



Print Management Technology and the Marketer

How the management of the print buying process has evolved from the back of an envelope to the cutting edge of technology in just a decade

The Print Management Company

The emergence of new technologies and medias in the 1990s led to an already confusing print market becoming even more complex. Improvements and new technology in the print industry, such as digital presses and print-on-demand solutions, working along side such established technologies like litho print, made the decision of where to place print more difficult. This set of circumstances, plus the realisation that print was a major cost to a business helped facilitate the rise of the Print Management Company (PMC).

In the early days, PMCs positioned themselves as an intermediary between a business' buying team and the print manufactures. They promised to take all the confusion out of buying printed collateral and present the corporate print buyer with the cheapest price from their roster of trusted printers. For the corporate print buyer this had great promise, as not only was the hassle taken out of their job, they were also getting the best price for their print.

In the late 1990's, the number of PMCs increased dramatically as more and more businesses outsourced their print procurement needs, often at the expense of their own internal team. When businesses were presented with the potential cost savings available through outsourcing, they often saw the opportunity to make even more savings by reducing or even disbanding their own in-house print-buying department, becoming totally dependent on the PMC.

With the steady removal of print buyers from corporations, PMCs have strategically positioned their way into corporate marketing departments, who had print buying responsibilities. However, marketers were more interested in the bigger picture, looking at their entire marketing strategy and not just how they were printing items. There was also an increased importance on Marketing Return On Investment (ROI) as marketing departments came under increased pressure to justify their spending. This led them to begin to question the price models that they had been presented by the PMC, especially amid rumours of the less scrupulous companies often placing huge mark ups on print that was well above the industry norm. Yet when these concerns arose, many businesses found that they lacked the expertise in house to regain management control from the PMC.

In more recent times, PMCs have evolved their propositions, building on their buying competences and offering a wider service encompassing other functions traditionally found within a corporate marketing operations group. Such services include, advice on production methods and techniques; creative production; and collateral guardianship.

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The Print Buyer

"80% of the respondents blamed a breakdown in the relationship as the primary reason for not renewing their contracts"

As the methods for buying printed marketing collateral have changed so has the person responsible for it. Marketers are becoming increasingly accountable for placing print and are being judged on its quality and effectiveness. In today's world corporations tend to have gone down one of three routes; maintain the skills within the marketing department; outsource the responsibility to a specialised PMC; or rely on their creative agency to implement a campaign in its entirety. For the purposes of this paper we will focus on the first two areas, largely due to the fact that the option of outsourcing completely to the agency deserves a discussion on its own merit.

While there are many factors that influence the decision of whether to outsource or manage in-house, one of the key elements is trust in the outsourced vendor. In a survey conducted of businesses that had moved operations back in house, nearly 80% of the respondents blamed a breakdown in the relationship as the primary reason for not renewing their contracts, while a further 13% claimed that the experience had left them questioning the entire concept of

outsourcing.¹ Yet for others, PMCs are becoming even more important as they offer ever-greater levels of service. A further market development has seen a number of print manufacturers begin to offer print management services to their customers.

The debate on whether to continue to manage in house or outsource is unlikely to be unilaterally resolved in the near future, with neither system being perfect and there not being one solution that fits all models across every industry. It comes down to the specific companies needs and experiences.

¹ <http://194.154.164.100/curbishley@firstcitymedia.co.uk/images/CP-Outsourcing.pdf>



Print Buying Technology

Summary of Benefits

- Visibility of the big picture in real-time
- Automated workflow for print specifications and associated artwork for provision to suppliers
- A workflow environment with the ability to apply strict timescales and budgets while maintaining a comprehensive approval structure
- Ability to manage entire campaigns through one dashboard
- Communicate effectively with everyone involved in a project, both internally and externally
- Automation of time consuming tasks such as requests for quotes
- Ability to save and store printed campaigns for referral and re-use
- Print-on-demand function – print only what you need when you need

Since the early 2000's, the print space has been greatly influenced by technology, largely made possible by the growth of the Internet. Print buying software has been developed primarily to give companies the capability to get clear visibility on the cost of print, while keeping the entire process simple. As solutions have evolved it has further fuelled the debate whether to use resources in house or to outsource the print buying process.

Technological advances have led to the print industry becoming far more diverse and complicated, yet perversely it has also led to a greater degree of clarity and simplicity.

