Objective:
Drive cost out of the manufacturing process by creating a seamless end-to-end workflow solution

Approach:
Partner HP Indigo Production Manager with Saepio PrintStore, Objective Advantage Symbio, and JDF–enabled finishing solutions

IT improvements:
• Web-to-print interfaces simplify job intake
• Integrated job routing integrates ERP, procurement, and billing
• JDF-enabled finishing cuts costs

Business benefits:
• Reduced turn-around times
• Innovative new offerings
• More profitable short runs
• Competitive pricing

In recent years, price competition in the print industry has continued to intensify. Print service providers (PSPs) have been challenged to remove cost from the manufacturing process while maintaining high-quality product. One way to remove cost from the process is to reduce or eliminate human touch points from the workflow, creating a seamless end-to-end solution.

Bob Radzis, owner of Chicago area based RT Associates, has faced that challenge head-on, transcending traditional printing technologies to offer their business-to-business customers effective, high-quality marketing campaigns. By embracing new technologies, RT Associates offers the most sophisticated solutions available.

The challenge
As an early adopter of digital printing technology, RT Associates was intimately aware of the advantages digital printing offered. However, by the end of 2004, a new opportunity with an existing client—a major midwestern technology retailer—pushed the limits of their capabilities. Further, the need for efficiency pressed RT Associates to look at their entire workflow as part of the initiative. To further complicate matters, the market was pushing for results closer to the quality of offset, making liquid ink technology a prerequisite.
To meet their customer’s needs, RT Associates needed a best-in-class web-to-print interface, the computing power to process hundreds of thousands of variable data records a day, automated job routing, highest quality print output, job finishing—and a way to tie it all into their own business systems and the systems of their customers.

A long-standing relationship with Saepio Technologies, Inc. had already helped RT Associates build a world-class web-to-print interface based on Saepio’s PrintStore product. The system accepted print orders, performed the necessary pre-flight tasks, and output a print-ready PDF file. However, after the jobs arrived in the shop, they had to be manually moved onto the presses. The majority of the jobs being posted from the web were also typically for small quantities and difficult to make profitable.

An early experience with Duplo finishing systems had provided some lessons on the value of JDF. JDF (Job Definition Format) is an electronic job jacket that holds not only the job content, but also instructions for automatically routing the job through each workflow step, from creation to final print production. RT was sold on JDF but needed a way to implement it.

RT Associates went to work with their partners—Saepio, Objective Advantage, and Duplo—along with the HP Indigo account and technical teams to devise a solution that would provide a seamless workflow, address their customers’ needs, yet still create competitive advantage for RT.

The solution

Symbio, a product from Objective Advantage, provides the link to Saepio’s web-ordering system, accepting the print-ready file, routing the job through the shop to both the DFE and to JDF-enabled finishing solutions. In addition, Symbio offers the ability to integrate with ERP systems, procurement, and billing—providing the proverbial glue for the solution.

The HP Indigo press 5000 was a natural choice, and two 6-color 5000s were connected to HP Indigo Production Manager with 8 RIPs to handle the volume. The combination of HP Indigo hardware and software, together with the partner solutions from Saepio, Objective Advantage, and Duplo created an end-to-end solution that not only met the immediate needs of their customer, but also provided a compelling pathway for the future.

The results

Today RT’s major accounts log in to their own personalized web application then upload their artwork and variable data files. Saepio software does the rest of the file preparation. Symbio then takes the job-ready file, routing it through the shop with hands-free efficiency. The order shows up directly at the press already imposed, with all the bindery requirements, shipping information and billing, all the way up to invoice. According to Radzis, “All we have to do is physically carry the job from station to station.” The system is so efficient, RT uses it to submit their own jobs.

One recurring job for a large national retailer—which RT won from a competitor—features 1400 variable data images that are stored in an asset library. RT Associates produces from 2500 to 5000 pieces per week on that job alone. HP Indigo Production Manager, HP’s high-powered digital front end, handles the processing with ease, driving the RIP time down from days to minutes, creating a significant advantage for RT over their competition. “The machine just gobbles it up,” Radzis remarked.
This particular application features an interface that retail sales personnel in the store can use to enter information about a customer’s product interests. Within 48 hours, the customer receives a personalized mailer with additional details on services and products that they discussed with the sales person. The application also creates a personalized web site that shows the customer more details customized to their preferences.

Having a hands-off workflow enabled RT to drive the cost out of their manufacturing process, making short-run color more profitable and pricing more competitive. That, combined with the quality advantages of HP Indigo’s liquid ink technology, gives their customers a compelling alternative to offset.

The future

Today, RT Associates is reaping the benefits of a well-thought-out and executed solution. Not a company to sit on their laurels, RT Associates is pushing forward, creating automated marketing tools for their customers. Personalized marketing web portals provide customers access to customizable templates and VDP integration, including Experian import capabilities, list purchasing, e-mail, and reporting. Individualized URLs and web pages drive customers onto the web, while surveys and data collection tools collect the information to show measurable results from mailings, allowing RT Associates to create and add value for their clients.