Doing Web-to-Print Right

Effective Integration of Web-to-Print

Solutions into Existing Workflows

Table of **Contents**

aurigma

Web-to-Print
and the **Workflow**

Sometime in the late 800s in Tang Dynasty China, Buddhist monks had the bright idea to apply ink to carved blocks and then apply those blocks to paper in order to write their sutras more efficiently. We now have the ability to go online, design a thank you card, submit an order, and a digital printing press will fulfill it after preflighting, all at the press of a button. The only problem is our lack of a time machine to then send the card back to the monks, thanking them for creating our profession. There's a lot of history between woodblock printing and web-to-print, filled with innovations throughout. While you would be hard-pressed to find anyone decrying innovation as a negative thing, introducing new technology will always present challenges in any industry.

Even with some of the earliest examples of printing innovations, print houses needed to make adjustments in order to integrate these new technologies into the workflow. Web-to-print technology is no different. Growth has been slow and steady at around 3,7% globally in recent years (Fig. 1-1), but we can expect that to change as the technology comes into its own and becomes more normalized, just like every industry-changing innovation has done in the past[1]. In fact, the pivot to web-to-print is at a crucial point. The technology is not in its infancy anymore, we have learned a lot about how to increase its efficacy while squashing the inevitable early bugs, and each new product presents exciting new ways to augment existing workflows rather than hinder them.
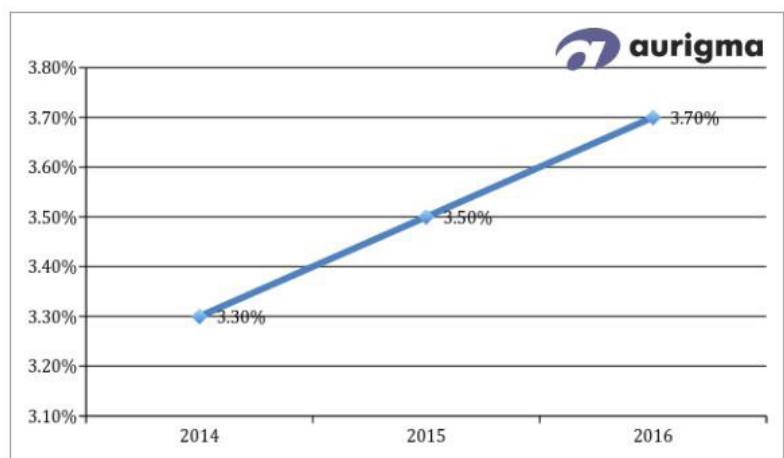

Fig. 1-1: The global web-to-print adoption rate has been growing steadily for the last 3 years. (Source: Drupa 2016).

[1] Drupa, 2016.

aurigma

Why Effective Integration is Important

We generally throw around "the workflow" as a blanket term, but in truth, there are several unique workflows snaking their way through a print shop at a given time. Maybe some of them are similar, such as the workflow for a business card or some letterhead. Other more specialized products, like a photo book or a catalogue, follow a completely different path through the shop. Each of these workflows can then be broken down into smaller chunks. For example, the ordering workflow and print production workflow are completely different organs of the same animal. With all of these delicate moving parts in place, messing it all up by introducing something new is a completely valid fear. The whole point of using a web-to-print solution is to reduce costs, but printers need to find the right solution for them and implement it carefully, or the consequences could be the opposite effect.

Throughout this white paper, we will discuss the real challenges that the average printer who wants to adopt a web-to-print solution may face while trying to introduce it into their current mix. However, we discuss these obstacles with great optimism. Lets take a brief look at these challenges and the solutions that the latest innovations in web-to-print technology offer to overcome them while enabling greater accessibility to W2P than ever before.

Workflow Optimized for Specific Products

We are reaching a turning point where the average consumer would prefer to shop at an online storefront rather than getting into their car and wasting the gas to drive to a brick-and-mortar shop. Print is no different, but the ordering workflow for personalized print products is far more complex to implement than a normal online store that sells premade goods. Thankfully, the newest web-to-print products are robust enough to give any size printer access to an ecommerce portal while effectively implementing and managing these sophisticated workflows.

