

WHAT'S NEW: JDF UPDATE

Clear benefits, though adoption is dragging. What's next?



JDF (JOB DEFINITION FORMAT) has been a major buzzword in the industry for about 10 years. Some shops are huge proponents of it, some say they simply don't understand it, and some are just too busy to be bothered. But more and more hardware and software manufacturers are creating JDF-enabled gear. So, like it or not, it seems like JDF is here to stay. The question is, is anybody using it?

WHAT IS IT?

JDF is an XML-based file format designed for end-to-end job ticket specifications that's embedded in equipment or software. Basically it allows all your equipment and systems to talk to each other, and can streamline information exchanged between

a variety of systems and applications, regardless of vendor, or platform. JDF's aim is to become the industry standard.

Stephen McWilliam, executive vice president and part owner of Avanti, says the advantages of JDF are obvious. It cuts down on the cost and time of production,

and with more shops being asked to turn things around in 24 hours, that kind of automation is key. And, since all your machines speak the same language, output is reliable and consistent. "The home run is that JDF limits the number of people that touch a job," says McWilliam. "You can't afford to touch a \$500 digital job 10 times and expect to make money"

A potential shop needs to treat JDF as a project, he says, and be willing to put in the time needed—which could range from weeks to months—to fully make the transition. JMF (Job Management Format), which is part of the JDF spec, offers a complete account of the job's progress and results, including errors, cost, status, waste, paper used and so on.

JMF can keep your manufacturing lean because you know exactly what you've used and can see where you can cut further.

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WHY THE SLOW START?

Despite all these benefits, JDF doesn't seem to be catching on much in Canada. Any progress it's making is slow. Some in the industry suggest JDF may have been over hyped, promising too much, too soon.

Just before Graph Expo 2008, Rick Littrell, CMO of cross media marketing firm Magicomm, posted a video on WhatTheyThink that got a lot of attention. Titled, *Is JDF Dead?* Littrell, himself a JDF supporter, asks the question: is JDF dead or is it on life support? He says that three



For more information on JDF, check out these websites.

- www.adobe.com/products/jdf
- www.cip4.org
- www.networkpdf.com
- www.jdfusergroup.org
- www.ipa.org/jdf
- www.gain.org

years ago, integration was on everyone's lips, but leading up to the show, there had been nary a mention of it in any press releases. Littrell also states that—at the time—of the 150 vendors that are members of CIP4, only seven had products that had passed JDF certification. For some reason, JDF had fallen off the map.

But McWilliam says he is starting to see JDF beginning to pick up speed. A slow, continuous momentum is taking place, and the industry is reaching the end of the “early adopter stage,” he says. Large shops were mainly the first to get on board, and small and mid-sized printers will be the next. The trigger for most shops, he says, is purchasing new equipment. “That’s when they make the investment.” Since most equipment is being made JDF-enabled, all that remains is to select and purchase a JDF-enabled MIS. (See article on the latest MIS systems updates on page 33.)

The CIP4 (International Cooperation for the Integration of Processes in Prepress, Press, and Postpress Organization) is in charge of the development of JDF and handling the specs.

More than 300 printers, consultants, and vendors are members. It estimates that about 150 companies are manufacturing JDF-enabled gear, and more than 180 JDF-enabled products are currently available. Also, almost 4,000 shops worldwide are using one or more JDF-enabled machines.



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But the number of products that have passed the JDF-certification is only about 35, according to the CIP4 website. However, the number of companies is much smaller. Kodak/Creo owns eight of those JDF-certified products for example. Even if a product is not certified, but is made JDF-enabled, it will still work, it just won't carry the certification logo.

Despite the slow start, JDF is moving into postpress and finishing applications, where the same benefits of prepress and press apply. Tom Lang, national sales manager at Müller Martini says JDF has a bright future in postpress in theory, though the number of Canadian shops using it for that purpose is still “extremely low.” He attributes that to printers' unwillingness to apply time and money, and confusion about what JDF is and what it can do.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

The future of JDF in Canada depends on education and economics, especially on the postpress side. Since so much gear is already ready for JDF, most likely the next piece of equipment a shop buys will have it. Manufacturers say it's as straightforward as finding a vendor that's been there, asking questions, and purchasing new JDF-certified gear. The trick is to get it back in the public vernacular. And it doesn't appear to be going away, as far as the manufacturers are concerned, so expect to hear more about JDF in the near future. 