Strategy Manufacturing Writes the Book on Just-In-Time Printing with Océ Twin Printing Systems

Committed to total customer satisfaction, the shortest cycle time manufacturing, and ISO 9002 operating policies and practices, Strategy Manufacturing enables companies to focus on their core competencies, leaving the packaging and distribution of information to them. This not only reduces document cycle times and exposure to unnecessary overhead and related costs, it minimizes and in some instances, eliminates excess inventory. To this end, Strategy serves companies large and small throughout California, the United States and internationally, in multiple languages. As dynamic as the industry it serves, the company is intent on doubling revenues in each of the next three consecutive years.

The on-demand publishing of books, predominantly technical and training manuals, is a central component of Strategy Manufacturing’s business mix. The company generates more than 25 million pages of book output each month to support constantly changing customer requirements. Until recently, much of this print volume has been short-run printing, with larger print runs being outsourced. It is this market that Strategy has targeted for growth.

The drive to meet the needs of this marketplace, and the need to bring these types of jobs in-house, coupled with a growing requirement for less proprietary on-demand technology led to the acquisition of the company’s first Océ Twin on-demand publishing system.

Good things come to those who wait, or so the saying goes. Unless of course, you’re Strategy Manufacturing, Inc.—a company poised on the leading edge of one of today’s most explosive growth industries—the packaging and distribution of information. In which case, it might be more accurate to coin a phrase from another manufacturer with a vested interest in reaching the finish line faster ... just do it ... just in time.

In an age of global competition, split-second change and unprecedented growth in the volume of information that is generated, packaged and distributed every day, businesses today are under intense pressure to get products and information to market faster and more efficiently than ever. With this in mind, the concept of just-in-time production is becoming an increasingly important component of information distribution strategies. And, while it may mean many different things to many different people, the common denominator is the ability to produce documents—when, where, how, and in the precise quantity needed.

Strategy Manufacturing is a compelling example of a company meeting the unique challenges of the Information Age head on. Established in May of 1993 in Hayward, California, Strategy Manufacturing specializes in on-demand information distribution services—from packaging of information and manufacturing of optical and magnetic disks, to documents transmitted via the Internet and books ranging in size from 100 to 700 pages, printed on-demand—just in time. The company has leveraged expertise in today’s most advanced information distribution technologies to quadruple annual revenues since its inception just three years ago.
The 2090 Twin- The High-Speed Print on Demand printer

The 2090 Twin has proven its mettle. Strategy can now produce books in large volumes for customers in a week ... books with cycle times that took as long as a month when printed using traditional offset technology.

For example, one of Strategy’s customers previously used a competitive supplier to produce its books. They typically ordered three month supplies of books that changed at least five times a year. Frequently the inventories of manuals were obsoleted. Now with Strategy and the 2090 Twin system, the customer receives documents that are supplied when needed and at the same cost-effective unit price.

Today the company takes pride in the fact that they can produce 25 units of material to support ten products ... or 50,000 units to support a single product ... all with a competitive unit cost.

“Thanks to the 2090 Twin we can satisfy our customers requirements on a weekly basis instead of in three weeks, without requiring huge cash outlays. What’s more, our standard turnaround is three days. The rules,” observes Newsom, “have changed.”

So much so, in fact, that in order to obtain a second 2090 Twin printing system, Strategy quickly signed off on the beta 2090 Twin. Clearly, the 2090 Twin is the right printer for the job. So, what is it that makes the 2090 Twin such an effective solution?

For starters, the 2090 Twin PostScript printing systems, which are operated in conjunction with Printserver 9000 controllers, are ideal solutions for true on-demand manufacturing and duplex printing at a volume level not supported by previous technology—up to 8 million images per month. This fact alone enables Strategy to expand its customer base while remaining cost-competitive with the marketplace.

Teaming the proven performance of two high performance 2090 printers, the 2090 Twin continuous forms duplex printing systems uses patented LED PLUS technology and advanced imaging and fusing methods to deliver the highest print quality available in the industry today—especially in printing large black areas, logos, and photos—at a speed of 308 images per minute.

The 2090 Twin supports features like two across and duplex printing, both of which are crucial to the book manufacturing business. The wide print line and duplex capability, enables users to print two 8 1/2 by 11 portrait pages, 7 by 9 inch pages, or those of variable sizes. Using the 2090 Twin, the uniquely-sized pages may be printed side-by-side two across on both sides of the page with superb print quality.

For added flexibility, the two printers comprising the Océ Printing Systems’ 2090 Twin high-speed device provides for user’s unique application requirements. Whereas other technology was confining, the Océ Twin printers enable the customer to configure and design the system as needed. What’s more, the 2090 Twin system can be physically configured at right angles or in-line, and the twin printers can be operated separately, on-line or off-line. In addition, each individual printer can be used separately for simplex applications adding to the system’ benefits.
Recognizing the importance of advanced technology, in May, 1993, President, Bob Newsom, set out to update Strategy’s 53,000 square foot facility. The objective: upgrade the system workflow to support on-demand solutions that optimize quality and productivity, and allow for longer print runs by utilizing open applications.

Newsom commented, “We were looking for a printer that would support just-in-time printing for higher volumes, without the limitations of proprietary architectures.”

