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AIT OTTA IS FIRST IN EUROPE TO JDF-INTEGRATE SCREEN EQUIOS PRE4M WORKFLOW WITH HIFLEX MIS FOR STREAMLINED PRODUCTION

Latest step on route to complete production automation from online order entry to finished books

A year after the Norwegian print house AIT Otta AS celebrated its 60th anniversary it is pioneering a powerful new production project. The company specializes in one-stop book printing and is the very first in Europe to integrate Screen's brand new workflow solution Equios Pre4m with its Hiflex MIS system through a JDF connection. AIT worked closely with Coloro, Screen's distributor in Norway, to manage the project and three months of testing have shown great results.

AIT Otta AS is the only nationally-owned completely integrated book printing company left in Norway. IT-Manager Anders Sagdalen describes the market as very demanding with the trend for more and more books to be printed in Eastern Europe or China. However the company's JDF integration of complete manufacturing, from order entry all the way to bound books, will result in highly efficient and cost-effective production and increase the company's competitive power still further. The company is not quite there yet, but well on the way. One crucial link in that process of increasing efficiency is the integration of the prepress workflow within the JDF-based production environment.

The JDF-enabled Equios Pre4m/Hiflex MIS integration started in January this year and has already led to significant prepress production savings and improved efficiency. Equios Pre4m is a new part of Screen's popular Trueflow SE workflow and directly enables the handling of JDF stripping parameters to accelerate end-to end automation. Trueflow SE uses JDF-based job tickets and integrates everything from the automated handling of incoming jobs to prepress production, proofing and output to different CTP and digital printing devices. It produces consistent and repeatable production files that follow specific output guidelines and controls quality, colour management and trapping.

This process is already well on the way at Otta, half way between Oslo and Trondheim, in southern Norway.

Simplified imposition

“It was, among other things, the automatic handling of impositions and transfer of the stripping parameters from our Hiflex MIS system into the production workflow that was the main reason why we chose to enter into a pilot project like this with Screen Equios Pre4m”, says Mr. Sagdalen. “Before this project, impositioning was a process that required several manual operations with few opportunities to make last minute changes. The imposition process was based on fixed templates, which means that the company had to build up a significant library of these. If a print job was imposed, and something needed to be changed, the whole imposition process had to start all over again. Both the local template library and the reworking of imposed jobs is now history. A new workflow server and the new imposition module in Equios Pre4m, which is highly automated, makes it so quick and easy to make a new imposition that both the template library and manual intervention is unnecessary. In addition to that, small last minute changes can be made just in time before the data is transferred for plate imaging to the company’s Screen PlateRite 8800 CTP.”

Utmost efficiency is paramount. Last year the company manufactured 2000+ jobs and its four presses require about 400-500 plates every 24 hours in a three shift operation.

“Even for jobs of several hundred pages, or even more than a thousand, with gigabyte sized files, the imposition process runs so seamlessly that we only RIP the files again if we need to make last minute changes”, Mr. Sagdalen explains.

Straight from customer to CTP

As of today, all the imposition parameters are entered directly into Equios Pre4m, while job tickets, which in practical terms means workflow queues, are created in Trueflow and then transferred into Equios Pre4m. By the end of April the Equios system at AIT Otta will be upgraded so that the job tickets can be generated directly by the new system. A further streamlining of the process will be achieved when the transfer of the stripping parameters in to Equios Pre4m is made directly from the MIS system after the order is registered in the Hiflex MIS system. This functionality is a technical option at AIT Otta today, but currently undergoing testing and will be fully implemented in production shortly.

When the company launches its new customer portal, the automated workflow can be further extended all the way to the customer’s desktop. Mr Sagdalen says that there will be

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an option for selected customers to initiate the whole prepress workflow up to plate-ready files. However, the company will still have a check point just before the output of the plates to ensure everything is fine.

The imposition module in the new Equios Pre4m system utilises the CIP4 imposition catalogue. In addition, AIT Otta has tailored these by adding some minor local adaptation of positioning marks used specifically by them. This has resulted in a significant saving in time and man hours. In addition their old library of imposition templates is now superfluous.

Good experiences with Screen

This year's pioneer project is not the first time AIT Otta AS has been an early adopter of new solutions from Screen. The company has used Trueflow workflow system for ten years, ever since it invested its first digital plate production line. At the time Trueflow replaced the popular Taiga workflow but the transition went smoothly and it was that experience that meant AIT Otta was happy to undergo another workflow upgrade supported by Screen.

Mr. Sagdalen acknowledges both the products and the support from Screen and says that the company also is very satisfied with the hardware provided by the vendor. The fully-automated PlateRite 8800 CTP device runs smoothly, producing 60,000 plates last year alone. Based 300 km from Oslo, the company needs to keep its own backup CTP solution in case of the unlikely event that the main CTP is temporarily down. The backup CTP line hasn't been used for over a year!

Smooth transition

Originally AIT Otta was worried about adopting a new workflow approach in the prepress department. But the combination of 10 years' positive experience with Trueflow backed by strong support from Screen, Coloro and Hiflex, convinced them that it was worth the effort to try. They do not regret the decision as the change of workflow system was virtually seamless and runs smoothly.

"The whole project has worked very well", says Mr. Sagdalen. He acknowledges Screen in particular for the company's ability to address and solve all the minor issues that has occurred along the way in the installation and implementation process. Screen's close developmental cooperation with Hiflex has also provided a high level of confidence and contributed to the smooth integration of the MIS system with the prepress workflow.

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Mr. Sagdalen explains that the printing house is completely focused on competing on quality and delivery. The ability to handle the complete book production process under one roof gives them a clear advantage and a complete JDF integration of the production will guarantee the quality of the production chain. The latest piece of the PDF puzzle is the implementation of Screen Equios Pre4m in the JDF puzzle. Although still early days to draw definite conclusions on the success of the investment, Mr Sagdalen says everything is working more smoothly than he or his colleagues had ever expected.

End

About Screen

As a precision manufacturer with a long history of building innovative imaging technologies, Screen develops and manufactures expert digital printing technologies for high-end professional print on demand applications. The company provides a 360 degree service delivering total solutions spanning workflow automation, digital printing devices, finishing partnerships, ink and substrate expertise and support. www.screeneurope.com

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