

Wide format printing requires a workflow that typically includes preproduction, printing, finishing, and distribution.

While specific tasks can vary depending on the kinds of jobs being printed, all workflows should be designed for effective and efficient use of resources—including the printer and related ink, media and operator time. Workflow software is available from a variety of vendors; most manufacturers of wide format print and scan devices will have their own relevant software offerings.

Below are some common wide format printing workflow elements in detail.

MAKE-READY/PREFLIGHTING

The make-ready stage includes producing a digital document or graphic; verifying that the file is in the correct format (and has been proofread); and marking up spot color if necessary. In a similar way, preflighting checks that images, graphics, and fonts are in the correct format and resolution, and any required color profiles are included.

IMPOSITION

Imposition is another preliminary task. It involves laying out multiple pages or images so that they print in the correct order. This undertaking helps minimize the amount of labor required to assemble a finished product.

INTEGRATION WITH MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS

Integration with management information systems (MIS systems) is another workflow task. Not every print job requires this, but large print runs can sometimes be linked to other systems within a business—such as inventory or financial records, for tracking of the job.

RASTER IMAGE PROCESSING

Raster image processing, or RIPing, is the process of converting a digital file into a dot-by-dot image that will be reproduced on the printer. A RIP can be accomplished by software or dedicated hardware, commonly an EFI Fiery controller.

Many RIP software and hardware packages also have the capability to optimize media, and provide color management closely matched to International Color Consortium (ICC) profiles or color systems such as Pantone. If color analyzing equipment such as a spectrophotometer is necessary, be certain your operators are properly trained in how to use it.

SPECIALIZED EXTERNAL CUTTING

If specialized external cutting equipment is being used, make sure corresponding drivers are both included and up-to-date. Color accuracy between the cut path's assigned spot color and RIP software is also a concern. Verify that your operators are familiar with your chosen color matching and control process.

JOB SUBMISSION

In an office or production environment, it is necessary to determine the scheduling of the submitted print jobs to deliver those with the highest degree of urgency. Before this task can be performed, however, jobs must be entered into the system.

Jobs can be received and saved in a number of ways, including via flash drive or DVD, through your network, or using a “web-to-print” portal. Depending on the number of jobs you typically submit, as well as their origin, web to print might make sense for your company.

FINISHING AND DISTRIBUTION

Once a print run has taken place, the process is not

over. Depending on the printer/MFP configuration, cutters and/or finishers may be attached and further operations necessary. Once the job is complete, a notification procedure alerts the job submitter that the print is finished.

The last step is delivering the finished job to the person who requested it. This could involve packaging, labeling, and shipping the job (whether through a carrier or your own truck), or simply bringing it down the hall to a colleague.

3 TAKEAWAYS

- The wide format printing process typically includes stages of preproduction, printing, finishing, and distribution.
- While required tasks vary by job, possible steps may include preflighting, imposition, raster image processing, and specialized external cutting.
- Many wide format tasks can be optimized with workflow software from printer manufacturers and/or third parties.

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