Freeport Press: Launching Into the Stratosphere

CHALLENGE:

“When I purchased Freeport Press 10 years ago, it was a cold-set plant in financial distress, with 43% of revenues generated from a single account. Everything was manual and there were 28 people in prepress alone. The goal was to transition this historic company to a profitable, digitally-enabled business.”

—David Pilcher, President

The original home of Harmon Homes, one of the nation’s leading real estate magazines, Freeport Press was primarily a cold-set web house with nearly half of its revenues coming from this single customer. “In spite of the shortcomings,” says David Pilcher, the firm’s current owner, “I was intrigued by the historic nature of the company, the dedication of its people, and the loyalty of its customers. But I knew I would need to dramatically change its operating philosophy and infrastructure to achieve the double digit growth I knew we were capable of.”
SOLUTION:
“Our new Customer Service manager, Phil Salvo, formerly with Time-Life, recommended EFI’s Monarch as the backbone for our new digital future.”

Freeport Press had purchased EFI’s PSI™ print MIS solution prior to Pilcher’s purchasing the company but had never implemented it. “Our first step,” says Pilcher, “was to get people off of typewriters and Rolodexes by implementing PSI. We only had seven computers in the entire company, and our staff of 28 in prepress was still hand-stripping and manually pasting up and typesetting. We didn’t even have a customer list we could mail to!” Pilcher reports that PSI took the company into the electronic era with an enterprise solution that enabled double-digit growth. But more was needed to achieve the level of explosive growth Pilcher saw in the company’s future. “By implementing the full EFI™ Monarch suite—including management, production planning, PrintFlow® dynamic scheduling, and Auto-Count® Direct Machine Interface (DMI),” he says, “we now have an infrastructure in place to support two to three times our current sales volume and we plan to hit that mark.”

Freeport Press is now a heat-set web plant with two half-size and two full-size web presses. The company is in the process of adding two new Komori System 38S web presses. “The first Komori went into service in October,” says Pilcher. “We will be migrating volume to the new press while at the same time back-selling capacity on the older presses so that when our second Komori arrives in early 2010, it will already have work lined up and we can retire at least one, if not more, of the older presses, while still growing the business.” Pilcher points out that with the increased automation of the new presses, combined with the company’s EFI workflow backbone, the new presses will easily outperform the older presses three to one. Pilcher is shifting the company’s direct mail focus to catalogs and publications, where he sees more growth potential.

“Today we have 75 computers in the building,” says Pilcher, “and the role of the CSR has dramatically changed with the elimination of the manually-typed two-part job ticket form we were using. In addition, we are down to eight people in prepress. Our 100% PDF workflow accepts only print-ready files and Monarch does the job planning, layout,
impositions and job tickets. With the EFI integrated combination of management, planning, DMI and scheduling, we have an efficient, enterprise-wide system that fully integrates order processing, inventory, accounting and billing, and we have electronic, automated, real-time scheduling that optimizes our production throughput.

One example of how this system has improved efficiency is the way EFI Auto-Count helps control waste. Auto-Count counts every revolution of the press and automatically shuts down the press when the target good count is reached. “Pressmen tend to want to run overages so they don’t get caught short,” comments Pilcher. “But that often leads to an imbalance. You might end up with an extra skid of one form while you are actually still short on another. Auto-Count helps us achieve an amazing component balance by weighing makeready and run waste—in real time—and subtracting it from the total paper used. With Auto-Count, we know exactly where we are with waste and can continue to work to reduce it.”

Freeport has also replaced its Excel scheduling system with PrintFlow, which dynamically schedules all equipment in the shop. “PrintFlow is phenomenal,” remarks Pilcher. “You can see every piece of equipment in real time, and you can include rules that PrintFlow adds to its own logic to schedule jobs in a manner that will even save wash-ups.”

RESULTS:
“The integrated solution we have in place is primarily being used by much larger, multi-site companies. But we understood the benefits it could deliver, and the significant investment we made is delivering the results and the ROI we had hoped for.”
Print to Win

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