SIGNATURE

ENGAGE.EXPLORE.ENERGIZE.EXCEL.

The range of what printers have accomplished indicates how much becomes possible once a plant commits to workflow automation.

WORKFLOW AUTOMATION:
PRINTERS SHARE THEIR SUCCESS STORIES

By Patrick Henry, Liberty or Death Communications

Editor's note: this article was commissioned by the Print and Graphics Communications Association (PGCA), representing the industry in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware.

Printing's march toward automation began with steam-powered presses in the early 19th century, took a giant leap forward with the invention of the Linotype toward the end of that period, and has continued nonstop ever since. The difference is that today, automation is as much about the software controlling the print manufacturing sequence as it is about the machines doing the printing.

AUTOMATION PLATFORM FOR PRINT PRODUCTION

Printers know this aspect of the process as workflow automation, and most of them perceive it as essential to success in the industry as it now operates. The basic question to ask when implementing it, according Marty Parker, a Senior Lecturer in Management at the University of Georgia, is whether a company wants to be a cost leader, an innovator, or a customer-centric provider.

❝ To survive as a firm, automate your workflows so that you get economies of scale, better purchasing power, and better labor utilization.

But, he counsels that changing the model can be "incredibly difficult" in mature industries where pressure toward commoditization is always a stark reality of the business.

See What AI Did There? We Soon Will

See sidebar on pages 5 & 6 for a look at the "incredible potential" of AI for print automation by one industry expert.

PGCA Membership Survey Results:

88.9% of survey respondents said they are "very likely" to renew their membership. Read highlights from the 2023 PGCA Membership Survey on pages 8-11.
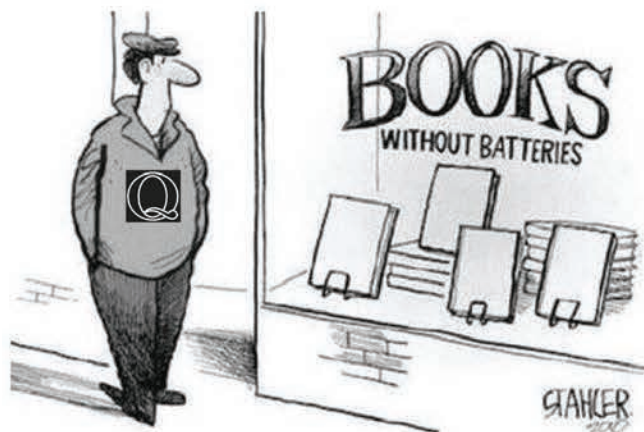
88.9%

PRINT & GRAPHIC COMMUNICATIONS ASSOCIATION

June 2023 / In this issue

Quality Bindery & Mailing Services
& Hard Cover Book Binding and Restoration
loves books on paper and hopes you do too!

Q

**QUALITY
BINDERY
SERVICES**
INC.

To learn more about our hard cover custom book binding and book repair services,
visit our website **www.qualitybindery.com** or call Kathie at **(716) 883-5185** today!

(716) 883-5185   (888) 883-1266 toll-free   info@qualitybindery.com

501 Amherst Street   Buffalo, NY 14207

Family owned and operated since 1993!

COVER CONTINUED

"You do have to know who you are and what you're trying to accomplish," says Parker, who specializes in supply chain strategies. "You don't want to get mixed up in trying to do everything: I'm an innovator, I'm customer-centric, and I'm a cost leader. It's impossible to have the investments you'd need to on the customer / innovator side and keep costs down to commodity levels."

'Do it to Survive'

In a mature, hyper-competitive, and consolidating industry like printing, that means achieving cost savings wherever they can be found. "You have to do it to survive as a firm," urges Parker. "The way to do that is by automating your workflows and your manufacturing and supply chain processes so that you get economies of scale, better purchasing power, and better labor utilization."

> 66 **Printers who have automated their workflows with the help of software know that the gains in operating economy and efficiency are real.**

As if that weren't enough to think about, printers must now also consider the impact that the emerging tools of artificial intelligence (AI) are likely to have on their manufacturing routines (see sidebar on page 5).

Printers who have automated their workflows with the help of software know that the gains in operating economy and efficiency are real. Those hanging back may feel overwhelmed by the apparent difficulty of deciding where to begin. But, the question isn't as complicated as it may appear.

Joe Olivo, president of Perfect Communications in Moorestown, NJ, admits that by overthinking automation in the past, he'd created a "barrier" to achieving it. He explains, "The mistake I made was trying to look at something and saying, how can we fully automate? And I've realized over time that that was probably the worst thing to do."

Olivo says he now realizes that "any sort of automation is an ongoing process that has to be done incrementally for there to be success. We were always looking at using excuses, saying, well, we can't automate this part of it, so it can never be automated."

Not All or Nothing

Olivo credits the consultant and analyst David Zwang with leading him to an "epiphany" about where he had gone wrong. Once it was understood that automation didn't have to be an all or nothing proposition, Perfect Communications could take better advantage of a tool it already had: Enfocus Switch, an automation platform for print production workflows.

"It was kind of sitting there unused," says Olivo. "We were using it for one specific application, but did not realize its full potential and abilities."

That changed, and now, says Olivo, Switch has automated the incoming workflow to the point where file preflight takes place at the estimating stage – an improvement he calls "a tremendous help" in catching and fixing file issues as far upstream in the process as possible.