The Internet was initially seen as a threat to the print industry, offering a way in to people's homes that direct mail and other traditional methods could not compete with. Yet instead of making print obsolete, the print industry has embraced the Internet, through e-procurement and Web2Print solutions.

The promise of e-procurement first came about with the dot.com era of the late 1990s, but it is only in the last few years that it has really come in to its own.² In some of the more successful instances these e-procurement systems have been developed by companies that are neither printers nor print managers, but independent software houses. The services they tend to offer encompass the whole procurement supply chain and so can be used by a corporate that has kept its operations in house, or by a PMC to manage their clients print.

The Emergence of Print Buying Software

One of the major benefits of these online systems is the visibility they give to the end user. The print buyer can select the specifications for a specific job, send it out to a network of printers with all the relevant information to do with colours, timescales and distribution instructions and receive a quote within a pre-determined timeframe. They can decide which quote gives them the best value and proceed to manage the

production. In this situation the software does the job of the print manager, but this does not mean that this type of software is a threat to the PMC, in fact most have implemented such systems to offer to their clients and to aid their own internal processes.

The key value proposition of the technology has been to make things easier and more visible. Historically, a print buyer would spend days organising specifications from numerous internal departments, then spend a huge amount of time emailing, calling and posting information to their print roster, while at the same time trying to keep a record of events in a basic spreadsheet.

Print buying technology has enabled all of these processes to be managed in one place. Specifications are uploaded to an area that is easy to access by all who need to and the whole process is easier to manage. Requests for quotes are sent out automatically to the print roster accompanied by any relevant artwork, the bidding process is also closed automatically when the time limit that has been set has expired. Re-use of historic and similar jobs with a clear audit trail of the buying process deliver additional benefits.

As well as e-procurement there has been huge increases in Web2Print catalogues that hold repeat order items such as business stationery and brand artwork allowing items to be quickly ordered, while maintaining consistency. As businesses that had outsourced print buying try to build up their own expertise again, the potential buyers they are training are all familiar with the Internet for buying. This includes downloading songs from iTunes, to getting a book or DVD from Amazon. The latest Web2Print catalogues reflect this by offering features that one regularly finds on a consumer giants on-line site.

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http://www.edsf.org/pdfs/Print_eProcurement_Marketplace_Reportz.pdf

The Future of Print Buying

The roles of the corporate print buyer, the print management company and the marketer have become increasingly intertwined since the beginning of the twenty first century and show no signs of changing. With print procurement falling in to marketing budgets marketers look to gain a greater understanding of how their collateral is ordered and distributed, but want to do this in the context of their whole campaign.

When a company launches a new product it is very unlikely that the marketing department will limit all of their marketing to an advert in a magazine or a billboard. The increase in multiple channels to reach consumers means that integrated campaigns have become the norm for marketers. A marketing campaign today will most likely cover TV, radio, print, Internet, SMS and email. With the responsibility of buying print now falling to the marketer, they want to be able to accurately assess how the print campaign is going to affect and interact with other marketing mediums, for example animated advertising banners on the Internet.

The latest technology developed by Mtivity allows the marketer to do exactly that. Mtivity is leading the innovation, evolving the online systems used to buy and monitor print and expand it to incorporate media schedules and download TV ads and training videos. This evolution makes the prospect of using technology more appealing for the marketer as they no longer have to navigate between countless systems, they can have all the relevant information and analysis in one place.

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Conclusion

"While the debate over outsourcing print continues, there is no such debate on the importance of technology"

The speed with which technology has been integrated in to the print buying process is truly astonishing. While the debate over outsourcing print continues, there is no such debate on the importance of technology. The efficiencies and cost savings that are offered by technology mean that once a system has been implemented it is very unlikely for it to be removed and not replaced. What is more likely is the end user of the technology will demand the latest releases and upgrades to ensure they are continually getting the best user experience.

The more that marketers become involved in the purchasing of print, the more diverse the technology solutions will become. Those software providers on the cutting edge are already beginning to offer the marketer the ability to get an overview of an entire campaign and then bore down in to the specifics from one online dashboard, and providers show no sign of stopping there.

About Mtivity

Mtivity provides a hosted, Software as a Service (SaaS) solution that allows marketing and print professionals to manage and optimise all marketing processes from origination through production to fulfilment. Mtivity's software suite provides the tools to support campaign planning, production management, procurement and the delivery of personalised direct marketing campaigns. For more information on Mtivity's services or to arrange a demo please email info@mtivity.com or call 020 7828 8070.



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