NAEIR, the National Association for the Exchange of Industrial Resources, accepts donations of new merchandise from American corporations and redistributes them to more than 10,000 member nonprofits, including churches, schools and community groups. NAEIR’s 135 employees have redistributed nearly $2 billion in merchandise from such well-known companies as Microsoft Corporation, The Gillette Company, American Greetings, and Oreck Corporation. The non-profit group depends on effective mailings to solicit both donations and members.

Challenge
Response rates to NAEIR’s direct mail campaigns were falling. Outsourcing print jobs to commercial print facilities left NAEIR with more output than necessary, high costs, delays, and uncertain document quality. NAEIR needed an affordable yet high-quality in-house print production solution with easy, powerful variable data printing tools.

Solution
An in-house one-to-one marketing operation using EFI’s Fiery EXP6000 server, with Atlas PrintShop Mail™ – Fiery Version, and Xerox® DocuColor™ 6060 Digital Color Press.

Results
NAEIR now produces effective, customized mail campaigns on site. It has reduced waste, saved time, and lowered costs. Job turnaround time has gone from weeks to days; productivity is up 30 to 40 percent; inquiries have increased 10-fold; membership is up 12 percent in just two years.
Delays, waste and poor results

The vital exchange of goods through NAEIR’s distribution center in Galesburg, IL, depends on a system of direct mail solicitations, catalogs and flyers to potential donors and nonprofits. By 2001, NAEIR’s critical direct mail campaigns showed disheartening results. Response rates were falling about 10 percent annually. Worse, commercial printers were slow and expensive, requiring larger print runs than NAEIR needed, adding waste. Delays, due to poor print quality, added weeks to mailing schedules. NAEIR staff struggled to get a limited array of bland materials into circulation. Frustrated at their lack of control over print production and data management, NAEIR decided to take the print production process in-house. “We thought we could do better,” says Bob Gilstrap, Vice President and CFO.

An easy, effective solution

In June of 2001, NAEIR purchased an EFI Fiery EX2000 server and Xerox DocuColor 2045 Digital Color Press. The server featured EFI’s industry-leading workflow technology for variable data printing (VDP), which provides an extensive array of specialized tools for creating static and variable elements. The solution’s open architecture gave NAEIR the control and flexibility it needed to create a streamlined VDP workflow and print personalized direct mail materials on site. Jackie Thomas, NAEIR’s Catalog Production Coordinator, was immediately impressed with the intuitive ease of Command WorkStation™, the Fiery user interface that makes it easy to perform even complex printing tasks with an array of powerful tools. “I figured out several things I wanted to do even before the training. It’s pretty simple to operate, and kind of fun. It saves on training time.”

NAEIR hired a design consultant to jazz up direct mail pieces. “He created designs to match our capabilities,” Gilstrap says. “Because we could do more, he could be more creative.”

NAEIR’s print volume grew. “Every time we turned around, we discovered one more thing we could control better and improve by doing in-house.” In November of 2002, NAEIR added an EFI EXP6000 Fiery color server and Xerox DocuColor 6060 Digital Color Press and began using Atlas PrintShop Mail™ – Fiery Version, an additional page composition tool for printing variable data. Sixteen months later they replaced their original solution with a second EFI EXP6000 Fiery server and DocuColor 6060.

“What we produce just looks better than what we used to get when we sent it to a printer. It gives a much better impression of the organization.”

— Bob Gilstrap, Vice President, CFO, the National Association for the Exchange of Industrial Resources (NAEIR)
“We’re producing 30 to 40% more than we used to. We’re just able to do a lot more with what we have budgeted.”
—Bob Gilstrap, Vice President, CFO, the National Association for the Exchange of Industrial Resources (NAEIR)

The PrintShop Mail application makes personalized printing a quick and easy one-step process. Thomas can integrate database information into the layout of a document simply by dragging and dropping database fields. During printing, the static portion of the job is RIPped once and the variable elements are sent to the printer on the fly. For Thomas, this means less printing time and less network congestion as printers run at rated speed. “It has made such a difference for us in time savings;” she says.

Efficiency, savings and quality

“Because the Fiery and its software are open – you can use just about any file format with it. It’s so easy to use that we got into personalizing a lot more things and using more variable elements. It also does all the post-office prep work for us so we haven’t had to hire someone to handle and sort jobs after printing. It just works for us.”

Nearly every function of the in-house solution produces savings, Thomas says. “Now I run just what we need, not the extra thousand the printer tells us we have to run. That’s a big savings to us. And because we clean the mailing lists ourselves, if 10 percent of the names on a list turn out to be unusable, they’re eliminated and we don’t print pieces for them. No waste.”

“Quality has improved,” Gilstrap says. “What we produce just looks better than what we used to get when we sent it to a printer. It gives a much better impression of the organization.”

Thomas relies on the Fiery’s ColorWise® software for easy, precise color management. And the Fiery’s DocBuilder Pro™ imposition tool speeds jobs by allowing her to build documents, view changes on screen in real-time, and make last-minute changes on the fly.

“The variable data printing capabilities of the Fiery have exceeded our expectations in terms of quality, speed, results, cost savings, and response – everything!”
— Bob Gilstrap, Vice President, CFO, the National Association for the Exchange of Industrial Resources (NAEIR)
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— Jackie Thomas, Catalog Production Coordinator, the National Association for the Exchange of Industrial Resources (NAEIR)

Agility, productivity and growth

Once reliant on outside resources, NAEIR has become more efficient and agile. Job turnaround time, once measured in weeks by commercial printers, has been cut to days. “We never know what products we’re going to have until we get a donation,” Gilstrap says. “Before, if we got calendars in December, it might take us to early February to get the news out. Now, we can design a good-looking flyer and get it out in days.”

NAEIR’s tiny production staff – Thomas, an assistant and occasional volunteers – now produce more than 200,000 color pieces each month. “We’re putting out more effective publications on the same budget without hiring more production staff,” Gilstrap says. “We’re producing 30 to 40 percent more than we used to. We’re just able to do a lot more with what we have budgeted.”

The results? “We have 10 times the number of inquiries now that we had two years ago. It’s wonderful. We’ve had to add more telemarketing reps to handle the volume; membership has grown by more than 12 percent. We couldn’t be happier.”

Gilstrap credits Thomas for running a successful print production facility, adding, “The variable data printing capabilities of the Fiery have exceeded our expectations in terms of quality, speed, results, cost savings, and response – everything!”