Optimizing Ordering Workflow for Higher Conversions

Any company in any industry that runs an online storefront is constantly tinkering the ordering workflow to see what achieves higher conversion rates. In this regard, the complexity of a web-to-print storefront's ordering workflow is a dou-

aurigma

ble-edged sword. Complexity begets more variables to play around with to achieve desirable results. On the other hand, a rigid, "canned" W2P solution may not be flexible enough to adapt to the changes required by the more adventurous printers who constantly try new things to improve sales. This ultimate flexibility can be achieved through a third-party, ready-to-use toolkit, such as the Customer's Canvas platform.

Effective Workflow in the Production Process

A job has still got a long journey ahead of it after the customer submits it online. Web-to-print plays just as a significant role in the print production process as it does in the online ordering workflow. The goal of using W2P is to help streamline the production process by producing an output compatible with the printing equipment directly after the customer places an order. If the solution cannot take into account accurate color management, imposition, rendering the correct PDF/X output, or other preprocessing steps, then money is lost down the road due to compatibility issues. There are web-to-print solutions that offer all of the features to meet these standards and more, so that no additional preprocessing steps are necessary.

aurigma

W2P: A Slow and Steady Reality

There was a point in time not too long ago when the industry was scrambling to find a solution to the web revolution, as the beginning of the eBook craze, decline of printed news, and talks of paperless offices painted a somewhat dystopian future for print. The solution for print in these circumstances was to run toward the web and embrace it instead of proselytizing against it. Web-to-print has created new niches and marketing channels while reducing costs for both printers and their customers. This technology has enabled printers to accept orders even when the doors to the shop are closed and from clients who are not necessarily in the local area. Anyone who wants a piece of the pie can take it, provided they have the right W2P solution. Why, then, has the adoption rate grown so slowly?

Obstacles in W2P Integration

We are slowly reaching the majority threshold of web-to-print adoption with 46% of American printers opting in. This is still the minority, however, and the stigma of uncertainty that comes prepackaged with new technology still persists. Additionally, not all web-to-print solutions are created equally. There are several very real obstacles printers should be made aware of before they choose a W2P product. Not all solutions are flexible enough to cater to the unique types of ordering workflows that a given printer needs on their online storefront. Printers may also not be able to tweak their ordering workflow in order to achieve higher conversions if the technology they are using is too rigid. Finally, these solutions are meant to streamline the workflow in general, not complicate it. Any web-to-print product worth its salt should be capable of producing outputs for several different products that are compatible with the machines in the print production process.

aurigma

Fig. 1-2: Significant portions of all American age groups prefer shopping online to going to a physical store. (Source: BigCommerce 2016).

Not Your Average Online Storefront

According to a recent survey, 80% of Americans make one online purchase a month while 30% make online purchases weekly[2]. This type of consumer is the new normal (Fig. 1-2), and print products are not immune to this desire for instant gratification. If customers have the option, they would prefer to be able to order their business cards from an Amazon-esque online portal and find them in their mailbox a couple of days later. Besides, VistaPrint makes it look easy, right? While the customer experience may be simple and easy, there are a lot of complicated moving parts under the hood that make this experience possible. For a normal online shop, customers simply add an item to their cart, pay for it, and the item is put into a box and shipped. However, a web-to-print platform must allow the customer to create a personal design or choose from a template, provide the option to bundle a product with other items, and possibly choose options like what type of paper stock they prefer. This is just for one item. The real challenge is finding a web-to-print solution flexible enough to support the many and varied workflows for several items, especially for the more custom, short-run jobs that are becoming more common these days.