Other printers interviewed for this report have made incremental advances of their own in the same task-specific way. The range of what they've accomplished indicates how much becomes possible once a plant commits to workflow automation.

Tonya Spiers, president and owner of Knight Abbey in Biloxi, MS, says her quest to automate started in prepress, where the goal was to take days off the preflight process "and get it down to seconds."

That has happened by virtue of triggered automation with Kodak Prinergy workflow software, so that everything previously checked manually now can go straight to platemaking if there are no issues with the files or if the job is a repeat order.

"Other very basic prepress tasks can be done through automation so that nobody has to touch it," Spiers says. "With foils, dies, and things like that, it's harder to automate, but most of our prepress function has been automated for the last four to five years."

'Elastic,' Top-Down Estimating

In Augusta, ME, J.S. McCarthy Printers is a legacy user of the Monarch MIS/ERP from EFI, which recently transferred its print and packaging production software business to the independently operating company eProductivity Software (ePS). J.S. McCarthy is rebuilding its 25-year-old Monarch database with the help of iQuote, an ePS print estimating solution that Matthew Tardiff, CFO, describes as a more "elastic" and user-friendly solution for job management.

iQuote, Tardiff explains, "estimates from the top down, where Monarch estimates from the ground up." iQuote does this by posing a series of questions from a "product carousel" and using the answers to drill down into the details needed to assemble the quote.

This is more efficient than starting from scratch in Monarch's ground-up estimating workflow, according to Tardiff. He adds that when iQuote is fully implemented, it will "drastically change" the automation of MIS/ERP at J.S. McCarthy as it transitions its business to folding cartons and packaging.

Adam Avrick, president of Design Distributors in Deer Park, NY, says that in the mass-mailing world where his company produces 10 million pieces per month, "automation with respect to data processing all stems from one important key element: the consistency of the way in which the data is supplied."

Drop and Process

That means in order to automate, "I need to be able to take that file and drop it into a hot folder that has been configured specifically

SIGNATURE

WORKFLOW AUTOMATION CONTINUED

for that data, and then I can auto-process," Avrick says. This lets the shop automate functions such as rules-based mailings to different states; USPS-compliant change-of-address updates; presorting for postal rate discounts; and programmatic mailings at regular intervals.

BCC Software and Quadient are the principal suppliers of mailing automation software at Design Distributors, which integrates their products with custom programming of its own. Before the company installed these solutions, much of the processing was manual, involving repeated handoffs of files and instructions between departments. Avrick says this tended to limit the workload to mailings that had to be produced as one-off jobs.

North Star Printing of Spanish Fork, UT, has operated with Heidelberg's Prinect workflow software for more than 10 years. Neal Foster, owner, says that of all the Prinect modules he's installed throughout the plant, the most powerful tool is Business Manager – a print MIS that he finds especially helpful for inventory control.

He says this is because Business Manager lets the plant track every plate, every linear inch of proofing material, and every pound of ink in real time as they are consumed. Prompted by JDF/JMF messaging during production, Business Manager then automatically deducts the quantities from inventory, posts the dollar amounts to job costing, and sets reordering points to trigger replenishment of what's been used.

Self-Inventorying Inventory

"It just made stuff so much easier," Foster says. Before ink consumption monitoring, for example, "PMS colors were just daunting. There were just so many of them, and so much to keep track of. Now, you don't have to do anything. The inventory just comes down on its own with no human intervention. It's actually been stunning to see how accurate it is."

The system can even generate a bill of materials based on how many sheets of make-ready the job is expected to need. "That all automatically gets reserved out of the warehouse," Foster says. "You don't have to run around looking for stuff."

The customer-facing part of a printing operation is another prime candidate for workflow automation. As a B2B printer, VISOGraphics of Addison, IL, has moved strongly in the direction of supporting its customers through digital storefronts: branded on-line portals where they can order the print, direct mail, and fulfillment services that VISOGraphics provides.

Bob Dahlke, in charge of business development, says that with 60 storefronts now in operation, "we've learned that you've got to be automated. The goal is for us not to touch things because they're smaller jobs that go through the plant." Software tools for taking out the touches include ePS Monarch for enterprise print management; Kodak InSite Creative Workflow for content creation; and Quadient for mailing.

Wake Up and Run

The rules-based automation of the VISOGraphics workflow sets production in full motion once clients have indicated what they want.

At the portals, "they can select stripping layouts and how they want proofs back," says John Dahlke, COO. "We have a couple of clients that have a vast amount of templates that they can choose from when they're uploading a file. They choose the layout, and it will automatically preflight, RIP, trap, and strip." Thanks to automation on the customer-facing side, "we have clients come in all hours of the day and night, and they're getting

their proofs in real time already laid out and stripped for them to approve."

In effect, says Bob Dahlke, "we were sleeping overnight while they did all the work in our system," eliminating those tasks on the printer's end. The next morning, with the customer's blessing, the job would be fully ready to run.

In Richmond, VA, Kenmore Envelope Company uses an ERP from One Point Systems, a developer of software solutions for envelope manufacturers. The system covers estimating, order entry, data collection, run speeds, shipments, inventory management, and invoicing – everything necessary to get a job into a well-regulated production workflow.

"It allows us to run an estimate and use that same bid to turn into an order," says Kristin Ogo, COO. "Once live, from there it will create a job for prepress to begin their workflow when art is available. We pull the shipment and invoice from the same system. Inventory is automatically allocated and reduced upon usage on our production floor. We can also see it live if it is running, and on what machine."

