

Automaton, Automaton, Automaton

Why this should be your mantra as you look to improve your finishing capabilities

Don't worry, I'm not suggesting Yogic exercises as part of your business routine, but you do need to clear your head of certain preconceptions if you are considering new finishing solutions.

For a start, do you believe that JDF and UP3i are irrelevant to a company of your size? You wouldn't be alone. But according to Dominic Quennell, vice president global marketing, Duplo, it should be key to your thinking and future planning. As he points out, "the same business objectives of profitability, efficiency and obtaining a good and fast return on investment apply to all printing companies, whether they are large corporations or high street printers. So when new developments evolve, which – like JDF - promise to improve printing processes forever, a printer does not want to hear that their business is too small to benefit from the technological revolution that is about to take place.

"System integration through JDF and UP3i has helped many companies fulfil ambitions to improve processes and automation. To date, this is especially true for print establishments that are able to justify a large investment in order to automate separate divisions through an all encompassing management information system. This trend has fuelled the common misconception that JDF is mostly applicable to larger, B1 printers.

"Thanks to the introduction of specially designed software however, printers can now install an inline digital workflow, from pre-press to finishing, which enables them to benefit from JDF without having to make large capital investments. Such software makes use of PDF and JDF standards to automate production across different presses and finishing systems, regardless of the vendors.

"Automated digital workflows are already significantly boosting revenue for high street printers by improving productivity and automated reporting for greater cost assessment. Shorter runs for customers are now a viable and profitable service offering, since processes are much faster and more efficient."

As complete integrated workflows have become more readily available to a wider range of businesses, JDF is certain to have the revolutionary effect that was predicted at the time of its launch.

"As integrated print lines become increasingly cost-efficient and accessible, standardised digital workflows will become the norm and, in turn, suppliers will develop a more united front in order to develop pre-press, printing and finishing systems that are designed to function as part of an automated print line," enthuses Quennell.

If that all seems a little too distant for your immediate needs, John Clason, national sales manager, Morgana Systems, points to the immediate must-have digital print finishing package: "Creasing is essential - a combination creaser/folder might be desirable, the right type of programmatic guillotine is very important and bookletmaking has an important role to play."

More suppliers are designing multi-functional systems for these applications, in Morgana's case that being the DocuMaster. But as Clason also points out, "be sure you think as far ahead as possible about future needs, and check whether your supplier has a clear upgrade path that allows equipment to be replaced economically for something more sophisticated as needs dictate" before handing over any cash.

However deep your pocket, the message is clear: think automation, automation, automation.

Tools for the Job

This being an Ipex year, we have seen a tremendous amount of finishing systems surfacing over the last six months. Here's a potted overview of the main newcomers to the UK.

Duplo www.duplointernational.com

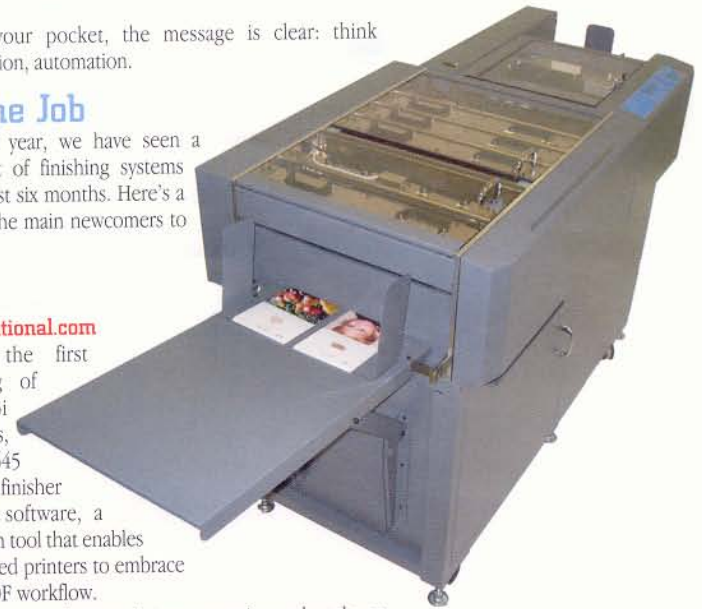
Ipex 2006 was the first European showing of Duplo's JDF/ UP3i compatible products, including the DC-645 production colour finisher driven by Symbio software, a front end production tool that enables small-to-medium sized printers to embrace a fully automated JDF workflow.

"The system slits, cuts and creases in one operation and works on a 'load and go' premise whereby the machine receives the information from the JDF job ticket. It offers the printer a high level of automation," says Peter Dyson, product marketing manager, digital print finishing.

The company also exhibited its UP3i compatible DBM-500 bookletmaking system inline with Océ's VP5000 digital printer.

Also new is the DF-1000 suction folder for work from offset or digital presses. It has a footprint of 1227mm x 534mm x 590mm and is able to handle stocks up to 200gsm. Operated by a LCD panel, it detects and adjusts itself to the specific paper size.

Last but not least is the DuBinder, an automatic, single-clamp system that can handle output from both offset and digital devices at speeds of up to 500 books an hour.



UP3i at a glance

UP3i is the interface that enables the inline connection of pre- and post-processing equipment for digital printers. It allows connectivity to a JDF workflow and joint venture partners Duplo, Océ, Hunkeler, IBM, Stralfors, and Xerox are making great efforts to promote it.

"UP3i is fully compatible with the JDF format and enables the communication between each separate device in a digital print line," says Duplo's Peter Dyson, product marketing manager, digital print finishing.

"Designed to support an inline printing operation, UP3i brings all the benefits of standardisation with the added advantage of reducing purchasing risk for the printer at the installation stage. This is because every separate component is attuned to the next, meaning future installations will be compatible to the printer's existing print line and equipment is less likely to become obsolete when new equipment is installed."

A print line connected via UP3i cuts both production costs and set up times for the printer. Only limited manual intervention is required to run the entire print line, from pre- to post-press, and allows for even the most inexperienced employee to successfully manage the entire print run.