Winning strategies for successful central reprographics departments

you can

This series of guides is based on comprehensive research into central reprographics departments (CRDs). With sponsorship from Canon, eminent industry expert Professor Frank Romano and a team of researchers from the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) conducted in-depth interviews with almost 700 inplant/CRD managers, print buyers, industry observers and others to produce a snapshot of the centralised in-house print market with projections into the future. The result is the Canon Insight Report *Corporate Reprographics: Trends and Opportunities.*

Their findings provide the *raison d'être* for this Canon guide. They demonstrate that while today's inplants, in common with every sector of the printing industry, face significant challenges, they could also benefit from a combination of factors that present enormous opportunities to become indispensable to the future success of their corporate 'customers'.

The first decade of the 21st Century has been good for many CRDs. The volume of work handled in-house has grown from 30% to 50% of all corporate print, and the number of CRDs is now estimated at 44,000-plus worldwide and 11,500 in Western Europe.

Many of these operations continue to provide their host organisations with the benefits that have underpinned in-house printing from the start. The most important is the **cost-saving** based on the absence of profit mark-ups and commercial sales commissions. The CRD exists to serve its internal clientele not only more promptly and efficiently than a commercial printer, but at a lower cost – a CRD should save 10-20% over outside printing and can reduce costs by as much as 30%. In-house printing also gives improved **control** over what is printed and the cost of printing, because each document can be printed in the most appropriate and cost-effective way. The print requirements of the CRD's internal "customers" create an **aggregated volume** that justifies a centralised operation equipped with the most appropriate and cost-effective production and finishing systems. Next is the **convenience** of having print production close to those customers, who in many cases don't have to leave the building or can arrange for collection or delivery. Last but not least, keeping print in the corporate family generally guarantees greater security of information – an important consideration given that data **security** is a vital component of effective corporate governance.

To these established benefits we can add three more recent factors. The first is the importance organisations place on print in an age where it is imperative for organisations to communicate regularly with internal and external audiences. The vast majority of the organisations that the RIT team spoke to – including a remarkable 95% of public sector organisations – rate print as 'critical' to their operations. Second, the global economic downturn means businesses continue to look for cost-savings, and saving money is one thing a well-run CRD will achieve. Third, the combination of digital printing and automated workflows – including web-to-print – enables the CRD to provide more flexible, cost-effective services to their users, based on short run-lengths, faster turnarounds and personalised printing.

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So while CRDs can look forward to a bright future, it is a future in which you must work hard to justify the CRD to your corporate masters. This will involve doing more than simply printing more cheaply. You must also demonstrate that the CRD adds value to the organisation's communication processes, by producing more complex work in-house, adopting the latest automated workflow and web-to-print solutions to improve efficiencies, and buying print effectively when necessary. However, you must be more than just more efficient; you must be creative, developing new products and services for your customers. To understand customers' needs, you must partner with the organisation's key departments and develop workflows to support them, involving the CRD in the creative process as early as possible. Lastly, you must invest in people with the skills to deliver your customers' requirements.

These guides will help you achieve these goals. Compiled with the assistance of independent industry experts working on Canon's Essential Business Builder Program, they will build into a valuable resource for managers who wish to transform their CRD from 'just' the in-house print and copying department into a communication service provider as vital to the organisation as the IT and HR departments.

Over the coming weeks, the guides will provide strategic and tactical advice on these key areas of modern CRD management:

Growing your CRD:
Many CRDs are keen to develop and promote their service proposition to internal customers. To help you understand what can be achieved, we use a real-life case study to show how one CRD responded to technological and operational challenges and successfully created a busy, well-respected, valuable printroom.


Why web-to-print is vital:
Web-to-print (W2P) makes ordering print easier, reduces errors in job submission, increases control over corporate brand guidelines and provides real-time job tracking. However, the strongest argument for W2P is its positive impact on customer satisfaction – CRDs with a web presence were rated "excellent" by 55% of their customers, compared to just 22% of those without one. We provide key guidelines to scoping, designing and rolling out this powerful means of driving volume to the CRD and enhancing the department's standing in the organisation.

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Proving your worth:
Too often senior management undervalues what printing in-house brings to the organisation. At a time when every cost centre is subject to harsh scrutiny, we explain how you can measure the department's contribution and – just as important – how best to present what you do to the top-level decision-makers. We also show you how to benchmark the CRD against your peers and your commercial competitors.
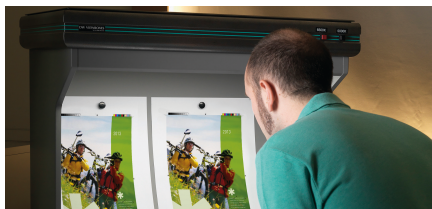
Taking control of design:
In recent years design and print-buying have converged to the point where designers exercise considerable control over how a job is produced—and whether it is cost-effective. Yet very few organisations combine design, printing and print-buying, despite the cost-savings and efficiency improvements this can bring. We explain how technology has encouraged the merging of responsibilities, and the practical steps you can take to win greater control of the design and print-buying functions.

Getting to know cross-media:
Print's future role in marketing will be in combination with other channels, and you need to know the essentials of cross-media in order to build a relationship with the marketing department – the CRD's most important customer. We provide you with the basic vocabulary to conduct a constructive conversation about cross-media in general and the role of print in particular. We explain what cross-media is, the benefits it provides to marketers, and the opportunities it offers the CRD.

Adding value with finishing:
Finishing is where the value is, because customers don't want a stack of sheets – they want a completed booklet or a bound report. We cover the developments in automated finishing that make it viable for CRDs to bring finishing in-house, look at the pros and cons of in-line, off-line and near-line systems for bookletmaking, folding, cutting and binding, and explain how special finishes can be applied to add value.

Working with external printers:
While digital printing and finishing enable the CRD to print more sophisticated work in-house, there will always be jobs that are beyond their capabilities for one reason or another – quantity, page count, turnaround, finished size, etc. We help you decide when to print in-house and when to use external printers, how to find the right outside print partner, and how to improve print buying, both within the CRD and in the organisation as a whole.

If you feel a little daunted by this catalogue of what you need to do to secure the future of the CRD, it's understandable.
But you are not alone in taking these measures – the entire printing industry is coming to terms with the plethora of change in the broader communications business we are part of.
No one pretends that change is easy, but CRDs have several advantages over the commercial competition and in their host organisations they have identifiable customers whose needs are there to be understood and met. We hope this series of guides will help you do both.

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