> 66 **There's no point in making any investment in software or equipment that doesn't reduce costs and increase efficiency.**

In Kenmore Envelope's prepress department, Esko Automation Engine automates all of the color functions and creates a complete set of instructions for ink key settings on press. Another Esko product, Phoenix, an AI-enhanced imposition tool, expedites layout creation by placing press marks and color bars with adjustments for specialized layouts as needed. These automation features have reduced errors primarily through reducing touches on the jobs, Ogo says.

What the CFO Needs to Know

Each of these efforts at automation has paid off in money-, time-, and labor-saving terms – the ultimate goal of the process. As Parker observes, there's no point in making any investment in software or equipment that doesn't reduce costs and increase efficiency.

"At the end of the day, any CFO worth their weight is going to say, am I writing fewer checks? Am I paying fewer people? Am I buying my raw materials for less money? Am I gaining more market share? If those things aren't happening, you shouldn't do it. You don't automate things to automate things."

There's no such thing as automation just for automation's sake at Perfect Communications, where the tangible benefits of software-driven workflow are a matter of record. Olivo says that since the company began making fuller use of Enfocus Switch, "our sales are doubled from where they were four years ago, yet we've cut our prepress department in half." He also gives workflow automation a good deal of the credit for the 20% increase in sales-per-employee that the company has seen over the last two years.

In John Dahlke's view, standing out as proof of what workflow automation has done for VISOGraphics is the fact that the company has grown by 25% in recent years without adding staff. He also reckons that automation of all kinds has brought down overtime by 50%.

'Super Powerful' for Pricing

Foster sees better estimating and pricing as one of the most significant outcomes of workflow automation at North Star Printing. He says the Prinect MIS has been "super powerful" in helping the company distinguish between jobs it can produce cost-effectively and those it can't.

"We can cost and charge correctly because it's very accurate," Foster says. "We really lean on it for our pricing structure."

That degree of accuracy is crucial to staying profitable, he emphasizes. "I would say we do more under one roof than any printer in Utah. We're super capable, but the margins are razor thin. We're able to make really good decisions on pricing to know if we can compete at that level and make money."

Workflow automation also can be a path to new sources of revenue, as Avrick has seen at Design Distributors. He says that

SEE WHAT AI DID THERE? WE SOON WILL

Just as printers were starting to get the hang of Industry 4.0 and its machine-to-machine interactions, along came artificial intelligence (AI), large language models (LLMs), and generative pretrained transformers (GPTs): the stuff of nightmares for some and bright new horizons for others.

Greg Cholmondeley, Director of Production Workflow at Keypoint Intelligence, has been following the technology and is mostly sanguine about what he thinks it has in store. He's notably keen on what AI could do for printers once it becomes a part of their manufacturing workflows.

Cholmondeley says that while specialized print providers have achieved "amazingly streamlined" workflows through software automation, general commercial shops and in-plants without a specialty product focus aren't as far along. One reason is that it's difficult for their rules-based workflow software to anticipate the endless variables of the different kinds of things they must produce in environments where the demand constantly changes.

This is where Cholmondeley sees an opening for AI systems, which aren't bound by the "if A, then B" conventions of rules-based programming. Instead, they draw their own inferences as their neural networks scour troves of LLM data for the kinds of practical connections that people make in the real world.

This means that AI systems are "more probabilistic" than the workflow solutions printers now use, Cholmondeley says. He points out that in a rules-based workflow, "if you see something you've never seen before, you don't know what to do. But because what AI does is to sift through vast quantities of information, looking for patterns, it can do that kind of thing better than rules-based programming."

Cholmondeley thinks the "incredible potential" of AI for print automation could be fulfilled in applications such as:

- user-specific service and training documentation generated by the data contained in the user's own LLM

- predictive maintenance, with scheduling based on AI's interpretation of machine job logs

- breaking workflow bottlenecks through AI-enhanced analysis of MIS/ERP data

- turning e-mailed orders for jobs into valid job tickets

- estimating and job costing, with the AI learning to get the same kind of "gut feel" for accuracy that human estimators rely on

- automating design by generating layouts on the fly instead of having to build them from templates

Cholmondeley cautions, however, that AI at its present stage of development remains "a very disruptive technology. It can work really well and then suddenly do something that just doesn't make any sense."

"It can make mistakes. You don't want to use it for your financial accounting," he says.

Nevertheless, Cholmondeley says he's convinced by what he learned at the recent Hunkeler Innovation Days and EskoWorld events that helpful AI implementations are on the way. "Every single software vendor I talked to is trying to figure this out," he says. "It is probably their number one priority."

Printers need to take the implications of the technology for their businesses just as seriously, Cholmondeley adds. "It has incredible potential as a useful tool. I think that anybody who isn't looking at doing it, or customers who aren't considering how it's going to apply, are going to be at a real disadvantage."

WORKFLOW AUTOMATION CONTINUED

by eliminating redundancies that used to limit the scope of the work, "we've been able to implement a lot more programmatic mailings. Now we can combine one-off mailings with programmatic mailings to leverage the efficiencies of both. It's opened up new opportunities for us and increased our usage of the digital component of our business."

Mailing efficiency is also crucial to success at Knight Abbey, which serves the gaming industry nationwide. Spiers estimates that the company produces at least 10 million pieces of mail per month for its casino customers. "Every bit of it is variable," she says, with some of it consisting of half a million records and 147 different tiers of variable information. "That's about two and a half to three weeks of work that comes in all at the same time."

