

Why web-to-print is vital

you can



Web-to-print (W2P) is often regarded as a new technology, but it's been around a long time. Under the banner of "print e-procurement", it first appeared in the dotcom frenzy of the late 1990s, and while most of those early W2P businesses went the way of Pets.Com, their founders deserve credit for recognising that print and the Internet are made for each other. So much so that it's no exaggeration to say that the future of the CRD depends on how successfully you implement web-to-print.

Many inplants have already grasped this. Canon's Insight Report *Corporate Reprographics: Trends and Opportunities* found that 65% of jobs were submitted online as digital files, that a number of CRDs have W2P websites, and that most have already put a degree of W2P in place or are planning to. The research also demonstrated W2P's remarkable 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.

Internet-enabled printing

For a succinct definition of W2P, try this from Professor Frank Romano on print industry website WhatTheyThink: "Web-to-print doesn't really mean anything. It's really using the Internet to enable printing in some way. That means I can send a file, proof a file, buy something, specify something, track something, correct something, know where my job stands, and so on – all over the Internet. All these things are using the Internet to integrate printing into the fabric of print buying on a worldwide basis."

Replace "worldwide" with "organisation-wide" and you can see why W2P needs to be a vital part of your strategy for transforming the CRD from 'just' the in-house print and copying department into a communications facilitator as vital to the organisation as the IT and HR departments.

In the following pages we look at what makes a W2P solution and the benefits it brings to the organisation and the CRD. As will become clear, W2P is a big subject; there are almost as many W2P models as there are different organisations, and each CRD has to find the right one for them. It would take a much bigger guide than this to cover every aspect of introducing web-to-print to your organisation, but there are certain processes that you need to follow to successfully harness this essential technology.

We first look at exactly what W2P is and what it can do – or more precisely, why W2P is vital to your strategy to grow the CRD's share of internal print. We then describe the key stages in designing and implementing a W2P solution. These include identifying the internal 'markets' most likely to benefit from the technology, building the internal relationships between the CRD and other departments that are vital to the success of the project, and – crucially – ensuring your staff have the right skills to deliver the new service. Finally, we suggest ways of rolling W2P out across the organisation.

The many flavours of W2P

Professor Romano's remark that W2P "doesn't really mean anything" highlights the fact that the label covers a wide range of models. In its simplest form, print buyers fill in an order form and upload a file. More complex W2P solutions might involve selecting and modifying standard documents from online libraries or catalogues, or the creation and submission of end-user-created documents using an Internet application, with subsequent production of the job in the CRD; in practice, you create a self-service Internet 'portal' where your customers create or select a job and submit it for production, at which point it automatically enters the CRD's workflow, gets a job ticket, is printed and dispatched, with an invoice generated if required.

A variety of service providers host these solutions, from commercial printers selling their services to print buyers, to online retailers selling stationery and simpler products to consumers and businesses. In the inplant environment, the most common host is the CRD, providing an online ordering facility for internal customers.

How W2P benefits the organisation

Web-to-print brings quantifiable benefits to both the CRD and the organisation as a whole by improving the management and efficiency of print procurement. In recent InfoTrends research¹ print providers deploying e-procurement enjoyed an average increase in print volumes of 8%, and the average cost-savings for corporate document owners were 14%. The benefits most commonly quoted include fewer errors in job submission, ease of ordering, online access to the latest versions of sales materials, increased control of corporate branding, tighter control of budgets, and so on. In addition, the Insight Report identified a number of other aspects of W2P that benefit the CRD, including:

- Automated job pricing, job cost accumulation and chargeback
- User authentication via login and logout
- Internet access to job status information and online status notification to customers
- Online proofing
- Document storage and reprinting

How W2P benefits the CRD

Implemented correctly, W2P is also a powerful channel the CRD can use to demonstrate its capabilities to internal customers, in the process securing its future within the organisation – remember what we said earlier about W2P "integrating printing into the fabric of print buying."

One reason many inplants have a low profile with internal customers is because those customers don't encounter the CRD on a day-to-day basis. In today's digital workplace, people expect to interact with colleagues and other departments via the organisation's network, or 'Intranet'. So far as they're concerned, if a part of the organisation isn't visible online, it doesn't impact on their corporate consciousness! So just by implementing a simple but effective W2P model you immediately raise the profile of the printroom.

Once you have an online presence, you can leverage it to build your customer base and increase volume. By making the CRD accessible to your customers, you also make them more accessible to the CRD and can start a two-way 'conversation' with benefits to both parties. For example, if you regularly get requests for jobs whose run-lengths are unsuitable for your digital presses, ask the customer why they want to print so many. The answer may be "because we always order that many", which provides you with the opportunity to explain the benefits of print-on-demand, versioning and personalisation. By talking about value and maximising returns, you can change the way people think about print.

With web-to-print you can draw a 'virtuous circle' in which the CRD's volumes grow, service responses improve, costs fall, the environmental impact lessens, and the CRD's strategic importance to the organisation is enhanced, all of which are powerful arguments for further investment in the CRD.

The first steps to W2P

From what you've read so far, it should be apparent that you don't arrive at the right W2P solution overnight. Instead, you have to approach the project much as you would set about building a new business – which, in effect, you are. You have to research the market.

If you've followed the advice we gave in Part 2 of the guide ('Growing Your CRD'), you already have a good idea of what's being printed, where, why and by whom, and you know what you're capable of producing in-house. Now you have to investigate further to identify those internal customers who will gain the most benefits from W2P, and which of their print requirements fit best with your W2P-enhanced production capability.

