Workflow Solution Tames 'Wild West' Ordering Process

"Sometimes it can feel a bit like the Wild West; orders come from everywhere—e-mail, walk-ins, fax machines and the mail," laments Chad Simpson, the Graphic Arts supervisor for the **East Baton Rouge Parish School System**. "The artwork files might come in from one way, such as e-mail, while the print request form might arrive in the mail three days later."

Clearly something had to be done to simplify the ordering process, while reducing the manual touches involved in producing each job and allowing production teams to access up-to-date job information. So in September, the seven-employee in-plant installed PressWise, an MIS, Web-to-print and workflow automation solution from SmartSoft.

PressWise offers a cloud-based platform that includes Web storefronts, estimating, order management, production automation, shipping, fulfillment and mail processing. The all-in-one nature of PressWise, including its ability to create unlimited custom storefronts for each school or department, was a big selling factor for the in-plant.

"We were definitely looking for something that had a Web-to-print component that didn't require us to maintain any hardware," says Simpson. "We wanted something that kept us organized but didn't take up a lot of time to use, and we wanted it all from one vendor so we wouldn't have to go through the finger pointing if things didn't go right."

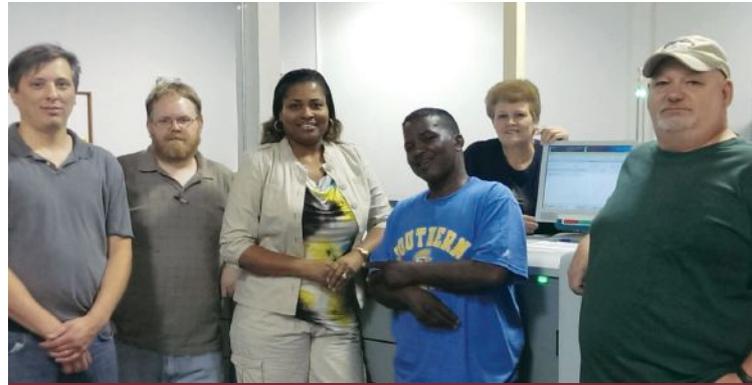The new MIS solution has streamlined and automated the in-plant's print production process workflow, allowing the shop to take orders from a variety of sources and push them through a single, unified workflow. Simpson couldn't be happier with the results.

"I was really impressed with all the technical support and online tools to get me up and running as quickly as possible, including a 'learning center' full of videos and an in-depth knowledge base, which goes a long way in educating me on what the product is capable of," he remarks. "It is a lot easier to get it off the ground if you can get answers to questions when you need them.

"The other huge selling point is how frequently the system is updated," he adds. "The fact that PressWise is software-as-a-service means I always have access to the very latest version. I have tried other systems, and updates are so rare they are practically non-existent. I wanted to partner with a company that would work at making the product better for me through enhancements that come from customer input on an ongoing basis, not once a year or once every couple of years."

Providing printing to 90 schools, 6,000 employees and 43,000 students in the East Baton Rouge Parish School System, the in-plant uses a mix of offset and digital equipment, including a two-color Heidelberg Printmaster QM 46 and Océ VarioPrint 6250, 4120 and CS665 printers.

"Most of the items we print are things you would typically think of in a school system, such as tests, workbooks, handouts, brochures, postcards and stationery," reports Simpson. "We average about 1.5 million letter impressions per month and about 3,000 square feet of wide-format printing."

In the near future, he says, the shop plans to add a fourth Océ device—another Océ VarioPrint 6250—as well as a 10-color automatic screen printing press and a four-clamp perfect binder. For now, though, he is excited about the efficiency his operation has gained from the PressWise system.

"The Graphic Arts department for the school system here in East Baton Rouge is now set up to provide a superior level of service," he declares, "with a company like SmartSoft that is clearly committed to being much more than a vendor, but a partner in our future success."

The Graphic Arts department staff at the East Baton Rouge Parish School System (from left): Chad Simpson, Donovan Walker, Daphane Stevenson, Lonnie Hankton, Debbie Hope and Michael Brooks.

Advancements in Alabama

been very busy lately printing posters and other items, he says, and the laminator protects those prints for prolonged outdoor use.

"Once word got around that we can do wide-format, everybody's coming at us," he says. "It sold itself."

Soon to be implemented at the in-plant is Print Shop Pro Lite, from edu Business Solutions. Robinson talked with other users of the MIS and went through an online demonstration. He was very impressed, and felt the software was geared toward smaller shops like his. The in-plant elected to add the LDAP module, which allows customers to log in using their UWA network credentials; the Color Themes module, which allows the shop's website to be configured with UWA colors and fonts; and the Document Converter module, which converts common file types to PDF during the customer's order process.

"It's going to reduce our billing time from about six hours to five minutes," Robinson observes.

—By Bob Neubauer