

JDF is more than a file format

JDF is the hot new buzzword being tossed around the printing world. Experts tell us it's the next leap forward, vendors boast of their JDF compatible applications, but few are actually telling us what JDF will do to improve our businesses. My objective is to clarify what JDF can do for you.

As a printing consultant, I repeatedly encounter the same problem – job ticket technology is lagging behind the rest of the industry.

Job tickets are essential for efficient print production workflows for a simple reason – job information must be communicated to different operators performing different tasks in different departments. Paper based tickets have filled this role for decades. However, with today's complex workflows, paper tickets are increasingly an impediment to automation.

Paper tickets present three primary problems: once printed they are static, they cannot be used for tracking, and they

require human interaction to enter the information they contain into the computer. Job information changes constantly.

Changes made in pre-press must be recorded for accurate billing, imposition schemes vary as press assignments are rearranged, clients call with last minute requests. Every change forces a choice between two options: re-enter the information into the management system, which places an extra burden on production personnel, or make a hand-written correction to the ticket and hope the information is entered into the system later.

Job tracking is also an essential part of the workflow. A client needs to know when a proof will be ready. A second shift production manager needs to know which pre-press operator worked on a job at noon. In a paper-based workflow, someone must go from department to department, sometimes operator to operator until they find the information they need.

Finally, paper tickets produce a media mismatch. Job instructions are entered into a

The screenshot displays a software interface for job management. At the top, a table lists job details:

01.05.	0:19	0	0,00	N	FF 03.09.	16,00	981.073	Hiflex USA,	test AD 1
	0:00	0	0,00	N	Fr 03.09.	16,00	981.074	Hiflex USA,	test AD 1
	0:00	0	0,00	N	Mo 06.09.	16,00	981.074	Hiflex USA,	test AD 1
	0:00	0	0,00	N	Mo 06.09.	16,00	981.104	Hiflex USA,	Creo 23.04
	0:00	0	0,00	N	Tu 07.09.	16,00	981.104	Hiflex USA,	Creo 23.04

Below the table, there are several sections:

- JMF: SH 10 St.**: A section showing machine performance metrics:
 - Speed: 9.800
 - Good: 4.565
 - Waste: 67
 - InProgress: 47%
 - 30.04. - 20:45
 - Cost center
- Chart / CC**: A section with a 'Jobs spread' grid. The grid shows job numbers and names across different time slots:

		04			
Jobs spread		-14	14-16	16-18	18-20
981.070	Hiflex USA / test 2				
981.164	Demo Druck / abc				
981.072	Hiflex USA / test A				
981.073	Hiflex USA / test A				
981.074	Hiflex USA / test A				
- Buttons**: 'JDF -> Job', 'JDF -> JobPart', 'Scale: Shift Plan', 'Half Col None'.
- Status Bar**: 'There are jobs for selected cost centers loaded'.

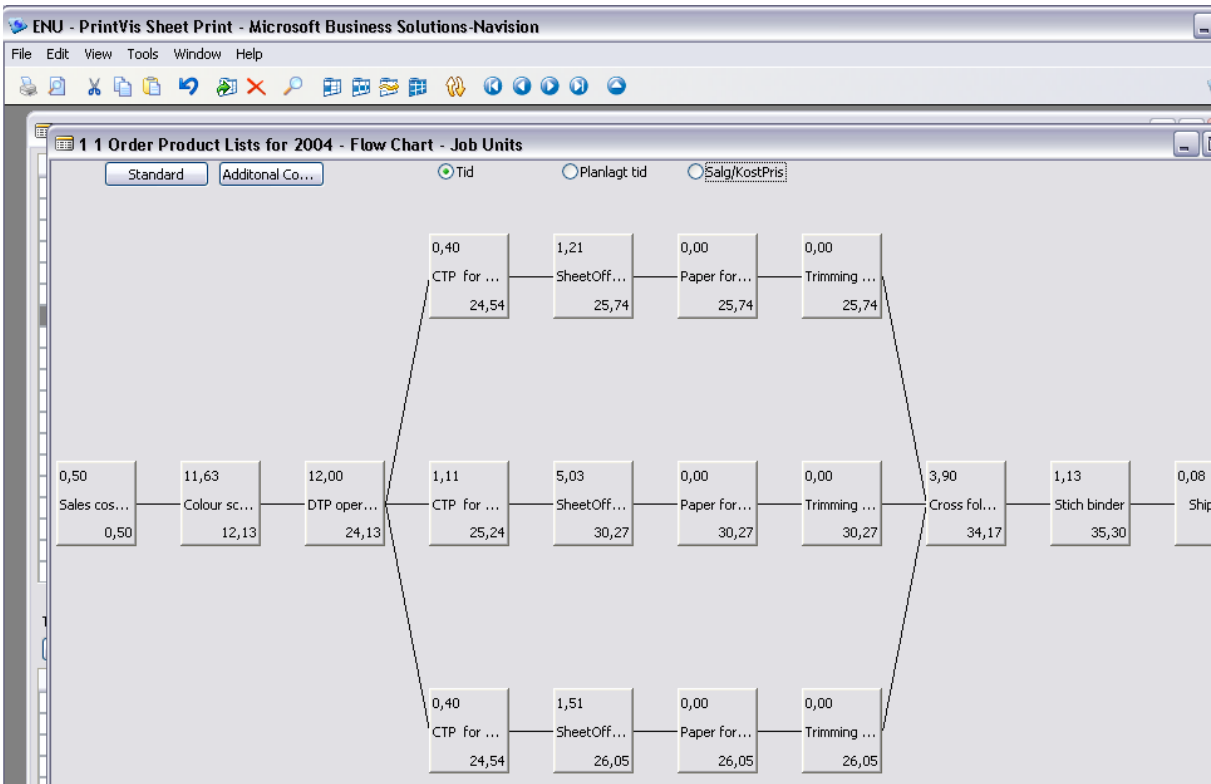
Direct JDF Feedback from a Müller-Martini machine to Hiflex MIS

computerized management system and another computer will carry out the instructions. But the link between the two computers is a paper ticket. A human operator must enter the information from one system into the next. And each department uses separate computers so information must be entered multiple times, with the danger of mistyping data each time. Do any of these problems sound familiar? If so, you already understand the need for JDF.

What does JDF do? Quite simply, it overcomes paper's weaknesses. JDF provides a

step within the JDF specification, the dream of a true JDF workflow is coming closer to reality each day. Every computer, every application, every machine that ever learned to "speak" JDF can communicate with all other systems. The plate setter will inform the press that the final 8 plates for a job will be ready in 12 minutes. The press in turn informs the paper warehouse that more paper rolls are needed.

The development of JDF is driven by the CIP4 association with content work done by various working groups. Worldwide there are about three dozen beta installati-



A JDF networked production requires thorough planning, hence a JDF MIS needs to schedule a complete production workflow, here done within Tharstern, a British MIS system

universal interface for all compliant applications. The production manager's PC communicates with prepress operator's Mac. The Mac sends information to the press, the bindery and the billing department while the status and location of the job is sent back to the production machine. The key is a common language to allow automated communication between computers. This is what the CIP4 association wants JDF to be. By breaking a print workflow into steps and describing each

ons where job tickets are directed automatically from the job planner's computer into the prepress system and then to the press. Information about the job's progress is sent back to the planner. The future has already begun!

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