By using templates in the Prinergy workflow supported by Enterprise Print Management Solutions (EPMS) for print MIS, BCC Software for mailing, and XMPie for variable data processing, "we've taken three to four days of jobs that come in monthly down to minutes and seconds. About 80 manual hours both in prepress and VDP has been eliminated," Spiers declares.

> **❝ Increasingly, printers see automation as an answer to filling positions they would gladly preserve if only today's constrained labor market would let them do it.**

Importance of 'Intrinsic'

Tracking the intervals between creating estimates and getting jobs into production is one way that Tardiff measures progress at J.S. McCarthy. He notes, however, that the benefits of software-based workflow automation also can be "intrinsic": less about the data than about how the experience of doing the work has changed for the better.

"It's more of talking to the folks behind the scenes to see what are they actually saving for time," Tardiff explains. "Are there less clicks? Are there parts of the workflow that we're not touching anymore that are more automated?" Something as simple as no longer having to reattach job specs to RFQs for estimating – an improvement made possible by iQuote – is a good example. As Tardiff observes, "little things like that just add up."

Spiers may have witnessed the same kind of intrinsic improvement happening at Knight Abbey as automation started to take hold there.

As she tells the story, "I was having people working around the clock on the weekends, and that's all come to a stop because of automation. I got an email from one of my VDP operators, and she's like, okay, Tonya. We were killing ourselves a few months ago, and now it's come to a screeching halt. You call this automation? Because she was thinking maybe we lost sales. Oh, no. Our sales have gone up about 70%. That's how automation is affecting you guys."

The Labor Connection

When it comes to labor, automation has a complicated history. Some decry it as a job-killer; others welcome it as a gateway to new categories of employment. Printers have a perspective of their own. Increasingly, they see automation as an answer to filling positions they would gladly preserve if only today's constrained labor market would let them do it.

This is what makes workflow automation part of the thinking about employment at Kenmore Envelope, according to Ogo.

"For estimating, account management, and prepress, the automation in our software allows for a quicker understanding of print and manufacturing as a whole," she explains. "For prepress in particular, Automation Engine does a lot to make files print-ready so our new hires do not necessarily need a wealth of print knowledge ahead of time."

This is consistent, she adds, with Kenmore Envelope's general approach to human resources management. "Kenmore believes in training our team and invests heavily in that with time and resources upon hiring. Employee happiness is important to us, and less friction in the work itself by utilizing software increases that. It has allowed us to shorten our training time in the areas where automation is used."

Along the same lines, Tardiff thinks that streamlining MIS/ERP at J.S. McCarthy will make the workflow easier to learn and more engaging to work with, particularly for younger employees.

"It could be much less of a learning curve. It's web-based, a lot more user-friendly, and a lot easier to estimate with," says Tardiff of the company's updated system. Because the interface being phased out is "very antiquated-looking," younger workers don't take to it – a resistance that Tardiff expects to fade away once the new system, with its more contemporary look and feel, is fully up and running.

"That alone is a huge help when training new hires, especially on the front end," he says.

Door-Opener for Newcomers

Foster is realistic about the ways in which automation and job skills intersect. "Before, you had to have a multitude of craftsmen to get this done," he says. "We have some really good tradesmen, but we also have them supported by some people that are not familiar with the industry and did not get brought up into it, especially over the last couple of years. And it's really helped us with the staffing challenges because we can bring people from outside, and it's more process-based."

Olivo agrees that software automation will be one solution to the uphill challenge of finding "competent people" to work at printing companies. "I really believe we have to automate every possible facet that we can if we're going continue to grow where the pool of labor is just not large enough to accommodate that," he declares.

Printers who have embraced workflow automation agree that the message to printers who have not taken the same step is clear.

"If you don't have it automated, you really can't get the margins you need," advises Bob Dahlke. "You get bombarded with phone calls. Things have to be seamless and easy for your clients."

"Honestly, it's just peace of mind," Foster concurs. "I just don't get that many fire drills anymore."

As Foster sees it, the peace of mind that comes from automating is also a competitive edge. "Those that are successful in the premium business are the ones that can predict the outcome," he counsels. "And that's why it's super important that you have these kinds of systems in place. If you want to survive, you just have to have them."

About the Author: Patrick Henry directs Liberty or Death Communications, an editorial consultancy. Contact him at pathenry@libordeath.com.

PGCA AND QUALITY BINDERY CO-SPONSOR SUMMER ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE AT BOOK ARTS

WNY Book Arts Center (aka "Book Arts") is happy to announce the launch of a new Summer Youth Artist-in-Residence Program, co-sponsored by PGCA and Quality Bindery Services. Rafael "Rafi" Vanouse, a student at Nichols School, will serve as the program's inaugural resident artist, focusing on the creation and study of 3-dimensional origami and origami tessellations. He will utilize Book Arts' resources to create new works of art and experiment with a variety of paper weights and styles and will attend workshops related to paper-folding and origami. Completed artworks will be exhibited as part of Book Arts Member Exhibition, on view from July 15-Aug. 19, 2023.

PAPER DONATIONS NEEDED! Book Arts is seeking paper donations for Rafi to work with, mainly white and cream sheets, both small and very large sheets, and just 10-12 samples of each sheet. Any printers having excess paper to donate may contact Laura Gough, Executive Director at director@wnybookarts.org.
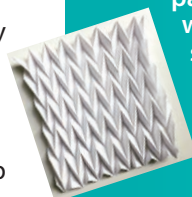
A brief Q & A with Rafi follows.

