RICOH
imagine. change.

Ricoh Software & Services | Ecosystem eBook Series

Input: The Starting Block

The Starting Block

Simply put, in-plant or in-house printers - insurance, banking/finance, retail, education, manufacturing or government, to name a few - need to prove their worth and not force the companies they serve to seek an outside alternative, saving the organization money while staying competitive.

It is undoubtedly a tall order, so how do they do this?

For starters, in-plant printers need a proactive approach to be able to manage the ecosystem infrastructure that drives their print business forward. The days of relying on whiteboards, spreadsheets, and team knowledge to bring work onboard, capture department specifications and optimize production output are in the past. No matter the size of your in-plant facility, limiting the touchpoints on the job is your path to efficiency and overall satisfaction.

Think of it as a relay race: every runner has their position, but it takes a team plan to ensure that everyone understands the pace and maximizes their handoff points. The lead runner has a starting block to help them launch, so they spend extra time understanding how to use it to get the best advantage when the starter pistol fires, but ultimately there is a handoff to the next stage, who is equally important in getting to the finish line. Your print starting block is a solid system to capture job orders using a process that standardizes every element, the rest of the team gets it done.

As you run through your workflow, pay attention to the following questions:

- How many steps are there?
- Are the steps linear or customized to each job?
- How many steps are automated vs manual touch points?
- Is there data or software that must be integrated before steps can be automated?

Input is more than job submission. It's a complex process of capturing the data and details to ensure a smooth, successful output and is rarely a straight line of information and processes.

01 **Input**

05 **Output**

02 **Manage**

04 **Produce**

03 **Prepare**

Input
ALWAYS
Equals
Output

The Common Onboarding Problem Line

Every job that comes into your in-house facility has a few elements in common, with the most basic intake starting with the following questions:

▪ **Who/which department is ordering the job?**

▪ **What and where is the work to be printed?**

▪ **When is the job due?**

▪ **How will it be charged?**

Each question appears easy, but even these basics can set off a chain of emails, phone calls, and conversations that consume time and resources.

Who/which department is ordering the job? The answer can be complex. While the contact information should always be in the record; interdepartmental orders may be missing a responsible party. Simple things like contact details can be out-of-date as people change jobs or working locations and there is rarely a process to verify details that come in by email, fax, or phone call.

What and where is the work to be printed? The job assets may be a file on a server that is printed regularly, or it may be a new job with a file attached or a pointer to a file location. Depending on the naming conventions in use, it may be challenging to determine what version of the file is to be printed. Using the wrong version is a crucial mistake that adds time and cost to the job. It's easier if a digital asset or content management system (CMS) is in use, but still, many in-plants rely on directory hierarchies and hot folders to manage the work they produce.

When is the job due? Delivery timeframes can be a point of negotiation. Some work is set up on a regular cadence, while other work comes in ad hoc requiring scheduling. Relationships and perceived urgency can color how work is slotted, which may not promote efficiency.

How will it be charged? Charging for the work is another pain point. Some operations use charge numbers but may also accept credit cards, purchase cards, or even cash. Others look at the in-plant as a cost of doing business and avoid the conversation about the cost of the work and its market pricing.

For organizations that outsource some of their work the order entry process takes on added complexity. There are real costs to working with an outside vendor. Without some rigor in the order entry process, it is possible to accept jobs that carry a higher cost than anticipated, leaving everyone frustrated.

Relay teams create race plans that account for race conditions and the behaviour of other runners by standardizing their approach to changing conditions. Job order entry requires the same approach because mistakes can and do happen when every inbound order is seen as unique, requiring individual handling.

Beyond Traditional Onboarding: Make It Personal

Offering marketing and campaign management solutions levers not only your data and content but offers new revenue streams to your print buyers.

