Who is Your Print MIS/ERP Administrator?

The Print MIS/ERP administrator role in your print business is a strategic differentiator. You want as much independence and ability to move at your own pace as possible from the software vendor.

By Jennifer Matt, WhatTheyThink

I ask the following question every time I engage with a printer: "Who is your print MIS/ERP administrator?" It tells me a lot about what we're going to have to do to make foundational changes in the way the print business uses software tools. Here are some of the common answers.

- I guess it's me.

- I don't know what you mean by "administrator."

- What does a Print MIS/ERP person do?

- Why do I need one?

- Isn't that the software vendor's job?

- Isn't software supposed to run itself?

- I bought the software to automate, now you're telling me I need a babysitter!

My favorite answer is:

"<Greg> is, he knows more about the software than the vendor."

Your Print MIS/ERP is a complicated piece of software, it doesn't matter which one you're using. It has hundreds or thousands of features. If it's a commercial product, it wasn't built to cater to the precise way you run your business. It was built in a generic fashion to run print businesses like the one you own or work at. This means you must be flexible. Your processes, your people, and your way of doing things has to "flex" to match how the software works.

Software doesn't flex to you. It's configurable, but you shouldn't think of it like a recipe that you can change to perfectly match the tastes of your business. Instead, you should think of a Print MIS/ERP more like a puzzle that has fixed pieces that were designed to work together in a specific way. If you go out of those specific patterns, you end up trying to force pieces together that were never really meant to be together.

A Print MIS/ERP administrator is your internal expert on the software that runs your business. I would say the number one reason some printers are successful with their Print MIS solutions while others are in a constant state of frustration really comes down to whether they have a designated internal Print MIS/ERP

expert or not. When you do not have an internal expert, everyone in your organization does the best they can with the tools they know how to use. So just think about the heavy users of your Print MIS/ERP: customer service and estimating. When employees in these functional areas are faced with a challenge involving the Print MIS/ERP, they use email, spreadsheets, printed notes, and PDFs to solve the problems because those are the tools they understand.

You can see this happening in real time in almost every print organization. Someone asks a question, the customer service agent doesn't know so they start tracking this information in a spreadsheet or a printed log or on a Post-It™ note on their monitor. Think about this happening over years and years and you know what kind of mess is being created.

Now go to a printer where there is a clear Print MIS/ERP expert. A new challenge is brought to customer service, they escalate it to the expert. The expert then might show them how they can track that data in the MIS in an area they might not have been aware of, or they might be able to add a custom field to the MIS. This adherence to keeping your Print MIS/ERP as the true system of record makes all the difference downstream. You can't run a report on information scribbled on a printed job ticket. You can't get a sense of all the tasks customer service is doing if they are tracking things in offline spreadsheets.

An internal expert/administrator enables your employees to focus on getting jobs done and having somewhere to turn when they have an exception. You simply cannot rely on the vendor's technical support desk for this. It isn't available in the response times your organization requires and the advice you need is 70% about how your business uses the software solution and only 30% about how the software itself functions. A Print MIS/ERP administrator can have other responsibilities, although at large print businesses, it may need to be a dedicated resource. The more time you can give a strategic resource to focus on this job the better your overall business will run. Here is a list of responsibilities I would put on a Print MIS/ERP Administrator.

- Manage upgrades of the Print MIS.

- Manage any integrations (with IT) between the Print MIS/ERP and other software

solutions.

- Attend the vendor's annual user conference (if there is one).

- Submit support tickets into the vendor (I find centralizing who talks to vendor support is

best).

- Educate management about new upcoming features.

- Submit feature requests to the vendor that would benefit the business.

- Train new employees on how you are using the Print MIS/ERP.

- Monitor the use of the Print MIS/ERP for consistency.

- Learn how to write custom reports.

- Learn how to export data.

- Get feedback from users.

This is a comprehensive list, but you can build the skills incrementally over time. When your business has this person, you are in control of your own destiny with your Print MIS. It is such an asset. I wish Print MIS/ERP vendors would be stricter about requiring this role to be present and filled all the time at the printer. Setting the expectation that you can be successful without it is pure delusion.

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