How did you get interested in paper folding/origami?

R.V: I had a nanny when I was five years old who taught me origami. I made some Star Wars people out of origami, which I thought was cool. Later, my mom and I watched a documentary about origami and in it was a guy who made a hyperbolic parabola and that's the first shape I learned.

Then, I learned how to make a herringbone fold (image above) and how to modify and turn paper into diferent shapes. Once you have enough exposure to working with the paper, there are all of these structures that are related to the hyperbolic parabola and herringbone folds – all the folds work off of those structures. I've taught myself to see a pattern through these original folds. I've learned how to turn the hyperbolic parabola into a spiral, which I think is more interesting than having just square. I've also been working on tessellations, which are pattern-related and often a lot harder to fold. I'm interested in seeing how these objects are expandable and contractable and seeing them through shadow and movement and how I can integrate them with something of my own.

SIGNATURE

Join us on Friday, July 28th

for PGCA's 6th Annual
Raymond A. Bubar Classic
Golf Outing

RAYMOND A. BUBAR CLASSIC
6th ANNUAL
ESTD 2017
GOLF OUTING

Terry Hills Golf Course
Batavia, NY

SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES
• HOLE SPONSORSHIP DONATION
• COCKTAIL HOUR SPONSOR
• PRIZE DONATION

REGISTER BY JULY 21, 2023
CONTACT KIM TUZZO AT
(800) 777-4742 OR
KIM@PRINTCOMMUNICATIONS.ORG

PGCA MEMBERSHIP SURVEY RESULTS

PGCA MEMBERS SPEAK OUT IN SURVEY
88.9% indicated they are "very likely" to renew their membership

We are excited to announce that our recent PGCA Membership Survey received an outstanding response rate, with over 100 member companies submitting their valuable feedback. We are grateful to our members for taking the time to share their thoughts with us. The high number of survey responses (about 30%) provides a strong numerical valuation of the opinions and ideas expressed by the PGCA membership. Thank you to everyone who participated in this survey — your input is crucial in helping us to better serve and support our members.

www.printcommunications.org

PGCA worked with Research & Marketing Strategies (RMS), a Central New York market research company to design and conduct the survey as well as analyze the data that was developed.

Four Key Themes Emerged from Survey Data:

➤ *PGCA is a trusted resource in the industry, as members often spoke of engagement with the group and have a high likelihood of renewal.*

➤ *Motivations to join PGCA centered around networking, solving business problems, and access to industry experts.*

➤ *The key priorities for members are assuring profitability, educating staff and maintaining/hiring a competent workforce.*

➤ *The data suggests low awareness of PGCA services and offerings. There is an opportunity for more outreach and sharing of available services to existing members.*

These themes suggest several opportunities for the organization including:

➤ *There is an opportunity for PGCA to increase its overall awareness (value) and provide tools that will help its members further engage with the organization.*

➤ *The PGCA should promote itself as a key "connector" and effective broad advocate for the print and graphic industry.*

PGCA Member Priorities – Ranked in order of importance

1. Profitability and Other Business Issues
2. Education and Training of Current and Future Employees
3. Marketing to Potential Print Customers
4. Environmental/Safety and Health Regulatory Compliance
5. Human Resource Issues and Employment Law Compliance
6. Increasing Public Awareness of Industry and the Importance of Print Communication

Will You Renew Your Membership? 88.9% indicated they are very likely to renew their membership. Some of their reasons appear below.

— *"PIA looks out for the printer, allowing the printer to focus on the business. Staying in front of potential issues, looking for partnerships that help costs, etc."*

— *"Workers Comp pays for the dues. Everything else is a BONUS!"*

— *"I've been a member of PIA for many years, and the greatest value is the community of print and the networking that results from being part of the organization."*

— *"Benefits outweigh the cost and those benefits are difficult to obtain elsewhere."*

— *"We have been members for 30 years and have always found the organization to be a valuable partner in our business. It isn't even a question about renewal. We just will.*

— *"We've been a member of the PIA for over 30 years and that's not going to stop."*

— *"It makes sense, for my organization to stay connected to the print industry."*

— *"I find the Association necessary for a strong printing community."*

Biggest Barrier to Growth for PGCA Members

— **" The economic uncertainty affecting our existing and new client's graphic communications marketing budgets."**

— **"The aging workforce is not being supplemented by new people coming into the industry."**

— **"MIS/Estimating software. I've bought three and demoed a dozen programs. I don't like any of them."**
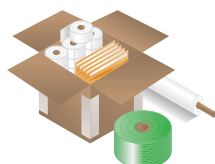
SIGNATURE

DATAGRAPHIC WOWS THE CROWD AT PAPERSPECS LIVE IN NEW YORK

PGCA was proud to be a sponsor of PaperSpecs Live held in New York in early June. The event drew a big crowd of designers and featured guest speakers, including Sabine Lenz, and a Paper & Print Exhibit with vendors giving away an eye-popping number of samples.

From left, Alex Chirivas, Sabine Lenz and Nicole Capiello

Every designer who attended got a name badge printed by PGCA member DATA-GRAPHIC, a 90+ year old family printer located on Long Island.

DATAGRAPHIC had the first table designers would see, with a tablecloth that said, We Speak Creative. Nicole Cappiello and Alex Chirivas handed out DATAGRAPHIC notepads printed with invisible ink. Each designer placed their DG notepad under a blacklight to reveal their prizes, items from DG customers such as bottles of Agua Magica mezcal, Deux Cranes chocolate bars, and Dilo candles.

