



Go with the [work]flow

Streamline your projects and track costs with a production workflow system

IS YOUR shop or studio a candidate for a workflow system? Take this 10-second quiz...

- i) Do you have six or more design and/or production staff members?
- ii) Do you design large projects where several people can be working on the same project files?
- iii) Do you take jobs beyond the design stage – into flight checking, contract-level proofing, online collaboration/approval, imposition?

If you answered “yes,” read on.

Production workflow systems

They are designed to move, process and track the electronic prepress files associated with each job through your shop. Starting with the original files in proprietary program formats (i.e. QuarkXPress, InDesign) or common graphic interchange formats (PDF, EPS, TIFF), the workflow system has software for managing the progress of the job using a “digital job jacket” (a database with production information for each job). It also handles most of the critical processes the files must go through: conversion

(usually to PDF); pre-flighting (and sometimes repair of common file problems); paper or soft/remote proofing; client collaboration/approval – and if you need it – trapping; imposition; and the final RIP/screening to an imagesetter, platesetter, digital copier or digital/DOP press.

and take in PDF files or convert other file types to PDF (with an appropriate colour profile) very early in the cycle. In that format, they are ready for prepress tasks after the design is complete – accurate proofing, flight checking, trapping, imposition, RIPing and screening. Specialized software with many of these systems allows you to make last minute text, graphics or layout changes in the final PDF file.

Job Definition Format

The second, and lesser known, standard is JDF (Job Definition Format). It's designed to store both technical and non-technical information about a project – such as the files involved; client name; quantities; scheduling; and which prepress, presses or other equipment are to be used along with their capabilities and limitations. JDF is the underlying standard language for the digital job dockets used by most workflow systems. Many popular prepress software programs and equipment are “JDF-aware” and can embed and/or read JDF information in a file, including Adobe's CS2 applications, QuarkXPress 7 and many other hardware and software products. Once inside a JDF workflow system, the job information is passed from one JDF-aware program to the next (or one piece of equipment to another).

How it works

In short, these two powerful industry-wide standards allow production workflow systems to connect your different hardware, software and tasks seamlessly from the beginning to the end of the job. Further, many current front-office management/MIS systems are now also JDF-aware, allowing you to manage literally all of the technical, production and business/financial aspects of each job you handle from your desktop or laptop, sometimes even remotely across the web.

So how does this work in a typical mid-size or large design studio? Most often, designers create the original files and then assign the job type (coldset web press, heatset, sheetfed press). Once the initial client approval has been secured, the files move into a production management system for all of the remaining steps – such as conversion into print-safe PDF files; preflighting and any required fixes or edits; and calibrated proofing or on-screen soft proofing.

With this in mind, here are a few systems appropriate to design shops. Typical systems can come in anywhere

from around \$1,000 to over \$100,000, depending on capabilities. Some are sold/packaged and supported by the same companies who sell prepress or press equipment while others are handled by workflow system vendors.

EFI OneFlow

Rather than using JDF, OneFlow works with pre-configured and linked “hot folders.” It handles all the usual prepress steps including colour management, preflight and file correction, proofing, trapping and RIPing to a variety of proofers, imagesetters, CTP or digital output devices.

WEB TROWS

- www.artwork-systems.com
- www.efi.com
- www.enfocus.com
- www.polkadots.ca

Artwork Systems Odystar

Odystar uses Artwork Systems' hot-folder-based workflow management software combined with Enfocus PitStop to deliver a PDF/JDF system that handles preflight/file repair, imposition, trapping, proofing and output to a wide range of existing RIPs. It also connects to its WebWay job management and collaboration system.

Polkadots PrePage-it

Polkadots Software offers its PrePage-it PDF/JDF workflow system with preflight and file repair, editing at the flat level, and soft proofing, plus optional automated page pairing and interactive trapping. It works with a wide variety of devices and can be scaled based on requirements.

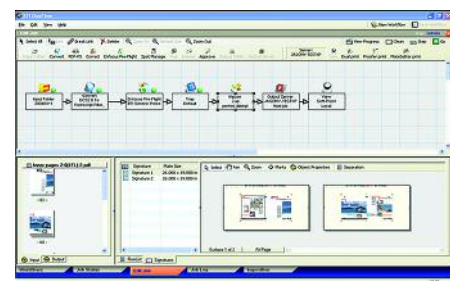
Enfocus PitStop Automate


PitStop Automate is the big brother to PitStop Professional (an Acrobat plug-in) and PitStop Server, which are generally regarded as the gold standard in tools to diagnose and fix problems with PDF files. Automate is hot-folder-based, and allows for full automation; conditional workflows based on job types or specs; editing and corrections until the last moment before output; and connectivity to almost any prepress gear. It's also one of the most affordable systems in this group.

EFI OneFlow uses pre-configured and linked “hot folders,” each with different prepress specification steps

Portable Document Format

Production management systems are based around two international standards. The first standard is Adobe's ubiquitous PDF (Portable Document Format), usually working with one or more variation of the PDF/X format, which Adobe created specifically for graphic arts and prepress work. PDF/X requires that you choose specifications for your work files (and all the items you place into them) that run in the real world of commercial print. After you pick a job type it will not save the final file as PDF/X (in Acrobat, InDesign, QuarkXPress, Illustrator) if any of the critical specifications (resolution, type, colour space, profiles) of your file are wrong for that job type. Most current workflow systems are based on PDF/X



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