

Taking control of design

you can



Building relationships across the organisation is fundamental to your strategy for growing the CRD, and arguably the most important relationship is between print and design. In reality, the relationship is more a triangle, with print buying as the third side, because one of the most noticeable trends in recent years has been the convergence of design and print buying—with significant consequences, as we shall see.

Every print job involves a creative, although the precise form the ‘creativity’ takes can vary enormously. According to the Canon Insight Report, *Corporate Reprographics: Trends and Opportunities*, 75% of jobs involve ‘direct’ design, in which the designer creates the ‘look and feel’, assembles the text and illustrations, prepares the file, sends it to the printer, and approves the final job. The remaining 25% involves template-driven ‘indirect’ design, where less-skilled employees simply select a slide design in PowerPoint or choose a pre-designed business card in Microsoft Word. Taking this broader definition, the design function is spread across departments throughout the organisation—for instance, the report found 39% in designated creative departments, 29% in sales and marketing, and 19% in purchasing.

Because they increasingly buy the print as well as design it (more print buyers have ‘designer’ as a job title than ‘print buyer’), designers are in many ways the CRD’s most important prospects and fundamental to its future. What’s more, the fact that the vast majority of organisations regard print as critical to their operations makes the health—or otherwise—of the relationship between design and print a significant contributor to corporate success.

In the following pages we first show why a closer relationship between those who design and those who print benefits both parties – and the organisation—before outlining some strategies for building that relationship. Although the title of the guide urges you to ‘take control’ of design, we don’t pretend that this is achieved easily or quickly. What’s more, for many CRDs absolute control of design—defined as meeting all the organisation’s design needs from within the print department—will be unrealistic because of the sheer scale of the corporate demand. It’s important to grasp that taking control of design doesn’t mean doing the design – you just want the people who design what you print to involve you in the process as early as possible.

Designers vs printers

There was a time, before the desktop publishing revolution, when many printers and designers didn't get on. Printers were often exasperated by the colours and effects designers expected from the presses; designers were frequently frustrated by what they saw as the technological barriers behind which printers conducted the 'black arts' of colour repro and printing.

Things are different in today's all-digital world, where designers not only perform pre-press tasks previously handled by printers but, as noted above, increasingly buy print as well. However, this switch in the balance of power between creativity and production has created a new set of problems, because many designers lack skills in areas that can affect the cost of a job.

File preparation and paper choices are notable instances. Professional design software such as Adobe InDesign and QuarkXPress features the functionality to translate a creative design into a printable file, but the designer still needs to make use of it. The packages used by 'indirect' designers, such as Microsoft Word and Publisher, have no such functionality. As a result, supplied files are a problem – according to the Insight Report, 81% needed work from a technical or content point of view, with common faults being problems with RGB and CMYK, fonts that don't embed in PDFs, and inclusion of low-resolution images. While pre-flighting software will identify issues, it's better to avoid them in the first place.

The right paper choice depends on a number of factors, including the audience and the distribution method – for example, if it's a mailshot, will it survive the mail handling equipment without scratching? Choosing the right format is equally important. The designer may opt for a non-standard size for added impact, but does it impose on a larger sheet without wasting paper?

Other areas where it pays to spend time making the right decision include mailing standards (knowing the rules on size and weight) and use of spot colours (is that fifth colour really necessary, or can you print a tint of CMYK?). Having in place a clear policy on changes can control costs too – in the report almost half the inplants interviewed said alterations added over 20% to the cost of a job.

These are powerful arguments for establishing a closer relationship between design, print buying and printing, in which the CRD's knowledge can help reduce costly errors, yet very few organisations have done so. Instead, many subscribe to the philosophy that the best way to cut costs is to cut volume—which impacts the ability of the organisation to communicate effectively – rather than save as much, or more, money through improved processes. Yet a glance outside the organisation – at commercial print providers and facilities management (FM) companies—shows exactly what these closer relationships can deliver as they add design services and more, and increasingly brand themselves as marketing services providers (MSPs). As one Canon commercial printer customer explained: "For every euro spent on print, ten are spent upstream of the press—on design, data management, and so on. If you're involved in design, you have more control of the printed page. With control comes more responsibility, which means higher margins."



Getting more involved

While healthier margins are unlikely to be your goal in the CRD, you do want the increased involvement in the design process that greater responsibility implies. Unfortunately, when it comes to getting more involved there's no set pattern to follow. How you approach the task depends on many factors, including the scale and scope of the organisation's design requirements, its existing design resources, and the CRD's capabilities and ambitions. Actually taking design under the implant umbrella may not be a realistic goal, at least not in the short term; simply gaining a seat at the planning meetings for new communications projects might be your first objective.

There are, however, some essential actions that you should take to strengthen the relationship between print, design and print buying. They are all intended to convey the message that the CRD is more than the last stage in the communications process. You and your department have specialist knowledge that customers should call on early in the project.

Find the designers:

You need to identify where design takes place in the organisation, and who's responsible for it. Your initial consultations with your customer departments should have given you a feel for this, but start drilling down to build a more accurate picture. For example, find out who designed every job that comes to the CRD for printing. Do the same for those jobs that you don't print. This information is doubly valuable, because it is also vital to your internal marketing campaign, helping you keep customers up to date with CRD developments.

Point out errors. Suggest solutions:

If a print job causes problems—the file might be poorly prepared, for example—and you know who originated it, point out what was wrong and explain how they can prevent it next time. These actions should be part of a broader programme to educate customers about what they can do to improve the service they get from the CRD. Produce a plain English guide to file preparation, for example, or to paper formats—by doing these simple things you are already building the CRD's reputation as 'more than just the photocopying department'.

Get feedback:

Feedback should be a two-way process. When you deliver a finished job, ask for feedback on what the customer thought of the CRD's service at every stage, from enquiry to delivery. You might include a feedback form with the job, or send an email questionnaire. Whatever you do, keep it simple and to the point to encourage the customer to complete it. You don't even need to mention the word 'design'—you just want them to think about the CRD as early in the process as possible next time round.

Consider adding design:

As we pointed out earlier, most commercial printers and FM companies offer design in their portfolio of services. If you're losing work to outside suppliers because you don't, consider whether you can add a design capability by either recruiting a graphic designer or partnering with a local freelance designer. It's the fastest way to expand your offering, requires the least investment and involves the least risk. Make sure, however, that whomever you choose has the right level of expertise for the work you're seeking from customer departments. It's easy to find a designer for routine work, but designers capable of creating and presenting high-calibre concepts are scarcer on the ground.

Automate design with web-to-print:

Don't forget that implementing a web-to-print (W2P) solution is one route to taking control of most of the 'indirect' design in the organisation. Using W2P, routine repeat jobs such as business cards, presentations and specification sheets can be designed using templates.

Do some or all of the above and you'll gradually establish a presence for the CRD upstream of the printroom. It won't happen overnight, and there will no doubt be setbacks along the way, but stick at it. Get your strategy for design right and you're well on the way to making the CRD indispensable.

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