Company Profile

Medicine Hat Public School District No. 76 serves the needs of 6,500 elementary and secondary students in the city of Medicine Hat in Alberta, Canada. During the nine and a half month school year, the School District’s print center handles a volume of 10 million pages. Two full-time operators concentrate on the production of workbooks and course material for 360 faculty members at 18 schools with a guarantee of next-day delivery.

Challenge

A rise in short run on demand color jobs was pushing the School District print center’s two Xerox devices to their limits, and causing teachers to wait up to three days to receive printed course material for their classrooms. The print center needed to turn color jobs around faster but did not want to drive up printing costs for the schools.

Solution

School District No. 76 chose a Xerox DocuColor 5252 and EFI Balance™ workflow software to maximize print capacity and manage jobs across four color and black-and white devices.

Results

With greater control and more efficient equipment utilization, the print center reduced color print costs by 60 percent. Automated workflow processes cut labor time from hours to minutes, and turn around times went from two to three days to next-day delivery.
Keeping Up With Demand

The Print Services Center at Medicine Hat School District No. 76 promises next-day service to 360 faculty members at 18 schools. Greg Brown, Instructional Material Center Manager, stands behind that promise and makes sure the print center stays on the cutting edge of technology to make it happen: “We are always on the look out for new and advanced ways to deliver the printed materials schools need quickly and cost-effectively.”

Since 1996, School District No. 76 has offered a special wireless WAN (Wide Area Network) service to its teachers, enabling them to submit jobs from the classroom directly to the print center using a print driver installed on their desktop. The print center relied on two devices to handle incoming jobs: a Xerox Docutech 6135 high volume black-and-white printer driven by an EFI Fiery® server, and a Xerox DocuColor 12 color printer with an EFI Splash™ server. But next day delivery was not always possible. Complex color jobs typically required two to three days to turn around. “We manually produced jobs that involved both color and black-and-white, and hand-collated pages together. It was very time consuming,” said Brown.

When demand for short run color increased, the print center needed a new solution to help handle the load. “We wanted to turn around color jobs faster, but did not want to drive up printing costs for the schools,” said Brown. The print center purchased a DocuColor 5252 digital color press, an additional black-and-white Xerox 1010 to back up the Docutech, and EFI Balance™ software to combine and control the flow of jobs across all four of its devices.

Balance Makes The Grade

EFI Balance established a central point of command that gave the print center greater control and maximum power over their equipment. Now teachers simply select the printer they want on the shared network and their job is routed directly to the EFI Balance job management queue, Command WorkStation®. Balance software color splits jobs across multiple engines, routing color or black-and-white pages to the appropriate device. Post insertion capabilities automatically assemble pages in order without hand-collating.

Shortly after installing the new Xerox printers and Balance software, Brown began seeing immediate improvements, “especially with load balancing and splitting color. Balance reduces costs by allowing us to send color pages to the DocuColor 5252, and black-and-white pages to the Docutech 6135, and merge the pages together with the interposer tray. The most important feature is the color split. It saves a lot of time and money.”

“Since having the Xerox DocuColor 5252 and EFI Balance software, we’ve reduced color print cost by 60 percent.”

— Greg Brown, Instructional Material Center Manager, Medicine Hat School District No. 76
The print center’s operators, who were already familiar with the ease of use and consistency of EFI’s Command WorkStation interface on the Fiery, were quickly able to manage the new software and gain more control over their print environment. “Balance gives the operators one queue with control over all the printers in the group. With more control, we can utilize our devices more efficiently.”

One of the print center’s most frequent jobs is a customized course workbook designed by teachers. The teachers submit 8.5 x 11” documents, but according to Brown, the final output is a Signature Book requiring that the pages be imposed on 11 x 17” paper so it can be folded in half and stapled, resulting in an 8.5 x 11” size booklet.

“What previously required 2 hours of manual labor and a special time commitment is now accomplished in 10-15 minutes!”

— Greg Brown, Instructional Material Center Manager, Medicine Hat School District No. 76

Brown feels better knowing that schools are benefiting by teaching in color at a more affordable cost. “Documents like graphs and maps look so much better in color—they are more identifiable by the kids. With the Balance software we can slot those pages in as color within a black-and-white workbook and it’s not such an expensive cost for the schools to pay—and they get it the next day! The staff can accomplish more in less time, and by saving time, we are saving money.”

“We like the EFI Balance software. It was easy to implement, and it handles a lot of our needs. I know it is scalable and will support the types of engines we use.
Over the long term, as we're finding out more about Balance and its various components, we look forward to taking advantage of it even more.”

“Now that we can split color and black and white jobs much more efficiently and have better equipment utilization, we guarantee next day turn around on color.”

— Greg Brown, Instructional Material Center Manager, Medicine Hat School District No. 76

School District No. 76 is anticipating even more demand for its short run color services. It recently began providing print services for a nearby college, and a new fiber optics project now underway by the Alberta government will enable even faster networking connections for public buildings, libraries, hospitals and schools. “We’re seeing an even greater rise in short run color now that we’re serving the college faculty. And with a faster connection, we expect to handle larger color jobs with more complex media and bigger file sizes.”

With their Xerox devices and EFI Balance software at the ready, School District No. 76 is well equipped to handle the load.