

4DM Leads the Field with GMC PrintNet Designer Software

The UK's largest independent direct mail business in its sector, 4DM of Kettering, has used GMC Software Technology's PrintNet Designer personalized printing software to help the business grow to its current pre-eminence. "PrintNet Designer is far ahead of other products in technical ability, it has everything it needs to make it better than its competition," said Darren Crawford, Managing Director of Additions 4DM and the 4DM Group. "GMC has a history of getting things to work as they should, so we have been able to do everything our customers have needed us to do."

Ease of Use, Intuitive Interface Drive Efficiency

"The general intuitiveness of the product is the key. If you don't know how to do something, after just a few minutes on the computer, you can work it out," he added. "We specialize in small to medium run direct mail. Although we handle orders of up to a million, the average run is 150 - 300,000 packs, which may have anything up to 12 inserts. The total capacity on the site is 350 million packs a year, working a 24 hour x five day week. Since the software is highly scalable and capable of handling billions of pages a year, we can accommodate any future growth needs."

Because the company is owned by its employees, every one of the staff is highly motivated and 4DM prides itself on being fast on its feet to react to customer demands and give that something extra in terms of service and response time. "It's not just putting ink on paper," Darren explained. "It's constantly meeting deadlines and time pressures without letting standards slip."

Key Selection Criteria Include Product Quality & Reliability

"We invest heavily in the business, buying the best technology on the market for each function – this may not always be the most recent, we prefer tried and tested products. These are then put together to run very, very efficiently." The company has an £18m turnover across three divisions. The volume output at Kettering makes it the largest single centre point of entry into the Royal Mail system in the UK.

4DM first used GMC's software 12 years ago and since then the two businesses have grown together. "Back then, getting variable print onto the page was time consuming and expensive. Looking back, it's a miracle we got jobs out at all!" said Darren. "The people who set the text were computer programmers. They are an expensive breed and they like to do things their way. I know, I used to be one. If what you want to achieve does not fit in with their way, you can't do it."

PrintNet Helps Lower Costs, Increase Productivity

To take the business forward, 4DM set out to making itself more competitive by getting costs right down and producing work at the speed the client wanted, rather than the speed the system dictated. PrintNet enabled 4DM to divorce text setting from computer programming.

This pleased everyone. It enabled the business to employ extra personnel who were more 'document and design friendly' but less expensive than the programmers, who in turn were freed up for work they preferred. "GMC's PrintNet was the first genuinely Windows-based system on the market," Darren continued. "This made it accessible to people who were generally computer savvy without too much extra training. Consequently the cost of production went down, turn-around time went



a fresh approach
to direct marketing



Darren Crawford, Managing Director of
Additions 4DM and the 4DM Group

Key Facts

Client

The UK's largest independent direct mail business offering digital printing, secure fulfilment and allied services for the small to medium run sector.

Challenge

To commit to personalization software that will not only enable the business to keep ahead of the competition by cutting costs and improving efficiency and flexibility, but also ensure it is ready for projected future developments in the industry, especially color digital printing.

Solution

PrintNet Designer enables 4DM to divorce text setting from computer programming and is easily accessible to other computer literate staff. It can also run both black and white and color digital printing and features industry leading color management.

Results

The cost of production went down, reprogramming and development times have been cut dramatically. 4DM is ready for the predicted growth in Color digital printing.

down and we could work on more jobs from the same resource. We no longer had to depend on individual programmers always being there. With the GMC product, other people can pick up a job at any stage."

As 4DM grew, its close ties with GMC continued, each business learning from the other in what has remained a dynamic and mutually responsive relationship. "The migration to PrintNet Designer from its PrintNet 3 predecessor was the biggest single change for us," Darren confirmed. "It's a lot more clever both in handling data and how it's presented to the page, even in how we process data before it gets to production. There's been a big reduction in reprogramming and in development times. For example, you only have to define a component once and this can be used in a document in any position.

In a recent direct mail campaign targeting key seats for one of the political parties, using PrintNet Designer's ability to include variable specific marketing messages, according to pre-set rules, 4DM were able to automatically import different statistics and messages depending on the seat, the age and even the gender of the recipient. "PrintNet Designer cuts in half the data time on a job like that," said Darren. "If the underlying message is wrong, or needs to be tweaked, this can be done on the screen in minutes and output produced, you don't have to go back to the beginning."

4DM has to be ready for whatever is thrown at it. "Someone faced with printing transactional mail, for example, knows what they will be doing months from now," Crawford commented. "I can't be sure, plus or minus 50%, what I'll be doing next week. People want it now, so we have to have a tool we can depend on." His only criticism is that GMC does not blow its own trumpet enough. "GMC's competitors come across as a bit flashy but I have as yet to see the substance," declared Crawford.

GMC Delivers High Standard of Digital Color

Market perception of who can deliver the goods extends, he says, to color digital printing- the next big development in direct mail. "There are really only two serious players in the market and GMC is one of them," he continued. He added that some current high profile color digital printing work had been months at the set up and production stage and was often underwritten in order to test and prove new software. Applying the technology to the real world of jobbing direct mail was an altogether different proposition.

Higher set up costs, and lower print speeds, meant that color was always going to be a more expensive option and direct mail businesses would be selective in its use: "It's important to remember though, that in marketing, it's not the print cost that's the key, it's the return. It's here that color digital printing will score."

"The market for color digital print is where the black and white one was ten years ago," Crawford observed. "It's not going to replace, but complement, black and white, though even at full speed, color digital printers can't match the output possible for black and white. Remember that it has taken black and white laser printing 16 years to get where it is today, so we can't expect color digital printing to do it in less than a year. With color digital printing, every page is different, and you have to rely on the software to check the color for you. PrintNet Designer is very stable and delivers consistently to a high standard."

"At the moment, much of the color digital printing around is gimmicky, but it's soon going to be mainstream. We already know we will keep ahead of the game with GMC and if we have any technical issues, we will work together to solve them."

Darren Crawford, Managing Director of Additions 4DM and the 4DM Group

GMC Software Technology

GMC Software Technology helps businesses implement high impact, personalized communications programs that increase customer satisfaction and loyalty, drive new customer acquisition, improve productivity and cut costs. PrintNet software is an easy-to-implement, end-to-end solution that provides full data integration and processing, design and composition, collaboration and approval, distributed output management and process automation for highly targeted print and electronic communications. GMC has ISO 9001:2000 certification and CMMI development methodology. We serve thousands of users worldwide, and many of our customers are producing in excess of 100 million personalized documents per month – including direct mail, statements, bills, policies, catalogs, correspondence and transpromo materials. www.gmc.net.

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