Converting Clicks to Cash

Running a successful ecommerce site in any industry depends just as much on psychology as it does on the technology. Any company can have a website, but not every website will successfully convert clicks into sales. The ordering workflow

[2] BigCommerce, 2016.

needs to hold the customer's hand at every step of the way and shepherd them to that payment button. Consumers have a lot of choice in where they can spend their money online today, and unless they are dedicated to your brand, they will quickly leave for a competitor if there is not a clear path from products to shopping cart to payment. The same is true for a website that sells print products and services. Web-to-print solutions need to be flexible enough to make small changes to the ordering workflow on the fly in order to improve the rate of conversions. If the software is too rigid to allow businesses to test new ideas, then it can be a limiting factor in growth down the road.

Production Workflow Woes

When I worked as an intern at a small print shop, my boss always told me that any time the press isn't running, we're losing money. Sure, this could apply to a lack of jobs, but in my experience it was due to hiccups with the production workflow. We shared the goal that every printer has: streamline the workflow as much as possible. It reduces the possibility of errors and saves time and money down the road for that reason. Web-to-print can do this in spades, just as it can with the ordering workflow, but the right solution needs to be implemented correctly or the opposite result could occur. Once a customer has submitted a job, the web-to-print software needs to take care of the preprocessing before passing it on to the presses. This includes applying accurate color management, true CMYK output, printing imposition, and rendering a PDF/X output specifically designed for a number of printing applications. In essence, the web-to-print technology needs to speak the language that printing equipment can understand. Developing a solution that can handle all of this preprocessing automatically is very difficult on a technical level, so printers should make sure they select a skilled web-to-print vendor that can ensure the production workflow will be optimized rather than hindered by inferior technologies.

aurigma

W2P Evolved:
# The **Future** of **Printing** **Workflow**

As web-to-print begins to find solid footing in the industry, the above challenges are more legitimate than ever. These are valid concerns for any serious printer and they perhaps contribute to some of the fears that are keeping W2P adoption at a slow, steady rate despite considerable improvements to the technology over the years. We are seeing the new generation of web-to-print with innovative platforms such as Customer's Canvas that are able to wrangle multiple ordering workflows for the low-volume, highly specialized products that make up large shares of many printers' bottom lines today. This technology is also flexible enough to allow its users to make quick changes and optimize their ordering workflows in a way that can achieve higher sales conversions than out-of-the-box canned solutions. Finally, these W2P solutions can truly streamline the workflow, following a product from the online store to the print production process by producing compatible outputs that require no additional preprocessing. Let's explore these exciting features in greater detail below.

Robust Solutions Manage Multiple Ordering Workflows

The purpose of web-to-print is to add a self-service component to your business for your customers. When a customer walks into brick-and-mortar print shop, the employees can explain everything they offer in detail face-to-face. Customers don't have the same benefit when they're navigating a web-to-print enabled website. All of these products that you would like your customers to know about and all of their respective workflows need to be preprogrammed in order to guide users efficiently to the shopping cart. Out-of-the-box "complete toolkits" are usually not flexible enough to handle this, but we are starting to see third-party W2P solutions excel in this area. When integrated properly into a website, these powerful new products can allow for multiple ordering

aurigma

workflows for the same products, for example, the choice to design a product from scratch or to select a template (Fig 1-3). These tools can also manage several workflows that are packaged into a single product, such as a wedding bundle that contains invitations, envelopes, and table signs. Thanks to the flexible API of third-party W2P solutions, the intricacies of these multiple workflows are managed efficiently and happy customers can have a variety of products to choose from within a user-friendly environment.

