

# Choosing an MIS...

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## 1) What do you want from MIS?

### More efficient operation

- You need to be confident that the system you choose will be efficient, and especially that it won't impose inefficient ways of working.
- Remember that many MIS systems were written years ago and technology has changed in the meantime.

### Understand your business

- A good MIS will give you an understanding of what jobs are where, and from which sectors your profit derives.
- Measuring 'added value' can help you keep track of how your fixed overheads are being covered.
- A dash-board to give at-a-glance overviews for management is useful.

### Free up your time

- If you or your staff aren't tied up doing estimates all day, there'll be more time available for selling.
- By identifying which jobs and which customers to turn away you can often increase your profit while doing less work!

### Remove bottlenecks

- For most print companies, the main bottleneck is the vast number of quotes required, where a delay of even a few hours in responding can lose the job, yet an inaccuracy in the estimate can lead to serious cost overruns.
- Another consideration is finding and repeating old jobs. When the customer calls you and says it was 'those Mickey Mouse leaflets' how quickly can you locate the original records and recalculate the quote for the repeat order?

### Fast and accurate estimating

- We can't emphasize this too much. Everything flows from the estimating, so if you don't get it right the rest is of limited value.

- It has to be usable – not just pretty – day after day, month after month.
- It shouldn't just be a glorified adding machine – it should help you make decisions.
- Many systems are about as good as a spreadsheet!

## 2) What else can MIS do?

### Inform you instantly of work that is not profitable

- The whole concept of profit is vital to calculating an estimate.
- Correctly set up systems can let you see cost, profit, and added value (the contribution to fixed overhead).
- See how the customers target price impacts your bottom line.

### Help you in progressing both documentation and production process requirements

- For a start you'll need estimates and invoices.
- You'll need to progress the jobs, and also see what jobs are lining up for each press.
- Forms such as Jobsheets, purchase orders, despatch notes, confirmation notes, labels etc can be useful.

- Stock control can help your procurement processes.

#### Clearly advise you of where you are most productive

- What types and areas of customers, and which categories of work?
- Are long runs better than short runs? and on which presses do you get the best profit?

#### Help you market your products effectively

- Get an on-line presence – a shop-window for your customers.
- Allow customers to see progress of live jobs and re-order old jobs.
- Let them price and order on the web and see the job appear in your work in progress as a properly costed order.
- Allow your customers to call off finished stock on-line.

#### Plan your profit

- With care, you can prevent your year-end containing any nasty surprises.
- Identify and weed out your unprofitable customers for a useful profit boost .

#### Improve your target and general marketing capability

- Having identified your target customers, you can send them personalized communications.
- You can also keep track of call-backs via CRM style tools.

### 3) Why Switch?

#### Reduce cost

- Prices of systems vary enormously
- Ask why prices of systems are not displayed on-line – is it because they are embarrassed?
- There is usually not only an up-front cost, but a periodic cost too. A difference of a few pounds a week can get significant.
- What you pay does not necessarily correspond to what you get. Look [here](#).

#### What about problems transferring data?

- Whatever system you migrate from and to there is always work to do.
- Many systems allow you to import and export customers.

- Jobs are more problematic to transfer (and can be expensive). Nevertheless it might be worthwhile getting a quote.
- Paper pricelists can often be imported direct from files supplied by the suppliers.
- For a start you'll need estimates and invoices.

#### Reduce bureaucracy

- Some systems are far faster to use than others and require less entries
- Look for intelligent systems which can advise you rather than just adding up
- If the spot price you negotiated when estimating can become the purchase order on confirmation without further work then that's an example of efficiency.

#### Training and set-up

- Something to watch out for. Many systems rely on installation and training to make a large proportion of their income
- On-line tutorials can be useful for helping you find your feet.
- If it needs a lot of hand-holding to get set-up, don't forget you're on your

own when the man in the white coat goes home again.

- Intelligent systems take a lot less setting up

#### 4) Other Considerations:

##### Mature systems tend to be function-rich

- It's true to say that nothing beats sheer experience on the part of the MIS supplier to build in the little wrinkles that make a good software package great.
- Most new systems still lack refinements, and the annoying omissions are often discovered too late when looking at other systems!
- Simple isn't necessarily better, though it can be.

##### What about JDF?

- It can convey data to some of your equipment but you'll still need a machine minder.
- It can report back the time spent doing a job if your machines are appropriately equipped.

- It often won't give you the reasons for things that happen, though it will report them.
- On balance it seems to be an idea looking for an application, but it may bear fruit in a few years' time.

##### Job costing

- Useful, as long as it is intimately bound up with the estimating
- Is it a clerical entry procedure from jobsheets, or is it tied up with shop floor data entry and purchase invoice recording, or is it flexible enough to encompass both?
- For small companies, can you get a handle on the accuracy of your prices by just costing a small sample of your jobs?
- Can you accumulate real and theoretical values of estimates for specific tasks over a period to check you're getting it right? .

##### Scheduling

- Automatic scheduling is problematic. The Holy Grail of 'redo the schedule automatically so I can have this job on Thursday night' is fraught with problems in most print shops. (What

happens when a job goes wrong or a delivery is delayed?)

- Larger companies can find scheduling useful if they have enough staff to run a full scheduler.
- Most scheduling software is actually an electronic version of an old-fashioned wall chart.
- The proportion of companies who buy an expensive and shiny scheduling module and then decide not to use it is not small.
- Some systems are far faster to use than others and require less entries

##### Stock Control

- We say that in the average print shop you need to buy a Hitler moustache to get in the right frame of mind to work stock control
- Stock control must have a straightforward stock-take mechanism which holds up operations for the minimum time rather than closing the factory down completely
- Stock always goes missing. You have to be able to allow for it.
- For true job costing, ask if stock control uses FIFO costing (First In First Out). If the answer is no, reject it as paper prices can be quite volatile and your costings will be inaccurate.