High performance, personalized document creation provides effective, often critical, brand aware communications. Graphic designers and print business owners require the toolkit to manage variable data jobs with consistency, regardless of job volume, with speed and ease.
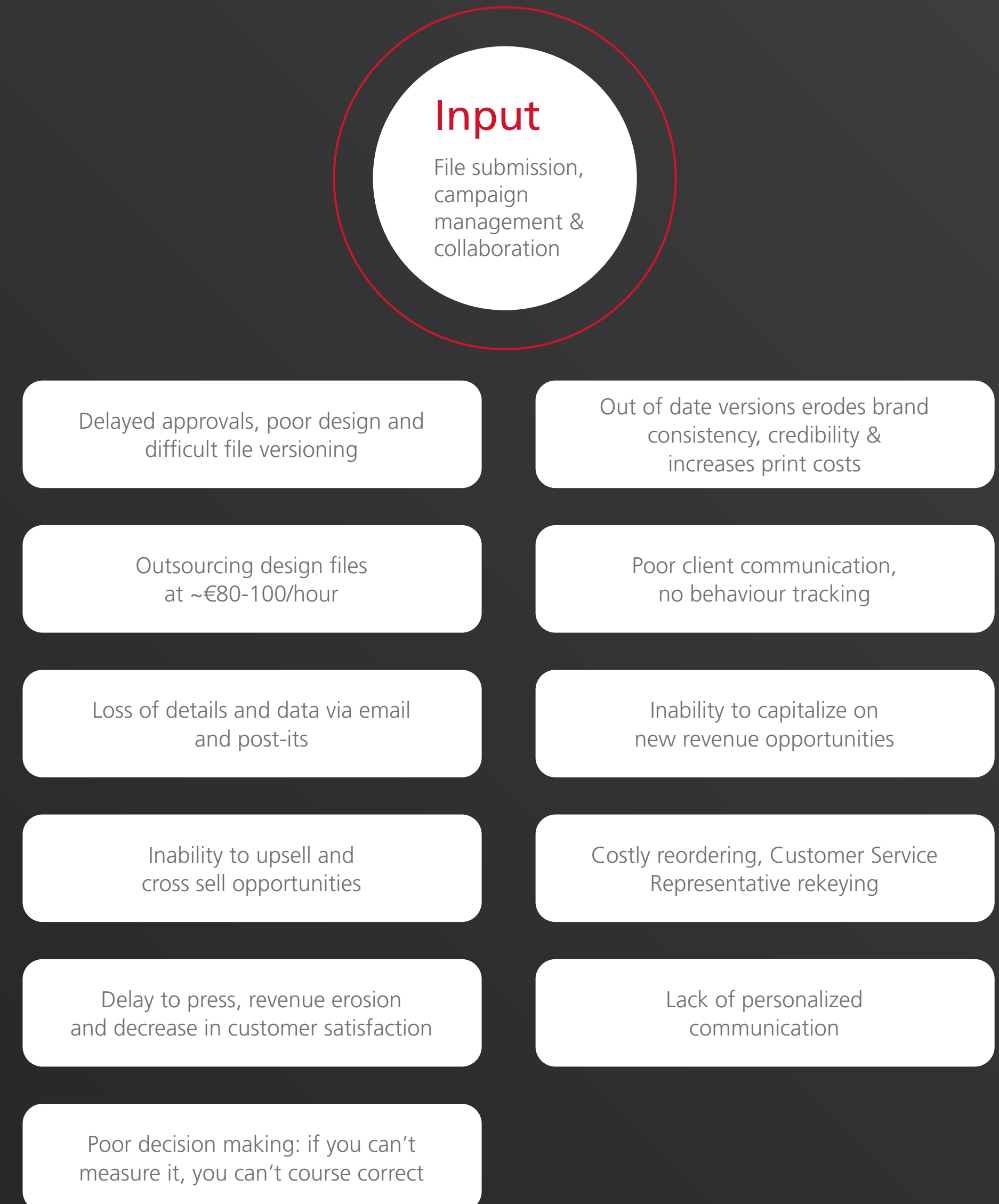
Desktop design and layout tools are often too complex for the average print business, resulting in expensive outsourcing and potentially a lack of versioning and asset control.

Bringing file creation and composition in-house ensures that all content, data, and assets are all within your visibility and control.

Benefits of expanding your marketing toolkit:

- **Pre-set templates for easy creation of impactful communications**
- **Variable data management with intelligent templates**
- **Centralized asset management and versioning control**
- **e-Delivery of press-ready files into production**
- **Creation and delivery of cross-media, traceable campaigns**

The Cost of a Poor Input Workflow:

Input
File submission, campaign management & collaboration

Delayed approvals, poor design and difficult file versioning

Out of date versions erodes brand consistency, credibility & increases print costs

Outsourcing design files at ~€80-100/hour

Poor client communication, no behaviour tracking

Loss of details and data via email and post-its

Inability to capitalize on new revenue opportunities

Inability to upsell and cross sell opportunities

Costly reordering, Customer Service Representative rekeying

Delay to press, revenue erosion and decrease in customer satisfaction

Lack of personalized communication

Poor decision making: if you can't measure it, you can't course correct

Speed Through Production with Automation

Job order entry is designed to capture the information to execute the job. However, gathering the job specifications comes with the risk of error because it's easy to create a personal shorthand from a series of email or phone conversations for everything from paper sizes to due dates. The more people there are taking orders in, the more variation develops, creating a very inefficient process.

Those conversations may happen several times during production as each new touchpoint needs assurances about the intent of the production.