Fig. 1-3: The ordering workflow of most web-to-print sites gives the customer the option to customize their products. (Source: Printcious 2017).
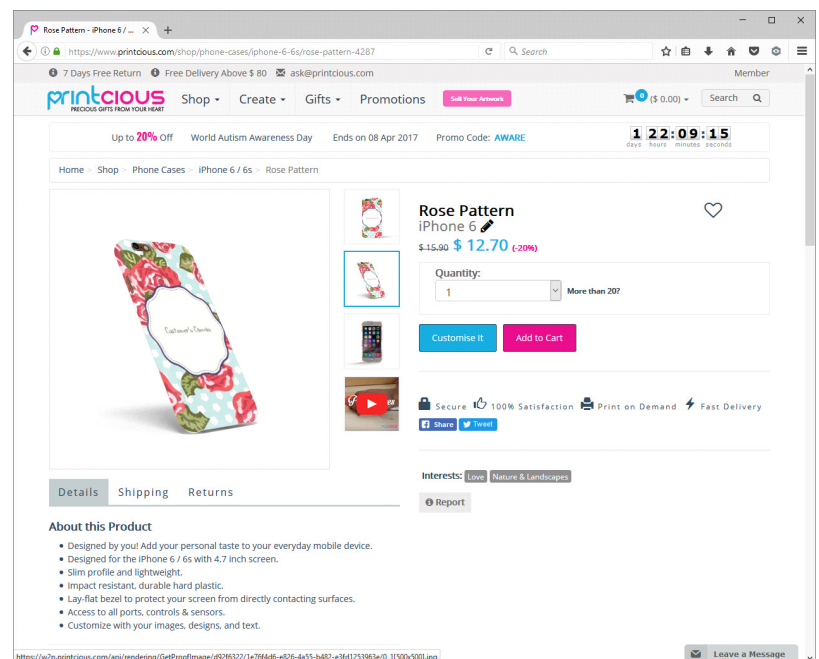
Flexible Technology Increases Conversions for All Printers

As businesses grow and change, so must their strategies. A crucial part of running an online storefront is constantly testing new ideas in an attempt to improve the user experience and increase conversions. The common method that many readers may already be aware of is A/B testing, which is used to evaluate new ways to make a customer's shopping experience more efficient and decrease the rate of abandoned shopping carts. If the technology behind a web-to-print solution is too rigid and such experiments aimed at streamlining the workflow results in rebuilding the entire ordering workflow from scratch, then it is a sign that the business invested in the wrong solution. This is usually the case with canned solutions that were made with a narrow range of applica-

*There are so many exciting develop-
ments underway with web-to-print
technology that we couldn't include
them all. [Click here](#) for a far more
in-depth white paper that explores
these topics and much more.*

Powerful Preprocessing with W2P in Print Production

tions in mind. However, there are more pliable W2P products out there that can accommodate these tweaks and changes without risking an implosion of the entire existing workflow. The right solution will allow printers to make these changes and observe how well their workflows do at achieving conversions under different circumstances. This is the power of adaptability that makes web-to-print technology a long-term investment rather than a fleeting change that will later need to be thrown out as a business grows.

Optimizing the ordering workflow properly will increase conversions, but this is a bittersweet outcome if the print production workflow is not also optimized in a way that can handle the influx of all these jobs. A solid web-to-print solution needs to be integrated properly end-to-end in order to reap the full benefits. Once an order is paid for online and the fulfillment process begins, the design needs to go through preprocessing. In the olden days, a client would hand in their design on a flash drive and then the designer would need to manually convert it from RGB to CMYK, set up the correct the print imposition, make sure the color profile is appropriate for the machine it will be fulfilled on, and save it to a compatible PDF output. Now that web-to-print solutions like Customer's Canvas can do all of this automatically, these are valuable labor hours that can be rationed elsewhere. Especially in an environment where low volume, highly customized jobs are the norm, reducing these steps in the production workflow is a key component in increasing margins and staying competitive as large runs become more scarce. Although it is possible for a print provider to add these features to a W2P later on, it is much more prudent to integrate the solution into the entire workflow together, lest there be incompatibility problems down the road.

