much more streamlined.

## **Customer Service**

How will your customers perceive your new solution for submitting their jobs to you?

Some clients feel it takes away from the relationship; they like the one-on-one customer service response and want to know they can call you. If you are launching your own print production site, you need to find a way to communicate to your clients that even though they are using a Web service, you still are reachable and understand their requirements. One way to handle this is to put your customer service phone number on all pages of your website so they know how to find you. Add contact information including photos of key personnel, and call clients to acknowledge when a job is submitted or a job is printed.

## **Solvency of Company**

I've had the experience of being on site at a commercial printing facility whose Web-to-print provider had closed that morning, and this is a crisis you want to make sure you avert (fortunately another company assumed the provider and they were back up late in the day). Does the company you've selected have the technical resources to handle your website? If this is an Applications Service Provider (ASP) and they are hosting your site, what is the depth of the server capacity, disaster recovery, and back up? Do they have the financial resources to grow and add resources as they continue with more placements?

## **Problem Resolution Process**

While everyone wants to believe your software will never crash and there will never be productivity issues, the reality is you must plan for the worst. In establishing your contract with a Web-to-print supplier, an important question to ask is what type of turnaround time you can expect when there are problems with the software. Consider how they prioritize and rank problem issues, and ask if they can supply you with a written description of their problem resolution process. You will want to fully understand their internal organizational structure and resources chain of command based on depth of product knowledge and problem resolution skills.

## **The Payback**

Scott Perry provides additional insight into the value of e-services for your clients: "The response from our customers has been outstanding. They can't wait to get their products up and running, and those who have contracted with us for branded sites are excited as well; the ability to control their branding locally, nationally, or globally is a big factor in working with us."

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