Automating job specification capture is the starting block for production efficiency. There are several approaches used to normalize how they onboard a job. A common practice is to use a Web-to-Print solution that forces users to provide a minimal level of detail before the work goes into production. Product templates for each type of printed product the operation can accept are useful because they include the specification ranges for sizing, paper constraints, and finishing options. The magic in this approach is how you lock down each entry element to ensure that sizes and options are limited to what you can produce. This simple solution ensures that no work comes in that can't be produced. It also makes the order entry process fully self-service.

Additional Automation Opportunities

If a Print Management Information System (MIS) is used, there could also be an online quote request portal available for users. These portals are directly linked to the estimating and costing processes of the print MIS and guide users to answer the minimal job specifications to enter the job. Many print MIS portals also allow users to upload their artwork and data files that can be submitted into the workflow once converted to a production job.

File formats are another area where verification and validation can be helpful. If the workflow is based on receiving PDF files and someone sends a PCL or an MS Word document, what is the protocol to solve that challenge? These situations can be routed through automated handling when the right elements are in place, eliminating the need for manual intervention.

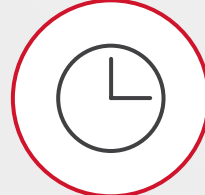# Create Universal Onboarding for Efficiency

Efficiencies boost effectiveness. Understanding the cost of an inefficient workflow is key to understanding how to build a universal onboarding process.

Ad hoc or one-off jobs wreak havoc on the best-laid plans for automated job onboarding. It may not be possible to capture these custom requests with your Web-to-Print, print MIS portal or other onboarding system, so users may still submit details through email. The power is in setting up processes so that requesters are guided to provide the minimal information needed in a normalized format, allowing staff to convert it into a job ticket. One commonly overlooked solution to assist in onboarding custom orders is to have internal staff use the Web-to-Print or print MIS portals. A customer support representative can convert the email or paper-based information into an order using the same software solutions for the routine work. The only difference being the internal user will have a higher access level with the ability to enter more specifications and set more customizations. By using the existing solutions, the order can be converted to a job and retain any set automation into the downstream print production workflow.

35%
of all printers
use email for job
submission

Without INPUT Systems (using email)

- Print buyer emails printer for request for quote with artwork file
- Request sent to manager for approval from CSR
- Quote prepared and sent to estimating
- Manager approval sent back to CSR
- Printer responds to customer for clarifications (loop)
- Clarifications sent to manager for review and quote tweaks
- Order quoted
- Customer is notified and accepts or requests changes (loop)

- Artwork creation and revisions to meet cost requirements
- Artwork approval cycle (loop)
- Final print ready file sent via FTP, email, sFTP, transfer service
- Notification sent to pick up file
- Final review
- Job sign off
- Final files sent to pre-press

3-4 days
reliant on staff being available for email communications and approval cycles

With INPUT Simple Workflow Systems (using eCommerce storefront, pre-set templates, catalog ordering)

- Log into online portal
- Select template
- Collaborate, customize artwork

- Check out, create artwork
- Print job

10 minutes – couple of hours
depending on reorder, existing template, catalog ordering or net new job

The Bottom Line

Just like short distance track runners, how you get off the starting block is often a predictor for the outcome of the entire race. It is the same for your job onboarding process. If there are too many methods to request a print, it takes longer to do the work. If the job and file information is not standardized, it makes for an awkward and slow exchange into your print processes and subsequent workflows.

Fix your job onboarding to not falter at the start, and your entire print production workflow can run.

If you're ready to optimize your job onboarding, contact us for more information and how a workflow assessment may help determine your workflow needs.

Benefits for automating your Input workflow:

- **Secured communications protects customer data and your business reputation**

- **Directly connects to customers to speed collaboration and communication**

- **Streamlines order capture requests into a single source versus multiple emails and fractured communications**

- **Eliminates manual intervention and missed details and job data**

- **Artwork creation (no outsourcing)**

- **Job status notifications**

- **Eliminates rekeying reorders**

- **Consistent versioning and personalized communications**

- **Reduces administration costs and frees up staff for revenue-generating activity**

- **Time savings allows more jobs on press**

Get The Next eBook: Manage

About Ricoh

Ricoh is empowering digital workplaces using innovative technologies and services enabling individuals to work smarter. For more than 80 years, Ricoh has been driving innovation and is a leading provider of document management solutions, IT services, communication services, commercial and industrial printing, digital cameras, and industrial systems.

Headquartered in Tokyo, Ricoh Group operates in approximately 200 countries and regions. In the financial year ended March 2019, Ricoh Group had worldwide sales of 2,013 billion yen (approx. 18.1 billion USD).

For further information visit www.ricohsoftware.com

RICOH
imagine. change.