The invisible ink was an exciting and interactive feature of DG's table that got designers excited to take away an item that wasn't just paper.

Designers were wowed by DG's capabilities as a printing powerhouse!

— "Maintaining profitability in the face of increasing costs (wages/insurance/materials)."

— "Decline in print and headwinds in the economy."

— "Building sales with large customers – takes time. Also takes money. Economy is hard to predict. Supplies are hard to predict. Labor is hard to predict with so many federal and statement government rules which seem to change constantly. All can be helped with good management creating a good culture at work – and we try hard."

— "Space, people, supply chain, automation applications, investment demands."

What services should PGCA provide/expand?

Education & Training

➤ "Looking forward to seeing how the PGCA evolves as it grows. Would like to see continued outreach into the high schools, vocational schools and colleges especially in the Long Island region."

➤ "Solving the industry issues with lack of training avenues for future employees. As a small business owner, I don't have the resources to invest in training employees from scratch."

➤ "Actively pursuing educational methods for bringing interest and new people to the industry."

Networking

➤ "Anything that encourages the building of a community among stakeholders in the industry."

➤ "More member events, sharing about services and capabilities to promote partnerships."

Engage Youth:

➤ "I think we need to have more resources for attracting and training new recruits as our industry is aging out."

Staffing

➤ "One of the biggest issues facing the print industry is staffing. There is no conduit for training people in the industry, in particular with pressman. I have been searching for over a year for one without success and I know there are many other printers out there in a similar situation."

Business Consulting

➤ "A key thing is what are the new big things to come into the industry? Getting a read on what new business lines we should be pursuing."

Recommendations & Opportunities Derived from Survey Results

➤ **Improve communication with members and actively promote the PGCA website**

➤ **Create PGCA Ambassadors/Mentors**

➤ **Become the Printing Industry's "Problem Solver"**

➤ **Celebrate a long history, a strong sense of community**

➤ **Reach out to vocational schools**

➤ **Attract younger demographics**

➤ **Consider growing through strategic mergers or partnerships**

➤ **Leverage shared buying power**

➤ **Continue networking events and training**

➤ **Promote/provide marketing support to members**

➤ **Continue to look for membership growth related to emerging technologies (e.g. 3D printing, equipment, eCommerce, packaging)**

➤ **Assess the membership model**

Next Steps

The PGCA staff and Board of Directors will continue discussions and planning over the next few months about improvements to existing programs and ongoing implementation of new ideas.

In September, the PGCA Board will be utilizing survey results along with other industry information to begin developing our new Strategic Plan for 2024.

Thanks for the input! It is invaluable as PGCA charts its course ahead. Members wishing to obtain a copy of the PGCA 2023 Membership Survey Results should contact us at (800) 777-4742 or info@printcommunications.org.

SIGNATURE

PGCA HR CONFERENCE DRAWS BIG CROWD

Over 150 attendees filled the room at Turning Stone for the 21st Annual Employment & Human Resources Law Solutions Conference held in early May. Registrants were updated on recent developments in employment law and avoiding HR mistakes during the employee life cycle by Nick Fiorenza, Mike Dodd and Katherine Gavett, with PGCA Association Counsel Ferrara Fiorenza PC.

Keynote speaker Merci Miglino, Master Certified Coach, entertained and informed the audience on what it takes to be a good coach.

PGCA members don't have to wait till next year's conference (scheduled for May 2 & 3, 2024 at Turning Stone) to get assistance with their stickiest and trickiest HR issues. Members may contact Tim Freeman at PGCA at (716) 691-3211 or tim@printcommunications. org or Nick, Mike or Katherine at (315) 437-7600 for help.

REALITY CHECK: THE PERCEPTION OF PRINTING

By Deborah Corn, Intergalactic Ambassador to the Printerverse, Print Media Centr

I record and produce a significant number of episodes for Podcasts from The Printerverse. Discussions about printing, print business, print sales, and print marketing are often playing through my computer, earbuds, car speakers, and voice assistants like Alexa. When I have some mindless admin work to focus on, I click on my pop culture podcast playlist and let reality-show gossip and celebrity interviews play in the background.

Yesterday I was listening to some infotainment when the conversation turned its focus on print and mail.

The topic of sending personal postcards came up. The host and her guest were contemplating whether people sent them anymore, whether a special stamp was needed, and if yes, WHERE does one get the special stamp. Then they spoke of the horror of writing with a PEN in the teeny tiny, allotted space and the required trip to the mailbox or post office to send it. They concluded it would take a lot of work to write and mail a postcard and wasn't worth it.

> 66 **Perception is our captor. Print is stuck in the well, putting lotion on its skin and putting the lotion in the basket. It can be easily disposed of, disregarded, and erased from marketing budgets and business plans when there is no connection to it. See what you can do to change that.**

These Were GEN-XERS!

They didn't care about any of the warm and fuzzy talking points we extrapolate from industry 'research' regarding the value of print. They concluded the process of sending a postcard was complicated, antiquated, time-consuming, and didn't provide enough ROI for the effort. It was about THEM, not about the recipient and their 'feelings' about receiving a handwritten postcard in their mailbox versus an email, text, or tag on social media.

