

Minding

How CIP4 makes the imagesetter

Picture this: A tradeshow in the not-too-distant future. You're innocently standing there assessing the latest features of the piece of bindery equipment you need, when the rep casually tosses off the fact that it implements the latest JDF extensions and is, of course, CIP4 compliant. Just when you thought you had the latest graphics lingo down pat, along comes another acronym to throw you for a loop.

You stop, you pause, you stare him in the eye, and gauge whether your question is going to make you or him seem out of touch...“CIP what?” you ask. The rep hands you the spec sheet and refers you to the technical data on the reverse.

You read on...

Although you originally think this is yet another workflow description it turns out that CIP4 is an organization: The International Cooperation for the Integration of Processes in Prepress, Press and Postpress (www.cip4.org). Based in Switzerland, CIP4 is an international working group of key graphic arts vendors, printers, consultants and associates. Its mission, directly from its Web site, seems clear enough: “to encourage computer-based integration of all processes that have to be considered in the graphic arts industry, in particular the specification of standards.”

You imagine a bunch of guys in white shirts with pocket protectors waxing poetic about computer languages and speaking in acronyms—http, XML, PPF, PDF—and to a large degree you're right. But what's encouraging is that the guys at the table represent the major vendors and printers who recognize that the print business is driven by bottom lines and margins that are only maintained, let alone maximized, by eeking out productivity gains one technological step at a time.

Usually that's done by reducing the makeready time of increasingly shorter-run print jobs and streamlining the number of times that data has to be entered to complete a job. And in the interest of “encouraging” these gains, CIP4 is coming together to hammer out a standard for the job ticket of the future—one that can live on the Web in the fast-approaching world of distributed e-procurement and print buying.

Enter JDF

It was a little more than two years ago that Adobe, Agfa, Heidelberg and MAN Roland began playing in the CIP sandbox with the Job Definition Format (JDF). Their goal was to develop an XML-based job ticket to make a Web-enabled print workflow a reality and to provide a frame-

work for it to flourish. This group had to consider not only the computer-integrated workflow covered by CIP3 (prepress, press, postpress) but also the front end of print orders and production management. Throw in the fact that these functions are increasingly carried out across the Web, whether through a multi-plant environment with centralized production management, or through a network of print businesses connected by the Internet, and you have a real-world, print business model.

The foundation of the Job Definition Format is the Print Production Format (PPF), already an open standard that allows equipment from multiple vendors to be controlled by a single job ticket. It recognizes that while major vendors might envision a single workflow system from end to end, the reality is that consumers will demand choice, and a workflow created with equipment from various vendors is a more likely reality.

The promise of JDF is good. It is the same promise that PDF holds. The same promise that PS held and delivered on when Apple's laser printer first bound toner to paper in crisp 4 pt. type and hairline rules.

What JDF is not, is another new piece of software. It is not another new language to learn and factor into your growth plans.

It is, quite simply, a standard embedded by suppliers and vendors into their software and hardware to ensure that your new job-entry software talks to your prepress job-

the shop

talk to the press, talk to the bindery

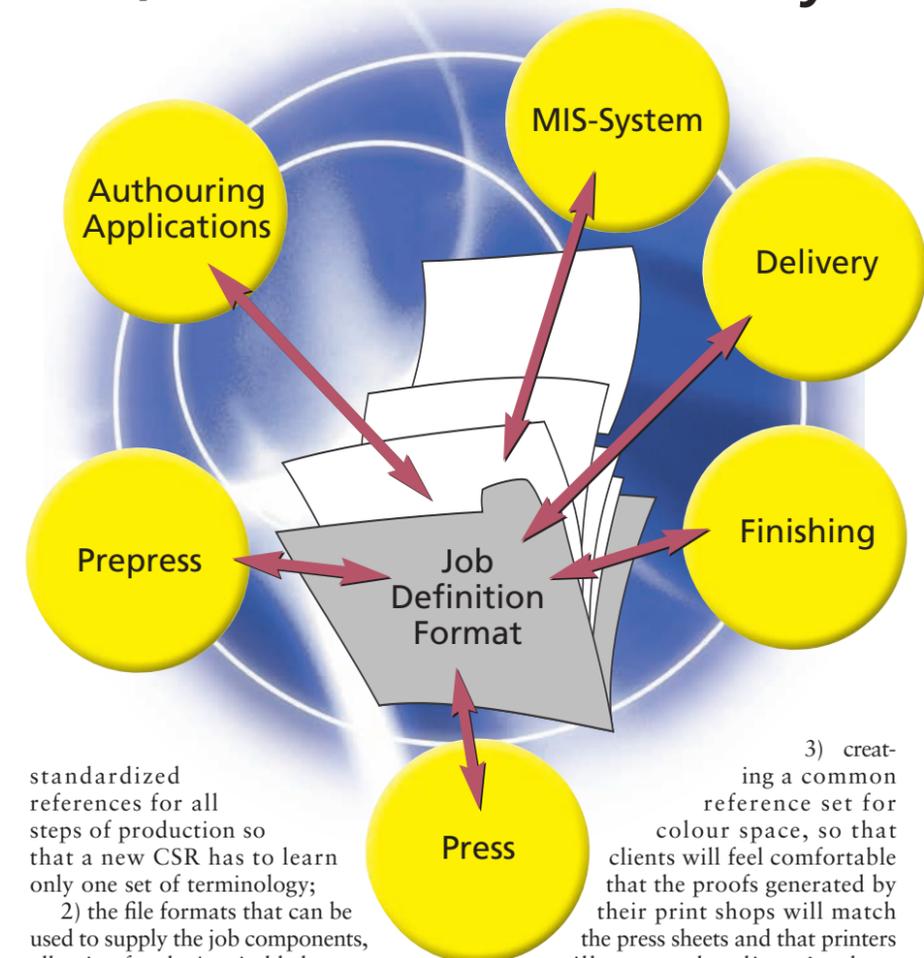
queuing software which talks to your press which talks to your bindery. All in the same language. And it backs it up a step further so that if I'm sitting at my desk and ordering my business card reprints online through my local print shop, then the form I complete on its Web site captures a standardized set of information. This ensures that the job can be sent on its way automatically and bindery specs don't accidentally get dumped into the customer address fields, ink densities don't end up in the screen angles field, and that the inevitable order revisions follow through the system, from the CSR who checks the Web site in the front office to the bindery operator who brings up the job out back.

Production data is entered once, and is accessible at all stages of the print-production process. With JDF, a print job becomes an interconnected workflow, from job submission through trapping, RIPping, filmmaking, platemaking, inking, printing, cutting, binding, and sometimes even through shipping.

Where will JDF take us?

The promise of a vendor-independent, industry-wide standard for job ticketing is not a pipe dream. With a published specification available to any and all who choose to implement it, and a membership that encourages adoption, there is the potential to standardize the following elements:

1) the description of the job, using



standardized references for all steps of production so that a new CSR has to learn only one set of terminology;

2) the file formats that can be used to supply the job components, allowing for the inevitable late-stage edits that result from one last proofread after the job is in the printer's hands;

3) creating a common reference set for colour space, so that clients will feel comfortable that the proofs generated by their print shops will match the press sheets and that printers will accept the clients' colour proofs as accurate renderings of the jobs to be printed;

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