

A Pressing production concern - Electrical and control system technology and how best to manage this growing dilemma

► BY SAM WAGNER SPECIAL TO NEWS & TECH



As with many other things in our society, printing presses have become much more technically advanced over the years incorporating more sophisticated electronic components and controls to provide more automation, higher quality and efficiency in place of old fashion manual

adjustments, drive shafts and very large drive motors. This also reduced the mechanical complexity of presses and allowed for more streamlined and flexible installations while saving time in the process.

This had some other 'trickle down' effect as well, eliminating some of the old mechanical maintenance procedures and inventory of many heavy replacement parts associated with older designs. It has also required printers to have available a slightly different type of technician, one having a background in electronics, PLC and drive controls as well as a working knowledge of computers. This coupled together with a different inventory of spare parts and the all-important on-line link to the manufacturers 24/7 'hotline' for help and support in the event of a critical breakdown when a higher level of assistance may be needed.

Price of technology

One of the downfalls of all this technology is the rapid pace of development and how quickly things can become obsolete or no longer supported. For example, can you count how many versions of Microsoft 'Windows' have been developed and released since your press was installed? Depending on the vintage of the press installation and all of the associated equipment, you may be like hundreds of other printers these days receiving letters talking about updates or upgrades for the equipment due to parts obsolescence and/or support no longer being available.

Sometimes, the cost of doing this can be quite startling and something that was never thought about or planned for. But, just like many other technical gadgets in our life like

computers, cell phones and so on, technology has a rather short shelf life and in order to maintain an acceptable level of performance, support and parts availability, updating and upgrading is a cold reality in maintaining a reliable and efficient machine.

What to do

Because this has caught so many off guard, there is a lot of uncertainty as to what to do and the best way to handle these situations. I can personally say I have been receiving a growing number of calls every week this year to discuss this very subject, in fact two while writing this article! There are a significant number of options available from having the OEM (original equipment manufacturer) handle the project or contracting directly to specific suppliers/vendors of the technology. There is also the option to employ a capable project design and management company for a more customized solution or use a local service company to repair the system on an 'as required' basis. Lastly, you can try to buy up as many spare parts as possible and continue to run the system 'as is' for as long as possible and simply replace what fails hoping this gets you to the 'finish line'.

Each one of these alternatives has its benefits and drawbacks as well as cost and associated risk and each should be fully understood before making such an important decision. The old adage of there are many ways to skin a cat could not be more true. For example, it is quite possible to update to a more reliable and advanced system and still realize significant savings as compared to what was thought to be the 'only alternative' available. Of course, there are also some very basic questions that need to be answered before getting started such as:

- How much more life or use is expected from the machine?
- What is a realistic budget that can be appropriated for such an undertaking?
- Are there other benefits that could reap financial gains by incorporating newer and/or different technology to improve efficiency or quality or a number of other factors?

Looking to the future

The newspaper industry and web offset printing in North America as well as many other parts of the world continues to evolve with a similar economic model and that is a focus on maximizing efficiency and flexibility in all aspects of the operation in order to insure profitability in today's competitive market. Any investment needs to provide a quick return since the future seems to be in a constant state of flux.

New equipment or upgrades should provide a high level of automation and integration for all processes in the production chain with simple, intuitive and straight forward operation requiring minimal training and human interaction in order to prepare, run and finish each printing job. Items critical to this include maximizing the printer to pages produced ratio's, minimizing waste, tracking of all materials, maintaining a consistent and high standard of quality and full reporting of all activities for more precise financial feedback and control.

Other important aspects

Along with press specific control and functionality features, many other aspects of a printing company can benefit from a truly advanced and fully integrated control system including the Accounting/Purchasing, Sales and Marketing, Planning/Scheduling, Pre-press and Postpress departments as well as your print customers:

- Accounting/Purchasing can determine highly accurate costs for all print jobs while inventory control can be streamlined due to the collection and use of real time data from a 'closed loop' collection system.
- Sales and marketing can sell jobs and press time to the full potential of the press at the correct pricing levels and avoid costly errors or misconceptions by utilizing accurate and predetermined information.
- Planning/Scheduling can be simplified into a 'drag and drop' type process and streamline the coordination of job flow to maximize efficiency and minimize errors

Pressing concern continued on page 12

Pressing concern from page 10

with minimal human intervention.

• Prepress can be streamlined with a fully integrated workflow providing simple tools to automate the entire process including any requirements for printing, finishing and other operations. In addition, customers can send, preview and OK their jobs for printing further minimizing human intervention.

• Postpress can be linked to the rest of the process to automate additional activities such as finishing operations, zoning requirements, counting and bundling, mailing and delivery and other related items.

The future is now

Many of these aspects have been accounted for on several recent press installation/upgrade projects we have done. For example, on a recent Canadian press installation, a fully integrated control system was specified, designed and installed and is yielding some industry leading results in terms of efficiency, productivity and flexibility. Furthermore, it has been doing this from 'day 1' without the dreaded 'learning

curve' that can sometimes last for months or even years before achieving positive results and justification for the expenditure.

For example, in the first 24 months of production on a 3 tower, single folder press:

• Over 5500 different print jobs totaling over 170 million printed copies have been run of various sizes and formats including broadsheet multi-section newspapers, tabloids, magazines and other products.

• Total press waste has been held at an incredible low rate of under 3% while at the same time maintaining a high level of quality. More impressive is the fact that run lengths are as short as under 1000 copies and occasionally up to as many as 1 million copies.

• Labor required is extremely low, usually only just 2 or 3 people total in the pressroom which yields a highly efficient rate of 48 printed pages (tabloid) per person. ▲

Sam Wagner is Principal of Web Offset Service, a press and control system design and project management company based in Sarasota, FL. He may be reached at weboffsetservice@aol.com

Morris centralizes from page 8

browser and unique log in.

All four properties will have a streamlined NewsWay Receiver footprint for more efficient and secure plate TIFF transmission and reduced network traffic, according to ProImage.

The hub in Augusta will RIP, impose and send plate-ready TIFFs to each property. Each of the four locations will also have an integrated RIP for disaster recover purposes and can plan, RIP, impose and output locally if needed.

Every site will also employ ProImage's On-Color Eco software to reduce ink consumption on the press.

"It will be very beneficial to have a single solution that facilitates the same functionality in each market," Ruth said. "From a support standpoint, we'll be able to manage this and not end up six or seven versions behind."

Ruth said the benefits of standardized software and hardware will touch all areas of the business going forward.

"It will help us in all areas to keep optimal equipment and give our staff somewhere to go with internal support," Ruth added. "We are working on building internal safety nets so our folks will know these systems well and resources can be shared among sites," he said. ▲



We'll get your babies home safe.

WELCOME TO THE REBIRTH OF PRINT DISTRIBUTION

- DELIVERY SERVICES
- TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS
- CONSULTING SOLUTIONS

PCF

pcfcorp.com | 1-877-PCF-6668

Your babies deserve a reliable, affordable trip into the hands of readers - and PCF is ready to serve. Choose from a range of affordable delivery and stand-alone technology solutions to maximize the efficiency of your distribution operation. Buckle in. Let's ride into the future together.