From Pixels to Paper

Now that we've sung the praises of web-to-print thoroughly, let's follow a real world example through a W2P-enabled workflow to see how each step is optimized. Instead of getting in their car and driving to the print shop, the custom-

aurigma

er browses the products you offer online, and they decide on some new business cards. The customer is not very design-savvy in our example, so they decided to choose from the templates that you have preprogrammed into your site. There are placeholders for them to add their text and upload their logo, and thanks to the intuitive user interface of the online editor, it's nearly impossible for them to make a mistake (Fig 1-4). Advanced image processing algorithms on the backend allow them to preview their design. The easy process prevents our customer from being frustrated and they add their completed design to the cart, as well as some matching letterhead they saw advertised in the sidebar below the cart. Once the job is paid for, the software automatically takes the steps to make the files print-ready. At the press of a button (the customer's), the designs are converted to true CMYK, the correct imposition is applied for business cards and letterhead, and a compatible PDF/X-4 output is generated for the press. Aside for the initial integration of the W2P solution, the customer did all of this at the click of a mouse and you have yet to lift a finger.

Fig. 1-4: Intuitive web-to-print editors allow customers to modify their own designs with little risk of errors. (Source: Aurigma 2017).
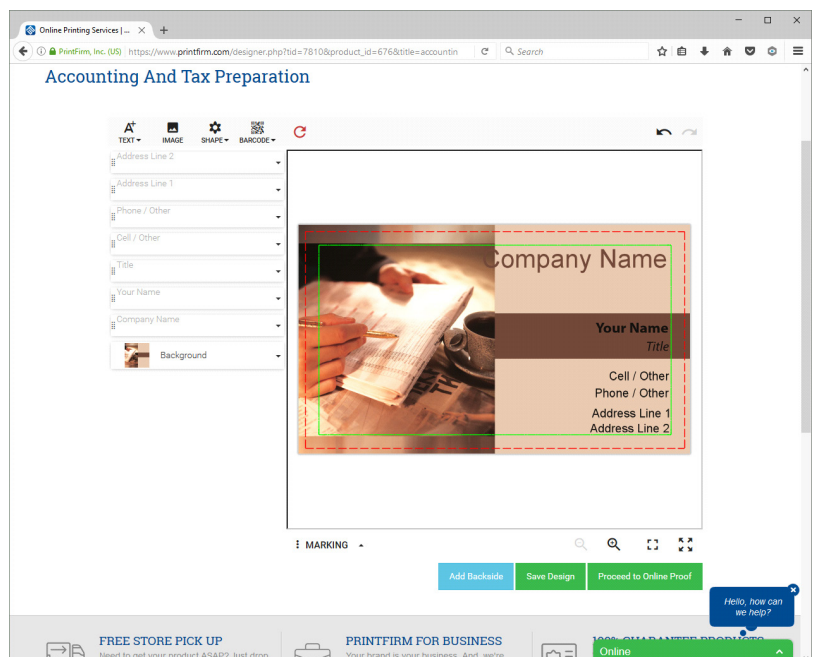
Conclusion

As web-to-print becomes more advanced, the criticisms and fears that were prevalent when the technology had just debuted are quickly becoming obsolete, much like a print shop's workflow that has yet to integrate one of these solutions. The printers that do adopt a powerful third party solution like Customer's Canvas will gain a streamlined workflow, the ability to accept jobs 24/7, and a nation-wide client base. There's still time now to get that competitive edge, but printers who put it off until web-to-print is completely normalized may find themselves too late to the party. The challenges of the past are no match for the solutions we have today, and you can be more confident than ever about integrating web-to-print into your workflow, no matter its size. However, we do encourage printers to learn as much as possible about web-to-print technology before making a decision to overhaul their workflow. Follow the links below to explore all the features that powerful web-to-print technology has to offer.

Additional Resources

Embracing Automation: A Web-to-Print Solution that Thrives on Change

Web-to-Print with Photoshop: Solidifying Web-to-Print Solutions through Photoshop Support

American Printer - Web-to-Print Evolved

References

Drupa. (2016). 3rd drupa Global Trends report 2016 Executive Summary. Global Trends (p. 5). Düsseldorf: drupa.

BigCommerce. (2016). BigCommerce Survey Shows Americans Consider Online Shopping Essential. Austin: BigCommerce.

aurigma