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A Vendor-Provided Case Study

Complex Courseware With On-Demand Digital Printing



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Jackie Damrau started 2002 with some trepidation. The leaner economic times had all companies looking at their spending, including the training and development department at Perot Systems Corporation in Plano, Texas. Perot Systems has more than 9000 associates who receive training. In Damrau's position as the team lead for the t&d instructional design and development team, she (and her team) continually review cost-savings measures.

"We were looking for every possible way to trim costs while maintaining our high standards," says Damrau. "All of our courses are instructor-led and, therefore, rely heavily on our printed materials. We want our materials to look professional, so we rely on our print vendor to provide us with high-quality output and delivery."

On a yearly basis, Perot Systems offers multiple training and development courses that are core to its curriculum. It also offers a number of specially designed one-off courses for specific business units, as well as custom courses for external clients as part of a project or contract.

Damrau found a solution that helps her team maintain quality while significantly reducing the print budget: on-demand digital printing.

On-demand printing provides users of print services the benefits of just-in-time production—a system by which businesses keep just enough raw materials and parts on hand to meet current demand. Because inventories are kept low, capital isn't tied up. On-demand digital printing also provides the highest possible quality document printing at a cost substantially less than off-set. It also has the last-minute flexibility that's so necessary in this fast-changing world of information technology.

In late 2001, Damrau started moving all of her department's printing needs to an on-demand digital printing service provided by Mimeo Inc., a browser-based printer that enables user-to-print complex, color and black-and-white documents to its high-speed digital printer, located next to the runway at shipping hubs for FedEx and UPS in Memphis, Tennessee. Users can look at and make changes to the entire document—set up the tabs, make sure the sections are correct, choose the binding and cover—in their Web browsers before they print. When they're satisfied, they hit print—just as if the printer were in the same room with them.

After the user enters the addresses of the people who need to receive the documents (or clicks on the addresses in their online address book), the documents are printed and delivered by 8:30 the next morning if desired, as long as they are printed by 10 EST the night before.

According to Damrau, her team at Perot Systems achieved a 26 percent year-over-year cost savings on printing in 2002 versus 2001. Here's how.

Making the switch helped get rid of wasteware. *On-demand* means just that: printing what you need when you need it in exactly the correct quantities from five to 5000 or more. No bulk buying. Before using on-demand print services, Perot Systems typically ordered bulk print runs of materials from local print shops in advance of a course to save money. Inevitably, that sometimes led to the storage and eventual removal of dated materials, reducing any cost savings associated with bulk orders. Using on-demand digital printing reduced errors. When they bought in bulk, Damrau's team couldn't easily and inexpensively make last-minute

changes. Now, they store most of the course materials in various folders on Mimeo's servers and access them through a Web browser. "Last-minute requests pose less of a problem when you print only what you need when you need it," notes Damrau. "The folder-based system lets us use the same folder structure as our internal document repository. That makes reordering easier when a team member is away from the office."

A hallmark of on-demand printing is the ability to see the document as it will be delivered to the instructors and learners—a virtual proof. That allows complete editing and quality control before hitting the print button.

Professional printers yield quality customer service and products. Switching to on-demand printing increased the quality of the courseware and provided top-level customer service.

"The quality of the printing, paper, and packaging make for materials that arrive in excellent condition and meet the high standards we want for our instructors and learners," says Damrau. If something doesn't look quite right, Mimeo's on-site print experts, who are available 24 hours a day, will be proactive and phone Damrau's production coordinator to provide the opportunity to make changes before the document is printed and delivered.

Another aspect of customer service unique to a technology-based print solution such as on-demand digital printing is the ability to adapt the product to meet customer needs and solve problems. Using technology to solve problems is what Perot Systems does for its customers; the company expects the same from its vendors.

"When we first started using Mimeo, we liked what it did, but we were looking for additional functionality," says Damrau. "For example, the ability to store our course material in electronic

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folders with varying levels of subfolders was important to us. We let our account executive know of our wishes, and Mimeo upgraded its user interface design to do exactly what we needed."

Efficient delivery lowers shipping costs. Damrau also reduced shipping costs in 2002. Mimeo ships from its print facility next to Fed-Ex's Memphis runway. Finished documents travel directly to their destinations without making multiple stops as they would if a local print shop sent them. That means fast delivery and Mimeo's preferred shipping rate with Fed-Ex. "When you ship to approximately 40 different locations on a regular basis, shipping becomes a critical cost center. Anything we can do to reduce that lets us focus our time and resources on course materials," says Damrau.

Fast, good, cheap: having it all

Most people are familiar with the business triangle: Draw a triangle and write *fast*, *good* and *cheap* at each point. The adage is that you can pick any two, but not all three. On-demand digital printing destroys that paradigm. A technology-based solution that combines the Internet, the best digital printers, and the power of overnight delivery enables print-intensive functions, such as training, to increase the quality of the product while reducing costs and turnaround times. In a time of tight budgets for training departments, that can make all the difference.