

Wondering about getting an MIS?

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The Printsum Partnership
August 2011



What's stopping you?

Up-to-the-minute systems are easier to use than ever, will let you transform estimating, job control, administration and corporate performance, can revolutionise your quality of life and can be cheap as chips.

Best practice

Although MIS use is internationally recognised as being essential to the efficient running of a printing company, according to UK pre-press consultant John Giles writing less than two years ago “only about half of the printing companies use a

computerized estimating system”. Why? Afraid of the unknown? Too busy? Or simply resistant to change? Whatever the reason, not having an MIS is not good for either you or your business.

The real question

The real question is not ‘Should I use MIS?’ but ‘Which one?’ So, resist the temptation to postpone the decision, and bite the bullet.

What does everyone else do?

You’re probably aware that the most successful printers use MIS, and that the person who gets the most immediate benefit from it is the estimator. But a recent survey carried out by PIRA revealed that comparatively “few companies use their MIS to best effect and in fact, the overwhelming majority could derive very much more benefit from their systems.”

There are substantial problems facing companies with older print MIS systems as ever more jobs are printed at ever shorter run lengths. And with competition ensuring that more quotes are required to for each job won, the estimating process becomes an immense bottleneck.

Additionally each job has to be managed from confirmation through to invoicing. If the process is manual the results are even worse.

..And do they get it right?

A recent study by the University of Eastern Kentucky revealed an inability or unwillingness of small printing companies to understand financial data, which may go some way to explaining the high business failure rate. Proper use of an MIS can allow managers to forestall problems by taking timely and appropriate action.

Try before you buy

In the most straightforward, easy-to-use systems, most of the development effort goes into usability, not functionality. The most important thing to look for is how it handles. You can’t compare rival systems simply by ticking off features on a list. You want it to feel right – not just when you use it a few times, but over and over. The question is “is it usable in the long term?”

When you choose a car you make your decision on its style, performance and handling. There’s a lot of emotion involved. It’s the same with MIS. It may look good but you really do need to get in and put it through its paces before you decide to buy. The best suppliers always provide a free, functional system for you to try.

Work smarter, not harder

Today, speed of response, job turnaround time and price determine a firm's competitive advantage. Quality seems increasingly to be taken as read. Pricing especially needs to be extremely accurate in an environment where negotiating those last percentage points can make the difference between profit and loss on a job. The possible combinations of factors involved in a typical job make it difficult not only to make that initial estimate, but also to keep an eye on everything. If you take your eye off the ball you can end up wasting precious time and energy in mindless paper shuffling and chaos administration as you lurch from crisis to crisis.

You won't be able to pull things together and get on top of things in this new go-faster world without the aid of MIS. And you are the only person with the power to resolve your predicament. You need to take the initiative and do something!

What's wrong with manual systems?

Effectiveness and efficiency is dependent on good information management. Unfortunately, detailed situation analysis, forward planning and control of work using manual systems can be a nightmare. You may record every stage of each job but because

you can't easily look at 'the current situation' you're stuck with looking at the world one job at a time. In an agile manufacturing environment, thumbing through files and poring over spreadsheets is a waste of very scarce time. Manual systems (and indeed some old-fashioned MIS systems) put a big brake on performance.

With a modern MIS, all information is in a central database – just a few clicks away. And it can be shared easily with others.

Value for money

Tens of thousands of development man-hours go into the design, building and testing of a best-of-breed MIS. The benefits delivered are colossal. It's ludicrous to compare such powerful technology with a paper-based, spreadsheet or home-grown system.

The most successful business practices in the printing industry are embedded in a standard MIS. While the system won't constrain you, it will guide you to a more disciplined approach to running your company. Out-of-the-box MIS can be flexible enough to be simply configured to your individual requirements without the need to customise. The development cost of an MIS is spread over hundreds of users – so the initial and on-going costs of ownership are very small - miniscule when compared to the benefits.

Everyone wins

An MIS is the printer's essential information tool for discharging the responsibilities of the job. It helps you succeed with much less stress. Besides the huge reduction in paperwork and administration, the prime benefits accrue from better systems and instant availability of decision-making information. MIS enables senior management to exercise corporate governance. Strategic objectives can be pursued and on-going performance and financial accuracy monitored and controlled.

MIS is valued by the print buyer too because it ensures transparency, responsiveness and overall quality of service. Auditors are impressed with clarity, comprehensiveness, security, presentation and easy retrieval of information. Operators like it because of the reduced frustration - all the information needed to get the job done is right at their fingertips.

In a nutshell

The use of MIS in the increasingly competitive modern printing industry is not just an option but a 'must-have'. It leads to faster throughput, more accurate costing, lower overheads, better management control, customer satisfaction, corporate image and highest profits. That's not because of the system *per se*, but because it transforms your capability to do your job properly!

Printer, you can't ignore it!

