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Production Workflow Solutions Consulting Service Production Workflow Solutions Europe

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Production Workflow Solutions Product Compendium: Variable Data Design and Production Software

Introduction

The *Production Workflow Solutions Product Compendium* presents an overview of products and vendors in the print production workflow arena. The primary objective of the Compendium is to deliver a comprehensive resource for print service providers seeking information about software tools and infrastructure for printing and print-related services.

The Compendium provides:

- A description of each product category, focusing on those features and considerations that are of the greatest importance to print providers and the print production workflow
- A brief description of products within each category
- A discussion of how the various products within each category are positioned in relation to each other
- Vendor profiles

Compendium Organization

The *Production Workflow Solutions Product Compendium* is delivered in the form of multiple documents. This document addresses the **Variable Data Design and Production** product category.

The following product categories are addressed in the various Compendium documents:

- Introduction to the PWS Compendium
- Datastream Transformation
- Preflighting
- Variable Data Design and Production (this document)

- Mail Preparation Applications
- Color Management
- Print e-Business Infrastructure
- Print-Related Business Management Systems
- Scan and Makeready
- Content Technologies
- Offset PDF Workflows

Variable Data Market Overview

With recent advances in digital print technology in terms of hardware and software, producing personalized black & white and full color documents with relevant images and text has become a reality. Three major advances have had a significant impact on variable data printing:

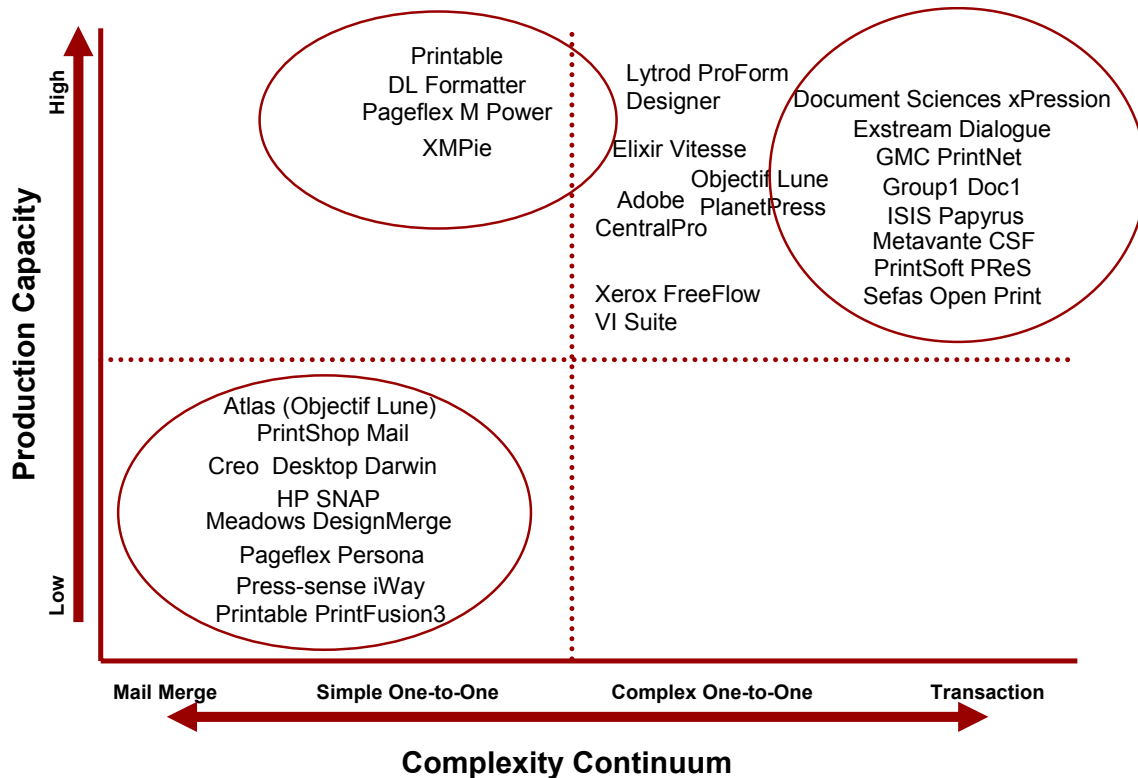
- Substantial improvements in the speed and quality of digital color print technology
- Upgrades in the efficiency and processing speed of RIPs as well as document composition software, making variable data applications easier to produce
- The convergence of digital printing and Web technologies coinciding with the development of 1:1 marketing campaigns

Key Workflow Concepts

Regardless of the software used to generate variable information documents, common terminology is associated with all solutions:

- A **master** or static portion of the document (text, graphics, images) typically remains constant for all recipients.
- **Document caching** is the process of storing reusable or common elements for repeated use throughout the print run. This significantly reduces the time it takes to create, transfer, RIP, and print variable information jobs.
- The **variable** portions of the document are those images and textual information that are unique to the individual recipient.
- **Elements** (text or links to graphics) that change from document to document are defined in a file (ASCII, text, or tab delimited).
- The **placeholder** is the area of the document defined by variable information publishing tools that contain the variable content, including text blocks, images, or graphic elements.
- Variable data applications frequently use conditional logic (if, then, and else statements) to further customize the variable content that the individual receives. Personalized correspondence can be linked to account information, purchase history, buying patterns, demographic information, etc.

Figure: Variable Data Market Positioning



Complexity can be defined on a continuum ranging from simple mail merge applications to complex transaction document solutions:

- **Mail Merge** – Incorporates simple name and address information to produce unique pieces for each recipient
- **Simple One-to-One** – Incorporates some targeted images and text, along with personalized information, to produce a unique composition that is customized to a unique recipient
- **Complex One-to-One** – Incorporates completely unique text, images, graphics, templates, content, and designs based on specific detailed profile information about each recipient
- **Transaction** – Incorporates personalized and customized content with intricate financial and account data that is automatically composed to produce “data-driven” documents. This data is frequently mainframe-based, and document creation may encompass complex logic.

It should be noted that this is a continuum, and that products that were initially or primarily designed for high-volume transaction environments are often used for the design and production of personalized marketing documents and other customer correspondence.

In addition to complexity, solutions may be organized by production capacity. Production capacity refers to the number of images (or pages) that are typically produced per month using the software application, and is defined as follows:

- **Low** – Solution typically capable of processing fewer than 10,000 images per month
- **Medium** – Solution typically capable of processing 500,000 images per month

- **High** – Solution typically capable of processing at least 1 million images per month

It is important to note that though certain business applications may require complex solutions that produce complex one-to-one or transaction solutions, even simple one-to-one solutions have been demonstrated to be successful in increasing document effectiveness, offering greater value to print customers, and providing higher margin to service providers.

Another way to segment variable data solutions is by their primary market focus. Some solutions mostly target mainframe-driven statement-printing environments. Others are more graphic arts-focused, with their primary audience found in the creative and commercial print markets.

The bottom line is that whether the solution produces segmented product brochures, new product announcements, custom catalogues, or high-volume transaction documents, 1:1 documents have market impact. Tools are available today to help businesses begin the journey toward more personalized customer communication.

This document has been abstracted from the InfoTrends/CAP Ventures white paper entitled “Production Workflow Solutions Product Compendium: Variable Data Design and Production Software,” which presents an overview of products and vendors in the print production workflow arena. The primary objective of the Compendium is to deliver a comprehensive resource for print service providers seeking information about software tools and infrastructure for printing and print-related services. This document addresses the Variable Data Design and Production product category. For more information about this and other InfoTrends/CAP Ventures white papers, contact Alison Hipp at (781)-616-2100 or alison_hipp@capv.com.