> **This is one example of the growing disconnect between our industry and the world.**
>
> No amount of expensive research or market analysis is going to fill this void. Reality is perception, and the growing perception is that print and all the processes around it are OLD.
>
> I said OLD, not over, not ineffective as a marketing, sales, education, and communication channel.

A few weeks ago, Donny Deutsch, host of the On Brand Podcast and my former boss, was a guest on a talk show. I worked at Deutsch NY for a few months on accounts for Bank of America, IKEA, Snapple, Tanqueray Gin, GNC, Biore, and more. The interview topic turned to branding and messaging. Donny contributed this gem regarding OWNING and controlling the narrative that creates perception.

He stated that the Eiffel Tower was just a lamppost with great PR.

Let that sink in. He isn't wrong even though it's not the whole story of the Eiffel Tower.

> **As for us, printing is an innovative, technology-driven, state-of-the-art communication device… with the WORST PR.**

We allow others to tell our story, define the value of print in a 'digital' world, make false and misleading claims about 'tree killing', and debate whether printed materials fit into a sustainability strategy based solely on paper/substrate usage, ink coverage, and finishing.

> **This is the perception of many consumers. It is a human experience.**

They may falsely equate 'printing' with their desktop printer, ink cartridges, and the ream of paper they get at the office supply store with 'printing' as we know it. They may look at their 'junk mail' and think about all the trees that had to die for a car wash coupon in a circular. They may wonder WHO ON EARTH is still sending postcards.

Those same people may be business owners, educators, and marketers. They may be students. They may even have professional print-buying roles. My question to you is this… WHAT is influencing their ultimate decision to use print? Is it a stat from an industry study?

> **The new PR campaign for print starts now, and it starts with you.**

Print Across America is a new Print Media Centr initiative. The mission is to educate and share the coolness of print through open-house events at print and sign shops and in-plants from coast-to-coast on October 25, 2023 – which is also International Print Day.

While print businesses and in-plants host plant tours, events, educational sessions, career fairs and more, I will be hosting a FREE, 10-hour International Print Day Conference online to support the open house events. Programming will present interviews and panel discussions about the magic of print and all that can be created by combining ink with imagination. Pure Printspiration!

> **Print Across America is the first step towards Print Across the World … But please, don't wait for me!**

Visit printacrossamerica.com to join in!

![Print Across America logo]

Opening your doors is one of the best ways to present the story of print and change perception.

➤ Show your community, customers, prospects, and local businesses what you can make.

➤ Show them the printing technology and software that powers the presses and personalization.

➤ Educate them about effective direct mail strategies and the USPS annual promotions.

➤ Host monthly print design classes. Invite a cool speaker to inspire your customers.

➤ Hold a career fair and let attendees make something they can take home and show off. **It matters!**

True Crime Podcasts are also part of my infotainment playlist. When people are kidnapped or held by a serial killer the professional advice is to humanize yourself when you can. Share personal stories, say your name, and talk about family. It makes it harder to 'dispose' of a person if you make a human connection.

I often think of print this way.

Perception is our captor. Print is stuck in the well, putting lotion on its skin and putting the lotion in the basket. It can be easily disposed of, disregarded, and erased from marketing budgets and business plans when there is no connection to it. See what you can do to change that.

PRINT LONG AND PROSPER!

About the Author: Deborah Corn is the Intergalactic Ambassador to the Printerverse at Print Media Centr, a Print Buyerologist, international industry speaker and blogger, and the cultivator of Print Production Professionals, the #1 print group on LinkedIn. PGCA is proud to partner with Deborah on many projects, including Print Across America.

SIGNATURE

ZENGER GROUP PARTNERS WITH FRINTZ

Steve Zenger and the Zenger Group crew recently hosted their new customer Frintz for the Buffalo, NY launch of their company. Frintz – the combination of "free" and "prints" is a Rochester-based startup that offers consumers free, high-quality photographic prints supported by advertising. Frintz is the brainchild of William Testa, a long time printing industry entrepreneur.

From left: Bryan Carr, Bill Testa and Steve Zenger.

Bryan Carr, the former vice president of production at The Buffalo News, is in charge of the Buffalo-Niagara market. Zenger Group in Tonawanda will do the printing locally, and CEO Steve Zenger said the Frintz work will likely lead to additional hiring.

The 4-by-6 prints are easily removed from the ad via a micro-perforated side of a piece of high-quality photo paper, suitable for mounting for framing. Frintz expects to start with 5,000 mailers in Buffalo in June.

A portion of the company's revenue will go to several charities. Frintz is also partnering with PGCA partner Print Releaf, so trees are planted to maintain sustainability.

PGCA MEMBERS EARN $8,067 IN REBATES WITH PRINTER TOWEL SERVICE FROM ITU ABSORBTECH

We're pleased to announce that Print & Graphic Communications Association members earned $8,067 in rebates and diverted 217,179 lbs. of waste from landfills last year with ITU AbsorbTech's Ultra™ Printer Towel program.

Congratulations to this year's rebate recipients! Participating members received a rebate certificate for ITUdirect.com, which can be redeemed for a variety of name-brand apparel and accessories.

