

Imprint-MIS & SentinelNet stand guard over the margins at Howard Hunt



Stuart King
Technology Director

Howard Hunt's decision to implement an Imprint Management Information System (MIS) came out of a straight-forward yet important need – one that every printing company, regardless of its size, should be thinking about.

Technology Director Stuart King expresses it very simply: “The board wanted to know whether a job was profitable or not.”

A perfectly reasonable request, but at the time – more than three years ago now – Howard Hunt, which has web and sheetfed offset printing alongside digital printing and a suite of marketing services, was working with several disparate systems across its various

was that as upgrades were inevitably made over time on one system or other this would have a detrimental effect on the integration as a whole.

The decision was made to assess the MIS solutions on the market, and this brought Mr King into contact with Imprint Business Systems. He had found an MIS vendor that had the software and the mentality to work with Howard Hunt on developing a bespoke system for its needs – something that was a critical factor for the company.

“The initial project had a base cost plan and we had a development budget going forward, because with the number of manufacturing lines and the complexity of our processes we knew we would never be able to use an MIS

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manufacturing operations. It was using shop floor data capture on the presses, but this did not communicate with the MIS that Howard Hunt was using at the time. There was no quick, simple and, most importantly, accurate way of determining the true cost of a job.

Mr King explained that one option might have been to work on more tightly integrating the existing systems, to achieve the clarity that Howard Hunt desired. The company had the development skills in-house, but the concern

straight out of the box. Having said that, I believe that Imprint would work for any sheetfed and or digital print business as well,” he said.

Project stages

To implement a system across the entire Howard Hunt multi-site operation all at once was considered to be too big an ask, so the project has been broken down into stages which are still being progressed through.



Perhaps the most important aspect however took place right at the start: fitting Imprint's SentinelNet Machine Monitoring technology to Howard Hunt's four web offset presses, sheetfed offset presses and two offlines. The Imprint Sentinel is a Live-on-Line, high performance, intelligent monitoring system that can be used on almost any production unit where items may be counted. It automatically identifies standing time from running time, counts good and waste copies, and compares information to the targets set by Estimating via the Works Instructions.

Using Sentinel and Imprint's Shop Floor Data Capture module enables companies to calculate the real margin on a job, rather than an estimated margin.

Mr King continued: "From the Sentinel data we know exactly the speed we are running at, and we can run this through Imprint to give us accurate running speeds and values for this. Different minders will make ready quicker or

slower, and have more or less spoilage. Sentinel allows us to make sure that our

estimating costs are in line with our actual production. If we can see fluctuations across the webs, we can look at the reasons behind them as well".

"Shop Floor Data Capture and Sentinel are about giving real-time costs back, and making sure that we are scheduling and costing correctly by process and monitoring our performance."

This was initially only rolled out in the press hall, and after success there, the Imprint shop floor data capture was extended into finishing. This provided its own challenges, said Mr King.

"From a press room perspective it is quite simple, but when you get down to folding and finishing there are a lot of splits – work with the same barcode going out on multiple delivery dates to multiple delivery destinations. That was the next journey – to build and customise that process from within the job bag screen and customise the document generator to give us the right facts and figures. That led to a feed of delivery destination, pallets and quantities going out to our logistics supplier and straight into their Mandata transport management system via XML."

Howard Hunt uses Imprint's barcode-driven pallet tracking system extensively – a module that Mr King describes as a Godsend. It is giving the company a true picture of where every pallet that has entered or left the premises is located, whether the pallet contains raw material or finished products. Everything has a barcode; everything is trackable.

Rewriting the rules

The bespoke nature of the Imprint implementation at Howard Hunt, and the closeness of the working relationship between the two companies, is illustrated by what has been achieved with the software's Direct Mail module. In short, it has been totally rewritten.

"We looked at what the DM module offered out of the box, tested it, and came across some challenges based on the amount of manufacturing lines and processes we have," said Mr King. "We took the decision to re-engineer the DM module with Imprint from the ground up. The benefit now is that when changes are required because of things like postal rate increases, downstream access developments, new machines, new processes, we are able to handle that internally and we don't have to wait for development. It's scalable."



Shop Floor Data Capture terminal

For the future, Imprint will be more comprehensively deployed throughout Howard Hunt, with the digital printing arm being the next part to become fully integrated. This will most likely be achieved through JDF to and from the company's Prinergy workflow. Imprint will also be more fully integrated into Howard Hunt's logistics supplier, while integration is already under way between the MIS and a new automated job ganging and imposition tool that Howard Hunt is using.

With around 170 people using Imprint across Howard Hunt, Stuart King makes it clear how important the Imprint MIS is to the smooth running of the business: "The ability of Imprint to give us accurate job costings so we know where we are on a job at any given point is extremely powerful. That's a huge plus, and it has helped us to focus attention where attention is required".

"It is a very, very important tool within our business. Without an integrated MIS we would be working blind, and if you are blind you don't know where your profit is. I don't think you can truly be operating a business, even a small business, without knowing what your costs are and where your profit and loss is. The flexibility of Imprint, being able to change and adapt, was also a massive consideration when we were doing the evaluation of the systems that were available."

The close partnership between the two companies has been a vital component of the success of the implementation, Mr King added. "Imprint understands us as a business and understands how fast we will move, so they know that they need to be adaptable and approachable. We needed to have a direct relationship with the senior members of the MIS provider that we chose, so that we could communicate directly with them. In our fast-paced environment, having to go through several layers of contact to reach a director would never work for us."

The greater good

Imprint's customers have benefited from the bespoke development work that has been carried out between the MIS firm and Howard Hunt, with improvements that will be of use to all being rolled out to all. This is consistent with the business ethos of Imprint, according to Sales & Marketing Director Wayne Beckett:

“Howard Hunt gave the contract to us because of our flexibility. They knew they would require an MIS that could be adapted for their bespoke requirements and we were the only company that was willing and able. We are always open to new suggestions and ideas. Our system is not a fixed solution and can be adapted to meet our client’s needs. It’s a system that’s been built with the end user in mind.”

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