

Xerox FreeFlow® Solutions Variable Image Printing Case Study

How one company utilized automation to achieve success.

Using a powerful trio of workflow software solutions, this print provider was able to grow their print volumes and improve turnaround time—all while reducing costs.



Established in 1999, Variable Image Printing (VIP) offers printing and fulfillment services at their two locations in southern California. Since opening, VIP had utilized Xerox black-and-white and color production devices with the majority of their business coming from print-on-demand brochures, flyers, books, binders, and manuals from manufacturing, real estate, and healthcare clients. In 2006, VIP turned to Xerox software solutions—implementing Xerox FreeFlow® Web Services Powered by Press-Sense™, Xerox FreeFlow Process Manager™, and a Print MIS system called Avanti® Graphic Arts Management Systems from a Xerox business partner, Avanti Systems—to automate their operations and grow their business. In the past, it used to take VIP days to generate a customer quote, turn it into an order, get the job into pre-press, and send it off to print. Today, thanks to VIP's automated workflow solution from Xerox, this entire process is done in a matter of minutes.

Changing with the times.

VIP found that the types of jobs that their customers were requesting were changing. Not only were they demanding shorter runs with faster turnaround times, customers also wanted different versions of jobs. Since versioning involved updating content, VIP began searching for a solution that enabled customers to upload and manage their content at will. Though VIP had equipped each of their fulfillment facilities with state-of-the-art Xerox monochrome and color production equipment, they knew their current workflow needed a complete overhaul. When a customer requested a job, it would sometimes take VIP an entire day just to create the job order and get the job into pre-press. Once in pre-press, it would go through a series of labor-intensive steps, including preflighting, imposing, color management, and job ticketing. What's more, as the number of short-run jobs increased, more time was spent in pre-press than was spent actually printing. All of this resulted in an average turnaround time of six days per job, a time lapse that VIP felt was just too high to stay competitive in the commercial print business. VIP unanimously agreed that to accelerate business growth, build customer loyalty, and handle substantial increases in the volume of jobs on a daily basis, they needed to address their workflow.

Planning for success.

VIP knew that they had to have a solid plan in place to grow their business in a challenging economy. Since optimizing workflow and print processes were the keys to long-term growth, VIP turned to the experts at Xerox for software and technology to help them achieve their goals.

As Xerox assessed VIP's needs, it became clear that VIP needed to address how to get the jobs into the print facility more efficiently via the Internet, automate their processes to enable processing of more jobs, and streamline billing and invoicing tasks. Xerox recommended FreeFlow Web Services, FreeFlow Process Manager, and Avanti's Print MIS System. This solution enables VIP customers to submit their jobs via a Web portal through an easy-to-use interface, build a catalog of jobs for future reprints, and even view the status of their job requests.

The implementation of FreeFlow Web Services enabled a truly automated, integrated system from the point of order entry through pre-press and printing—with everything being done automatically and without operator intervention. Plus, the data for that job is automatically captured for billing and shipping. Thanks to Web Services, VIP is now open for business

24/7 without having to invest in 24/7 staffing. Customers can now order and preview their jobs online in a matter of minutes, from anywhere in the world and at any time of the day or night. VIP can produce a custom, secure website with the look of their customers' intranet in less than a day. This capability has enabled VIP to attract new business by offering customers the ability to order forms, brochures, business cards and more quickly and easily.

FreeFlow Process Manager has enabled VIP to process more jobs every day by automating common pre-press tasks. VIP now prepares, proofs, and prints jobs without operator intervention—saving them both time and money. In the past, each of VIP's operators had their own settings for conversions, which yielded inconsistent results. Thanks to Process Manager, VIP now has consistent settings for file conversions, which ensures consistency and standardized files. Today, VIP's prepress operators are no longer worried about losing their jobs to automation. Instead, they love the fact that they are able to do their jobs quickly and easily, eliminate repetitive jobs, and concentrate their valuable time on more mission-critical tasks.

In addition to their workflow, VIP was also concerned with how to manage the incredibly time-consuming task of billing and invoicing. To improve efficiency in this area, we collaborated with Xerox Business Partner Avanti to provide VIP with a software solution that would automatically populate customer invoices with order information and pricing created at the time of order entry. Now, instead of invoices being sent out two weeks after job delivery, VIP's invoices are being sent out within a day of shipment.

Getting up to speed.

Implementing FreeFlow Web Services and FreeFlow Process Manager cut VIP's average job turnaround time in half. Jobs that used to take six days, now take three. Today, customers create, order, and manage their own content and version control, or select from a catalog of past jobs online through Web Services. Once an order is placed, the job is automatically sent through Process Manager and directed to the appropriate printer, sent on to finishing, and readied for shipping—without any operator intervention.

VIP is also able to offer new book services through their "build-a-book" application. Customers can now build their own books, tailor the content to fit their needs, and automatically stream the book to print through Web Services. Even saddle-stitched books are printed and finished automatically thanks to Process Manager. "I can offer complex or simple book templates, meeting any customer's need," says Ken Dunn, Director of Operations for VIP, "and since our customers can now see a proof online, we have been able to greatly improve our turnaround time."

Even if a customer doesn't use Web Services to submit a job, VIP still uses the software to enter the job into their system. This ensures that VIP can repeat the work and that all the data is captured electronically, while enabling them to track and report on a full range of activities at both of their locations. "We use Web Services as a productivity tool," says Ken. "Right now, a little over half of our jobs come via the Web—a number that is steadily growing."

When it comes to VIP billing, Avanti has helped them greatly improve their efficiency—eliminating nearly 40% of the labor associated with the process. Now, instead of invoices going out two weeks after a job ships, they're being sent within a day of shipment.

Reaping the rewards.

VIP is poised to quickly and easily bring in new customers. They are now able to offer their customers the ability to order, proof jobs, and track spending quickly and easily. What's more, VIP gives them complete control of version control and content management at their convenience—freeing up VIP's CSRs to do more production control coordination.

In the first year of implementation, VIP attributed more than \$200K in revenue directly to this software solution. Not only did Web-based job submission and workflow automation enable VIP to attract new customers, these solutions also allowed them to secure more business from their existing clients. As for VIP's billing bottleneck, Avanti has eliminated nearly 40% of the labor associated with the process and invoices are now being sent out faster than ever before.

To learn more about what an automated workflow solution can do for your business, call 1-800-ASK-XEROX or visit www.xerox.com/freeflow.



Feedback from the front lines.

"Repeat online orders take about 75% less time to process than they did traditionally and the job tickets created by the system ensure finishing is consistent since we can store production information about the job in the template."

—Kevin Lite, Press Operator

"With all the ticketing already built into templates, it makes it much easier to batch jobs for production. Before, we had to manually ticket each job, release it, and change the stock as needed. Now, we can load one type of stock, release a queue, and only the jobs that are eligible will print automatically."

—Terrence Birdsong, Press Operator