"The consistency of ITU AbsorbTech's service, quality of their print towels, and unique environmental reporting set ITU AbsorbTech apart from other towel service providers," says Tim Freemen, Co-President of PGCA. "Are you getting a clean towel and service that meets your standards from your current provider? If not, we can connect you with ITU today!"
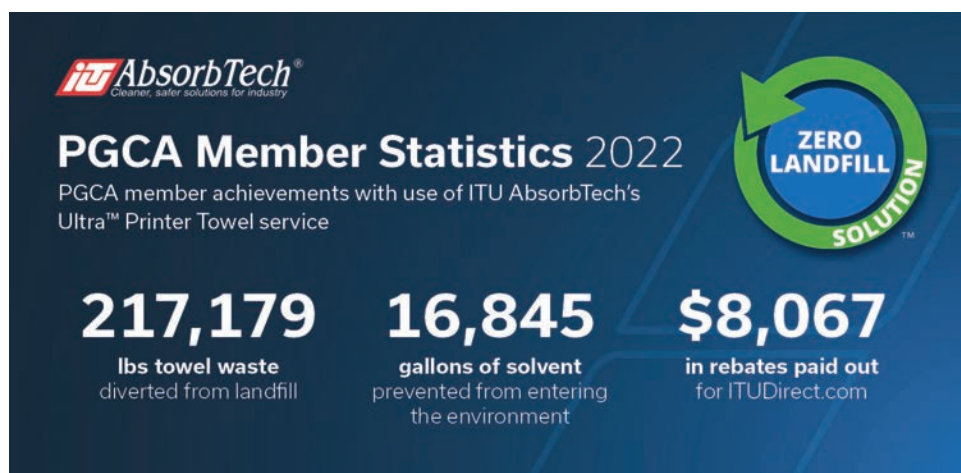
PGCA members that participate in ITU AbsorbTech's Ultra™ Printer Towel or other rental service programs are eligible for up to a 3% annual rebate.

PGCA's partner ITU AbsorbTech provides a cleaner, more absorbent Ultra™ Printer Towel with valuable service benefits, including:

- **Towel usage tracking**
- **Inventory management**
- **Recovered solvent and solid waste reduction reporting**
- **Compliance support**

Another important advantage is that all towels are processed in-house (never outsourced!) at an ITU AbsorbTech ISO 14001 registered facility, and the program meets the requirements for EPA Wipes Rule compliance.

This is important because you (the towel generator) are responsible for ensuring your solvent-contaminated towels are transported and processed in compliance with the EPA Wipes Rule.

Member Savings

PGCA members receive the following benefits with participation in the Ultra Printer Towel program from ITU AbsorbTech.

Complimentary Week of Service – for first-time customers on all rental services (up to a $1,500 value).

Annual Rebate – New customers receive a 3% rebate of their annual rental program spend in their first year, and 1.5% thereafter.

Ongoing Discounts – Enjoy 15% savings on ITUdirect and ITU First Aid.

Get started today! Visit www.ITUAbsorbTech.com/PRINT or contact Kim Tuzzo at (716) 691-3211 or kim@printcommunications.org.

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR TOWEL SERVICE PROVIDER

Before deciding on a towel service provider for your organization, come prepared with a list of questions. Asking the right questions helps ensure that you choose a program that aligns with your needs. We've listed key questions and answered them below.

Q: What are your Towel Quality and Processing Standards, including EPA Wipes Rule Compliance?

A: At ITU AbsorbTech, we start with a high-quality, tightly woven towel. Towels are laundered for reuse through an environmentally preferred cleaning process and recovered solvent is beneficially reused in industry. Printer towels are laundered separately from shop towels at our ISO 14001 facilities through a proprietary process to eliminate foreign matter. We also meet the requirement for the EPA Wipes Rule.

Q: What is the total cost of the program and potential ancillary fees? Do you charge an auto-replacement fee? Will you notify me before altering my towel inventory?

A: Through StraightUp!™ billing, ITU AbsorbTech bills for the complete and total cost of the program with no auto replacement fees. We proactively manage inventory to meet demand and require customer approval before making any adjustments that would impact your program cost.

Q: How do you manage the program? Do you offer training? Will you monitor our inventory? Will you be at our facility on a regular schedule?

A: We pride ourselves on delivering Genuine Service Excellence and manage your program completely. That includes installation, training, program signs, proactive inventory management, regularly scheduled visits to your facility, and ongoing customer reviews to ensure satisfaction.

To learn more about the Ultra™ Printer Towel program, visit ITUAbsorbTech.com/PRINT.

PRINT & GRAPHIC
COMMUNICATIONS ASSOCIATION

636 North French Road, Suite 1
Amherst, NY 14228

www.printcommunications.org

PRINT UNIVERSITY — 60 ON-DEMAND COURSES

New Training Focuses on Print Industry Fundamentals — Online Courses Available through Print University Partnership

PGCA PRINT UNIVERSITY
ONLINE LEARNING

New training webinars, focused on the fundamentals of print and graphic communications, are now available as a no-cost benefit to Print & Graphic Communications Association members.

PGCA has licensed more than 60 on-demand courses and educational tracks developed by print industry veterans and business consultants at The Print University.

PGCA members were asked what programs or services the Association should add to improve our core services (see page 10). Additional training and education offerings were specifically highlighted:

"Solving the industry issues with lack of training avenues for future employees. As a small business owner, I don't have the resources to invest in training employees from scratch."

There are currently eight sections/ modules available:

■ **Intro to Production Printing**
■ **Inside the Print Shop**
■ **Operations of a PSP**
■ **Selling Strategies for Industry Segments**
■ **Vertical Markets for Print**
■ **Print Workflow & Processes**
■ **Introduction to Finishing**
■ **Market Update**

Login today and expand your knowledge. New classes added regularly.

printcommunications.org/print-university

MANY THANKS TO OUR SPONSORS