According to Newsom, the just-in-time approach to information workflow has been emerging for years. However, until recently, the technology to support on-demand publishing hasn’t worked well. He continues, “Ours is a young industry and it is only recently that open solutions like the Océ system have been introduced.”

Prior to the Océ Twin, the company relied solely on Xerox Docutech machines for print jobs. While this technology has been sufficient to meet the needs of short-run applications, the proprietary nature of the technology and its inability to handle larger jobs have resulted in limitations and expenses.

Says Newsom, “Whereas competitive technology is proprietary, Océ products are open. Océ focuses on its core competency, which is to enable its customers to exploit their own expertise through open systems technology in an open system environment. That is why we selected the Twin.”

Newsom continues, “We need to be able to connect to our customers, manage information, and satisfy their requirements. We need a system that is flexible and open and allows our customers’ documents to be easily modified and printed … on demand. Our typical customer is a high technology company whose product is introduced as a beta release, followed by a limited release and then general release. This means that a typical document can be changed five times per year. With applications this dynamic, you can’t even think about film and plates. Neither can you rely on cumbersome technology that doesn’t support open systems processing.”

With the proprietary technology, fonts and resources had to either be embedded in customer’s files, and formatted and assembled in a form that could be printed in a Xerox world, or had to be resident on that company’s printer. So, if a customer wanted a font that was not available on their particular system, Strategy would have to go out and pay upwards of $300 to add a new character set.

Strategy also turned to Océ Printing Systems for a solution that could handle larger volumes, “With the other, Xerox equipment, we couldn’t touch the next level of the marketplace — the larger companies and bigger print runs. We had reached the ceiling in terms of cost-effectively supporting customers’ needs for on-demand book manufacturing with digital technology. We needed a system that would widen our bandwidth. The Océ 2090 Twin printing system does just that. We can now handle the larger print runs and we’ve got the flexibility we need to be truly digital when it comes to print.”

Strategy considered many competitive products from the other major players in the field, however, the others could not provide the necessary resolution, or in some cases could not guarantee the immediate response or the flexibility that Strategy required.

So, in February, 1996 Océ Printing Systems installed its first Twin on-demand printing system in conjunction with its Printserver 9000 front-end processor, setting Strategy up as an official print-on-demand beta site. Today, the facility houses a variety of printers, various media servers that perform front-end processing and resource storage functions, as well as two Océ 2090 Twin on-demand printing systems, and post-processing equipment including backend slitters, trimmers, and binding devices to support Strategy’s stringent book quality standards.
The Printserver 9000

RIP and print. It’s a function that is integral to print-on-demand for dynamic documents that are stored and then reprinted many times—especially when it comes to large files with complex graphics, menu screens, and backgrounds. As such, the 2090 Twin systems are operated in conjunction with the Printserver 9000 media server.

The Printserver 9000 is a turnkey processor developed to provide essential connectivity and print management functions for PostScript platforms in commercial publishing environments and to enable Océ printers to accept input created on Windows, UNIX or Macintosh platforms—and submitted via modem, tape, disk, or CD-ROM. Currently, Strategy, an established provider of Internet and FTP (file transfer protocol) services, receives eighty percent of its input via the Internet, and the other twenty per cent via optical or magnetic disks.

Designed to perform the RIP (raster image processing) function, in which PostScript datastreams are converted to an enhanced version of AFPDS acceptable to the 2090 Twin printer, the Printserver 9000 is also equipped with software to control and direct the twin printing systems. Other functions include file tuning and impositioning, which enable the printing of sequential pages two-across and four-up, and prepare the forms for saddle stitching or perfect binding.

Development on the Printserver 9000 was a cooperative effort between Strategy Manufacturing, Océ Printing Systems USA, and ENTIRE to fine-tune the performance of the Printserver 9000. The server is being configured with ENTIRE’s FIBRElink® gateway software, technologically tested and proven front end system that supports a wide range of electronic file formats and most standard input networks, while providing storage, queuing, print and file-spooling functions. The Printserver, equipped with customized software and the ENTIRE FIBRElink gateway, enables Strategy to create whole new documents or revise existing ones easily again without the need to re-RIP. What’s more, the teaming of Océ with ENTIRE allows Strategy to format documents more flexibly. Using the expertise of the organizations, Strategy moved the print registration marks further to the outer edges of the paper giving Strategy more space in which to print.

Customer Service

Makes the Difference

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The Strategy Manufacturing print center operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. With this kind of grueling production schedule, reliability is key to completing print jobs on time. Especially when it comes to implementing new technology. According to Newsom, “Being at the leading edge is not for the weak of heart. It means re-engineering processes to avoid cookie-cutter solutions, and facing the resulting challenges. However, the Océ team has been right with us every step of the way—from sales to service to management. It is very encouraging that a company the size of Océ Printing Systems USA was willing to partner with a much smaller operation in the development of their new printing systems. We have felt, from the beginning that the Océ field engineers and customer support people have taken our needs seriously. They’re here whenever we need them.”

Looking Ahead ...

The future looks bright for the company that is “writing the book” on high-tech information delivery. Strategy Manufacturing, which has experienced triple-digit growth in the three years since its inception will, by all indications, continue to thrive. To keep pace with accelerated growth, Strategy is looking to invest in three new Twin systems in each of the next three years. And as Strategy Manufacturing continues to expand its boundaries to package and distribute information around the world, Océ Printing Systems, USA will be right there by their side.

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