

Content Critical Solutions

Print Service Provider Streamlines Workflow



Background

Content Critical Solutions (CCS) is a well-established business communications service provider with production sites in New Jersey, New York, and Florida. The company has serviced customers for over 100 years, supporting custom applications for printed and electronic transactional documents.

Minimal Standardization

Over time, CCS adopted many customer procedures. They prided themselves on seamless transitions for their customers by adopting their customers' document production processes. Unfortunately, this practice resulted in hundreds of printer set-up instructions and inserter modes that relied too much on operator knowledge. The same jobs ran differently in each facility, and equipment operators made adjustments at the machine level with no central point of control.

CCS was tracing operational metrics to gauge the efficiency of their production operation, but data collection was mostly manual. Operators and managers entered information by hand, resulting in errors and data inconsistency. Chief Technology Officer John Slaney estimated the staff spent more time resolving mistakes than analyzing the core data.

"We needed a stronger workflow system that allowed us to manage multiple facilities," said Slaney, "Our manual reconciliation process required us to break large jobs into manageable segments, resulting in excessive time, angst, and clerical work to balance them."

Search for a Solution

Eventually, a new customer pushed CCS into a Six Sigma level of quality control and the company recognized they needed a solution that tied all the production processes together. They wanted to integrate and standardize their processes without undoing all the procedures and programs that had been running for many years—especially an internally created ERP system called OPALS that was the backbone of the workflow and tied into CCS' accounting systems. Also critical was a solution that allowed CCS to continue using Canon's PRISMA print management solution, on which they depended for daily production printing.

The company reviewed all the options available, looking for something that allowed them to leverage their current assets and the knowledge they had developed. They did not want to

reconfigure their processes to fit the workflow tool. After an extensive search, CCS chose PRO Conductor from Crawford Technologies. Their decision would allow them to transition from a setting that relied on unconnected systems and manual data collection to an automated environment that allows the company to continue growing while still providing the level of service and efficiency their customers expect.

PRO Conductor enables CCS to collect all the information that had been resident on production machines or various servers and store them in one central repository for immediate display on the PRO Conductor dashboard and consolidated reporting. The PRO Conductor dashboard also allows CCS to control jobs from beginning to end for all three sites.

Print/mail service providers often process a diverse set of applications, and this was the case at CCS. Work enters the organization as composed print, raw data, or print images. PRO Conductor supports all these methods of data ingress, which saved CCS "probably years" of custom programming efforts, according to Mr. Slaney.

"We've changed from a print and mail company to a document processing company with a streamlined, automated workflow."

*John Slaney, CTO
Content Critical Solutions*

Interestingly, CCS discovered facts about their own production system that, until they converted to PRO Conductor, had been hidden. CCS estimated and priced some jobs, for instance, according to a roll-fed inkjet production process. They were surprised to learn the work was actually running on sheet-fed printers. The company had to reconfigure some jobs so they matched the best practice decisions that production floor employees had adopted.

Results

Improvements to the CCS production workflow have been significant. Since installing PRO Conductor, CCS can easily redistribute the work when necessary, such as when equipment is down. PRO Conductor checks to make sure the receiving site has the materials necessary for the job and can move the job from one production site to another.



Now CCS produces work with the required Six Sigma level of quality, combined with relevant metrics and reporting. Management can look at their processes historically and make processing adjustments that improve productivity, quality, and profit margin. They have eliminated manual interventions that sometimes opened the door for problems, and they have improved productivity. As an example, Mr. Slaney points to a large job that formerly ran for seven days before implementing PRO Conductor. The same job now processes in 36 hours.

As expected, CCS has integrated Canon inkjet presses, BlueCrest and Bell + Howell inserters, Prisma, and the CCS OPALS system into a single control point—Crawford Technologies' PRO Conductor. Should a new document processing technology be developed that helps them achieve their goals, CCS is confident they will integrate those new components just as easily.

In dealing with COVID-19, CCS has taken advantage of the PRO Conductor dashboard to move production from one facility to another dependent on workforce fluctuations and material availability.

Because PRO Conductor enables procedures to be standardized, CCS knows they can process jobs correctly and consistently, regardless of which employees are actually running the jobs. This confidence and flexibility is highly beneficial in times of labor disruption, such as a pandemic, that keeps some employees from coming to work.

Some CCS customers perform periodic audits, where customers verify how CCS completed the work, down to the mailpiece level. Giving auditors limited access to the PRO Conductor system has reduced the time necessary to perform an audit. Inspectors can now complete their work in just a few hours—a task that formerly took them several days. Customers are happy about that!

More Results

Now that processes are standardized and controlled by PRO Conductor, client onboarding has become faster and easier. Reprints are now completely automated, which has improved timely completion of the work. And CCS can now accurately measure device and employee performance.

A strategy employed by many print operations as they move to high speed inkjet presses is consolidating small jobs. With applications like bills or statements, CCS must track and verify each page of every document at every processing step. 100% accountability is normally difficult when combining jobs.

With PRO Conductor though, CCS is merging small jobs with confidence. They automatically verify mailpiece integrity and track the work, even if they have combined several small jobs into larger units of work. The small volume jobs that print service providers must often accept from customers in order to win their large jobs are now done through the automated workflow. Before, many small jobs were hand-assembled.

Another example of benefits CCS has enjoyed after converting to PRO Conductor is the job rejection rate, which has decreased by 200%. Rejection occurs when a job is out of balance and the error cannot be found. The solution for most shops is to scrap the job and rerun it. If postage was applied by meter, the print/mail operation can reclaim the postage applied to unmailed pieces, but that is a manual operation. The USPS refunds only 80% of the postage applied to the envelopes that were not mailed, so decreasing the rejection rate simultaneously lessens the workload and reduces costs.

Transitioning to PRO Conductor was the culmination of a huge shift in how CCS processed customer work. With more efficient printing and inserting platforms now in place, joined with the automated workflow and quality control supplied by PRO Conductor, CCS can easily add new customers and volume without fear that a fragmented production control system will put the work at risk.

Mr. Slaney estimated that, "We're now doing 40% more work without adding equipment or labor because of the increase in efficiency provided by our adoption of CrawfordTech's PRO Conductor".

To hear more about PRO Conductor from Content Critical Solutions' CTO, John Slaney please see:
<https://bit.ly/ContentCritical2020>