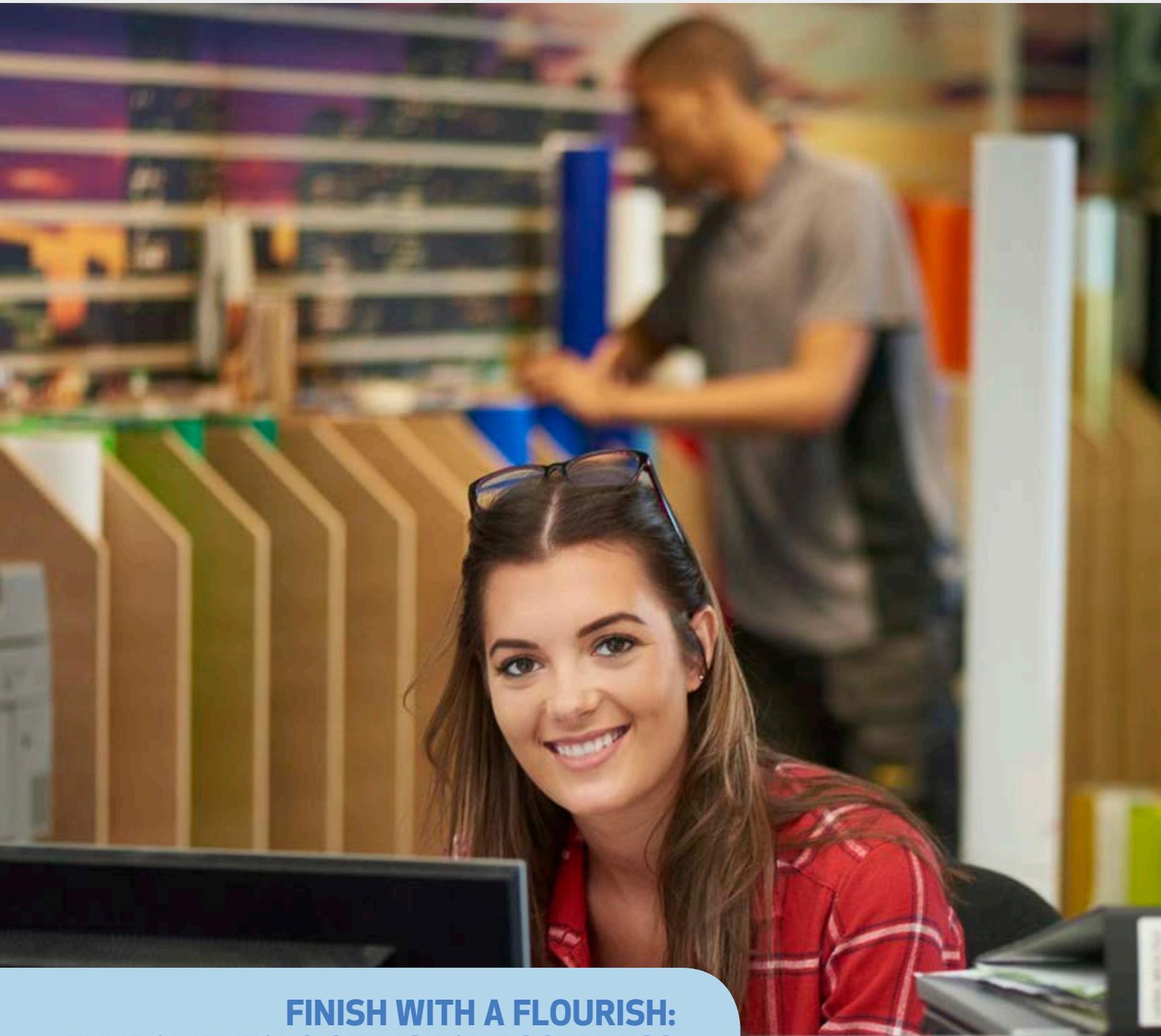


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FINISH WITH A FLOURISH:
FUNDAMENTALS OF DIGITAL POSTPRESS

BY: PATRICK HENRY



Today, finishing can be fully integrated with prepress and printing in a workflow based on relaying digital job specifications from process to process. When this happens, the whole print manufacturing paradigm changes.

Instead of prepping a job in one location, printing it in another, and binding it somewhere else, everything takes place in a unitary production line consisting of a networked press with finishing modules connected directly to it. In this inline digital finishing scenario, the sequence is “white paper in, sellable product out”: printed, trimmed, folded, bound, and ready to ship to the customer in one pass, all from what is essentially one device.

There are other ways to perform digital finishing, but every method of doing it has the same objectives:

- Eliminate manual steps and touch points
- Minimize errors, waste, and excess cost
- Achieve increased throughput, more machine uptime, faster turnaround
- Optimize labor utilization

Digital finishing—especially when it takes place inline with the press—breaks the “bindery bottleneck” by eliminating the gaps of time and space that tend to isolate process steps in a conventional bindery.

The enabler of this kind of one-pass production is automated workflow. “Workflow” is a term for software architecture that controls how production equipment operates and, just as important, how it gathers, stores, and shares data about everything it does.

Workflow also conveys job parameters: color, pagination, imposition, trim size, and so on. Instructions for carrying out these key requirements are encoded in the electronic job ticket that the workflow sends from station to station once the job is under way. Included are instructions for finishing, which ride along with all of the other job-processing cues and execute automatically as they do.

Finishing can be performed inline, near-line, or offline; as a combination of any two; or as a menu of all three. The key to the definitions is data connectivity.

Inline means that the finishing modules are attached to the press and are controlled by the same stream of JDF (job definition format) compliant data.

In a near-line configuration, the finishing modules are separate from the press but driven by a common JDF job ticket that sets them up for operation.

Offline finishing involves no mechanical or data connectivity, and each device must be programmed separately.



Inline digital finishing is the most sophisticated of the three. In an integrated production line, one-pass printing and finishing eliminate almost all need for manual sheet handling and transport. A single operator directs all of the work. If the press and the finishing modules are optimally matched, there is no “speed penalty” against the printing engine—the paper can be finished as fast as the press can print it.

Digital presses produce the best results when they are supported by digital finishing equipment. Today, a shop can have whatever digital-friendly postpress capabilities its workload requires—not just machinery, but workflow software and DFEs (digital front ends) as well.

The right capabilities to have are the ones that best suit the kinds of work a shop most commonly does. A big advantage of inline finishing in this regard is that postpress modules can be added when new kinds of work come in. As the applications become more specialized, the production platform can evolve to keep up with them.

A key selling point of any digital finishing system is its ability to integrate with digital presses for inline and near-line operation. Achieving a white paper in, sellable product out workflow isn’t just a matter of hooking up one box to another and hoping for the best.

The connection has to be seamless, both mechanically and in terms of data communication. This can come about only from close technical collaboration between the supplier of the finishing equipment and the maker of the press.

Canon takes pride in partnering with the finest such suppliers. Finishing systems from these manufacturers are tested for compatibility with Canon and Océ presses and the software that drives them. A recommended pairing of one of these presses and a partner-provided finishing component is a reliable formula for reaping maximum benefit from the marriage of digital printing and postpress.



About the Author



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Patrick Henry is a journalist, an editor, and an educator who has covered the graphic communications industry for more than 30 years. He has written for most of the industry's principal trade media and has been chief editor of several of its leading publications. Henry holds numerous awards for editorial excellence and has been recognized for exceptional service to the industry, particularly in education.

This analysis was commissioned by Canon Solutions America and NAPCO Media to help printers better understand how today's technology can optimize their production and how they can benefit by adopting these solutions.

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