All Roads Should Lead to Rome: Managing Multiple Order Acquisition Pathways

By Richard Romano, Industry Analyst

> ALEXI DARLING:
> Your footage of the riots: a-one
> Feature segment-network-deal time,
> I'm sending you a contract
> Ker-ching ker-ching
> Marky, give us a call 970-4301
> Or at home try 863-6754
> Or my cellphone at 919-763-0090
> Or you can email me at darlingalexi@newscom.net
> Or you can page me at—
>
> —"Voice Mail #3," from the Broadway musical *Rent*

Many of us have an ever-growing and ever-changing number of ways that people can reach us. There is the phone (often more than one; home, office, and mobile), email (sometimes more than one address), texting, social media (Twitter direct messaging, Facebook Messenger, LinkedIn Mail), and even good old-fashioned print mail. For some, the fax also clings to life, and at one time many of us had a pager number (remember those?).

We are so awash in ways of being reached that managing our communications can be a substantial challenge, especially if we need to retrieve or refer back to a specific message. "Was that bit of info I need in a voicemail message or an email?" "What mailbox would that email be in, and what device was I using when I received it?" Sure, we can sync some of these things so they're ostensibly easy to find, but that doesn't always happen.

We are seeing a similar phenomenon emerging when it comes to printers receiving customer jobs.

Red Light Specials

A recent webinar hosted by WhatTheyThink was titled "The Uber-ization of Print," and the Uber metaphor is an apt way of describing the latest attitude and approach to print order acquisition. That is, today's print buyers increasingly expect the print ordering process to be as simple as launching a mobile app, entering a few salient details (in Uber's case, current location and destination; in print's case, trim size and quantity, for example), and hitting a "Make It So" button. If you've never used Uber—and one could hardly blame you—Amazon's "One-Click Checkout" is another apt metaphor. In other words, print buyers want to order print the way they increasingly order everything else: using a mobile device and with a minimum of steps. I'm going to coin the term "red light ordering": they want to be able to order their print job in the time they are sitting in their cars waiting at a red light.

Even if mobile print-buying isn't 100-percent there right now—largely because of file size and handling issues—it's certainly on its way, thanks to the cloud.

The Doors of Perception—And Vice Versa

For today's print business, setting up that kind of Uber-esque order acquisition may be onerous enough, but as any printer can tell you, that's not the only way that customers order print jobs, just as there are other ways to order a car service—or, indeed, other ways that people can communicate with you. You may have the Uber app, but if you are in Midtown Manhattan, it may simply be more efficient to stand on the curb and hail a cab *sans* phone. Likewise, if you are a print business that has a physical location, some customers may find it more convenient—or comfortable—to simply walk in. Even online there are various ways of submitting jobs; customers who don't use mobile devices may be perfectly content to email you files, while others may have become reliant on a FTP site (yes, they still exist) or other direct upload method. Then there is Box, Dropbox, WeTransfer, and other file-sharing services that send links to files stored in the cloud.

And it even gets worse. Print shops can have *multiple* online storefronts. They can have certain private online portals for large, regular customers, or they can have different "branded" portals for different aspects of the print business—one for general commercial print, one for signage and display products, and so on. There can be one storefront that solely offers standard templated print products and another one for customers who have unique "one off" kinds of jobs—and the latter can be high-margin jobs, so you don't want to lose those. And those different storefronts may have been set up by different vendors.

Stimulus Overload

The point is that the typical printer today has jobs coming into the shop from many different directions. Let's face it, you take a risk of losing customers if you *only* offer online ordering or *only* offer walk-in service. Heck, even Amazon launched a physical retail location.

As you can see from this InfoTrends infographic, orders arrive in at least three basic ways, a situation that has been evolving over the past decade:

All the lonely orders—where do they all come from?
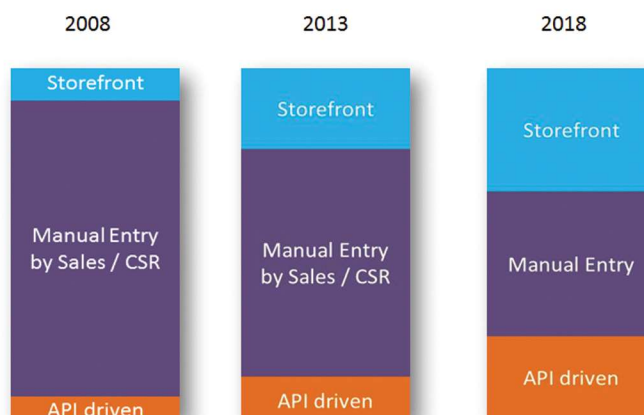
*Info Trends, Another Chapter Opens in the Evolution of the Printing Industry

"API-driven," by the way, is synonymous with online storefront, web-to-print, or whatever term you choose. The challenge, then, is how to manage jobs coming in through all these doors. Specifically, can one Management Information System (MIS) link to not only all of these disparate job submission methods, but also the various vendors' online storefronts, like PageDNA, Pageflex Storefront, Aleyant Pressero, etc.?

MISing the Point

As was mentioned in a previous editorial, all your "doors"—online or offline—should all lead to the same place. All roads should lead to Rome. You don't want different jobs to be running on multiple tracks through the shop—be it production, MIS, or otherwise—which can create a plethora of problems, from tying up personnel to perform redundant tasks, slowing turnaround time, introducing errors, causing production confusion, increasing training costs to learn these parallel systems, mismanagement of digital resources, and inconsistent pricing/estimating.

Having dueling MISes misses the point: you want one brain to control all aspects of the enterprise, and having a web-to-print system that bypasses the MIS entirely and shunts jobs right into production is akin to having "too many cooks in the kitchen." (So many metaphors, so little time!) You need one MIS to be the master chef, the web-to-print system can be the *sous chef*, the bricks and mortar intake system can be the waitstaff—you can carry this metaphor down as far down as you want. The point is: there can only be one boss, one MIS, that runs the operation. Or, to return to the Uber idea, a car should have only one driver, since we all know what backseat drivers are like.

You can pick whatever analogy you like, but the goal is to have a single system that coordinates such disparate functions as:

- web storefronts (all of 'em)
- custom order capture
- sales rep/business development/CSR order entry
- walk-in sales
- estimating
- order management
- proofing
- print automation
- accounting
- mail processing
- shipping

PressWise provides a web-to-print, MIS, and workflow automation solution that includes the optional integration with many of the popular third-party storefronts. Orders can be captured and processed from multiple, independent systems, and the system will coordinate all your order acquisition pathways, translating and transforming information as needed, regardless of how those orders come in. This results in a streamlined workflow, with fewer touches, lower costs, and increased efficiencies. This helps you—and helps your customers, however they prefer to reach you.