At least in the early stages, target users whose requirements allow you to prove the benefits of W2P quickly and easily – the 'low hanging fruit' of the organisation. Don't spread W2P too thinly, trying to be all things, to all customers, all of the time.

The products best suited to W2P production are simple for customers to order, and straightforward for you to produce – in other words, they fit a standardised workflow. Bear in mind that the most important factor in engaging your customers is the ordering process; you must provide users with a simple way of ordering everything from simple stationery to complex marketing collateral and variable data work. And once the order arrives in the CRD, it should move through the production process with minimal intervention. In an ideal world, the customer places an order and the only time the inplant staff touch it is when they box it up for dispatch.



It's a team game

A successful W2P solution is a team effort involving a number of departments besides the CRD, principally IT, procurement, marketing and communications, and human resources. Whether or not you co-opt representatives of each onto a formal W2P project team is up to you, but you will have to call on these pools of resources to implement W2P and spread the word.

The **IT department** is clearly vital – you need their network. At first they may be wary of the new data load that W2P brings, plus other technical issues. The key is to involve IT early – don't spring a surprise – and use their skills to the full in testing and deploying the solution. The same goes for the people in charge of the organisation's Intranet – they will ensure the 'look and feel' of the W2P solution fits the corporate brand, and they can also help you promote the service.

The support of the **procurement department** is vital to identifying 'print leakage' to non-CRD printers and outside print providers, and to stopping maverick print procurement. If you pitch W2P correctly, they will be receptive to how it improves procurement and opens up new services such as VDP and POD. Remember that they already have experience in e-procurement, and almost certainly have tools that you can use. There may also be a policy in place that favours internal procurement where possible and which you can apply to encourage take-up of W2P.

Marketing and communications are the CRD's biggest customers, so you need them to fully support W2P. To marketing, push the benefits of easy-to-use, template-driven processes for creating up-to-date, versioned or personalised marketing collateral – automating these repetitive jobs frees them for more creative work. Communications people want to be able to implement and fine-tune campaigns quickly and easily, and W2P takes some of the pressure off.

Lastly, you will need to call on the expertise of the **human resources** department. Web-to-print involves more than just new technology. It means a new culture in the CRD – one that is outward facing, not inward looking – and its deployment will touch on every aspect of the CRD operation. Change can be difficult for employees to handle. They may be unsettled by the new working practices, unsure of their ability to master new skills, and worried about the security of their jobs. It's imperative that you consult, listen and share throughout the process. Web-to-print won't work without a trained, focused, motivated and committed workforce.

New workflow, new skills

Web-to-print calls for new skills in the CRD. We have already touched on the importance of working with the IT department, but you can't rely totally on them. You need a level of **IT expertise** you can call on all the time, to handle the day-to-day issues that arise and liaise with corporate IT. Ideally, you will already have someone in the department able to do this – for the right person, it's a real career development – but if not you will have to recruit someone.

Customer relationship management (CRM) – another key skill – is a big leap for the CRD's existing estimating and account handling staff, who often do both. With W2P, estimating is likely to be a one-off calculation when the workflow for a particular job, or type of job, is first set up, but account handling may involve dealing with hundreds of buyers. To avoid being swamped, account handlers need to avoid unnecessary customer contact on low-cost jobs, which is where online solutions can help. Of course, if you've got your workflow right, customer calls should be few, but when they do happen you need systems, processes and procedures to deal efficiently with the issues.

Don't skimp on **applications training**. And distinguish between 'installation' and 'training', which suppliers often combine. Training should only begin after you've finally signed off the installation. Ideally, train two people or, at the very least, make sure a second person is trained in how to maintain the system as soon as possible. It's also a good idea to have a W2P project you can work on as soon as training is completed, to put the theory into practice.

CRD staff might resist **sales training**, but remember that W2P is part of a broader strategy to position the CRD as a pro-active, creative partner in developing communications solutions, and selling solutions is quite different from selling print. Don't expect staff to switch modes without some quality training.

Web-to-print volumes may be small to begin with, but as they grow **knowledge transfer** between staff will ensure everyone understands what each team member does. Make sure too that all the knowledge is documented to speed the training of new staff and minimise the impact of staff sickness or departures.

Going live!

You've done your homework. The web-to-print solution is installed. Your people are trained. It only remains to roll out W2P to the organisation. Here are some tips to help you ensure a successful launch.

Beta test: Before you 'go live', beta test the solution with selected customers who represent a good cross-section of the organisation – for example, a large department, a small department, a remote department, and maybe some home workers too. Ask for honest, no-holds-barred feedback, and take it on board.

In the beginning, it's likely the solution won't be able to do everything customers want. Explain why and explore different ways of getting the same result. You may end up with a better solution!

Provide a guide: Produce a user guide personalised to each customer, and use it as a training aid, perhaps by getting them to log on to order it. If you incorporate sample jobs to introduce the system to customers, incorporate a personal element; a good example would be a calendar template in which they can use their own photography. This way you're starting to change the way they think about print – not as a commodity but as something with added value.

Follow up: Always follow up new users, by email or phone. Send out feedback forms with each completed job. It makes customers feel part of what you're doing and helps build long-term relationships.

Keep the faith!

From what you've read, it should be clear that implementing a web-to-print solution is probably the most important single element in your strategy to place the CRD at the heart of the organisation's communications infrastructure. It's a major undertaking, because you are asking people – CRD staff and internal departments – to change the way they work. It won't be an overnight success – organisations can be slow to change – but if you keep the faith and take every opportunity to promote W2P throughout the organisation you will grow the CRD, enhance its status and secure its future.

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