Significans AUTOMATION

A Case for Custom Integrated Solutions

WE ARE INTEGRATION™

This is an updated revision of our previous article incorporating the pleasing evolution of our views of a few years ago.

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A Case for Custom Integrated Solutions

Have you wondered why, with sales and margin pressures increasingly burdening the print industry that the most successful companies are continuing to invest in technology? Technology that moves everyone to an automated business environment. Options for this are plentiful as vendors scramble to position themselves to benefit from the growing demand for enterprise wide software solutions.

Before opening the vault, there is an important question to answer.

"How am I going to solve the problem?"

Well, there are three main options you can choose from; they are custom software solutions, end-to-end or proprietary solutions and custom integrated systems solutions.

Each of these solution paths has merit. Let's look at where they fit and how we might choose the appropriate path for your business.

CRITERIA	CUSTOM SOFTWARE SOLUTIONS	PROPRIETARY ECOSYSTEM SOLUTIONS	CUSTOM INTEGRATED SOLUTIONS
Cost	$$$ High	$$ Medium	$$ Medium
Implementation Time	Long	Medium	Short
Flexibility	Low	Medium	High
Scalability	Low	Medium	High
Vendor Dependency	High	High	Low
Ideal For	Large Organizations	Smaller, Less Diversified Companies	All Business Sizes

CUSTOM SOFTWARE SOLUTIONS

Custom software solutions are designed and developed in accordance with existing business processes and (hopefully) future requirements. Custom solutions require a highly focused and competent team of analysts and software developers. These assets must be allowed the appropriate time to analyze, develop and trouble shoot the solution. This makes custom software solutions applicable only to large organizations; those that have the resources to fund a large, time consuming project. Most people who are reading this article will not be considering this option.

END-TO-END OR PROPRIETARY ECOSYSTEM SOLUTIONS

It is not uncommon for companies to begin their automation journey with a single vendor end-to-end solution. End-to-end or proprietary solutions reduce the risk of incompatibility between system components and offer a single source for service and support. Single-source solutions are beneficial for specific processes such as accounting, schedule management or prepress, and to smaller less diversified companies.

The risk with single-source solutions is that very few suppliers have the wide-ranging expertise to develop end-to-end enterprise solutions applicable to the print industry.

For example:

We all use Adobe products but would not consider Adobe as a potential supplier for our accounting requirements.

This forces the customer of end-to-end solution vendors to conform to that vendor's vision for the enterprise as opposed to the vendor adapting their products and service in support of the customer's unique business requirements. Remember, no matter what area of the printing industry you work in, we are primarily custom manufacturers with very few exceptions; our success has been and remains our ability to serve the unique requirements of our customers.

Most progressive printing companies end up choosing custom integrated solutions, even those who began their automation journey with a single vendor.

CUSTOM INTEGRATED SOLUTIONS

Custom integrated solutions offer the ability to choose the most appropriate software tools for the variety of tasks a printing company performs. Best-in-class software tools that help us increase productivity, capabilities and connectivity in an ever-demanding and diverse market.

Custom integrated solutions offer flexibility in both scale and capabilities to conform to existing business requirement while preserving wide-ranging choices in future expansion. Custom integrated solutions are better able to react to evolving industry trends and changes in market requirements.

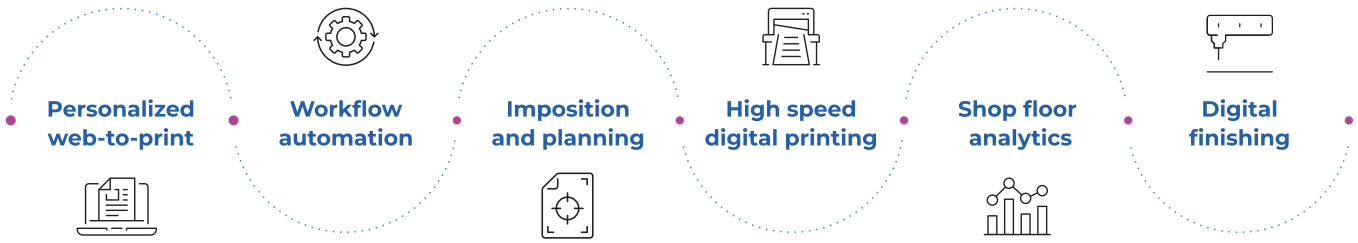
This is more important today with the popularity of Web-to-Print customer interfaces and the pending introduction of Artificial Intelligence software solutions.

WEB-TO-PRINT DEPENDENCIES

Are dependent on information from the MIS system to define products, pricing land accounts/collection data. This requires a seamless, real time, bi-directional exchange of data to serve the order input and production delivery requirements. Additionally, the pre-press, proofing and production systems must have the ability to communicate approvals and order status back to the customer. All in real time.

AI DEPENDENCIES

Artificial Intelligence (AI) will be even more dependent on accessing up-to-date data in real-time as the process of machine learning is dependent on accurate data input. The integrity of data from all of the enterprise systems will need to be accessible to the AI systems to ensure peak performance. Both Web-to-print and Artificial Intelligence require custom integration solutions.



Source: *Web Connect+*

The custom integrated solution, performed by experienced systems analysts and software programmers, respond to their customer's unique business requirements. Custom integration projects can be broken down to a series of smaller integrations, allowing projects to evolve with limited disruption to the on-going business as well as the flexibility to modify the specification as the project progresses. Smaller integration projects can also provide the ability for the customer to finance the investment with the savings gained from previous stages in the project.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stan Carmichael is a photographer by trade who found his way into the pre-press automation business from 1981 through 2005. During this time he directed Canadian sales and customer service efforts for a variety of pre-press technology manufacturers including Crosfield, Indigo, and Xeikon. Stan remains active in the graphics industry providing sales mentoring and coaching to select individuals as well as sales and marketing consultation to technology suppliers.

ABOUT SIGNIFICANS AUTOMATION

Significans Automation is a custom integrated solution provider that supports best-in-class software. Our staff migrated from end-to-end solution providers, and all have shop floor experience, they talk-the-talk and walk-the-walk, making them valuable resources for all print related organizations.

A Significans technology and workflow assessment may be the most productive way to begin the journey to enterprise workflow automation. This assessment gives business managers an up-to-date snapshot of the present state of workflow automation and provides a path forward to meet the companies future requirements.

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