

Allegra Tampa - Downtown automates workflows with real results

Allegra Tampa - Downtown is a small commercial printer that has embraced digital printing technology and workflow automation to remain ahead of its competition. Joel and Nancy Routman opened their printing facility in 1989 under the Insty-Print brand and switched to Allegra in 2004 as the company's work evolved more toward that of a small commercial printer. The shop had added a color copier in 1990, but by 2006 the Routmans realized they needed to adapt. They began down the road of becoming a digital print business and by 2013 had radically transformed the company.

The Routmans' children grew up helping in the family business. One son, Jeff, took over as president in 2012 when their father retired, and his brother Jason returned in 2013. The company also went through significant technological transformation during that time as it brought in new engines to stay ahead of its competition. Today, Allegra Tampa - Downtown has a Ricoh® Pro C9100 and two Ricoh Pro C901 color presses. It also has a Ricoh Pro 8110 and a Konica Minolta® bizhub® PRO 1050 monochrome production printer. The franchise uses an EFI™ PrintSmith™ Vision MIS workflow to manage day-to-day operations, including scheduling, job tracking, accounting, and billing.

Making the digital shift was crucial in the business for being able to continue in a challenging market. The Ricoh Pro C9110, for example, allows the shop to print on 13x27-inch sheets, which makes the company unique from many local competitors. This, along with the ability to produce a higher-quality product on a much larger range of papers, means Allegra Tampa - Downtown offers something that's not readily available. "It's allowing us to move more of our offset jobs over to digital," observes Jeff Routman.



Challenge:

"If I wasn't running a machine to make it print, I was in prepress getting jobs set up to print . . . but it felt like a complete waste of time to sit there and do the same thing over and over."

JEFF ROUTMAN, PRESIDENT
ALLEGRA TAMPA - DOWNTOWN



Allegra Tampa - Downtown
107 North Jefferson Street
Tampa, Florida 33602
+1-813-344-1571 or +1-813-228-8800
www.tampa-allegra.com
jeff@tampa-allegra.com



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Allegra Tampa - Downtown is a small commercial print business with expertise in high-quality printing and direct mail campaigns. They are located in Tampa, Florida.

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All of the company's Ricoh presses have EFI Fiery® digital front ends (DFEs), and Fiery Command WorkStation® is the company's key digital print management interface.

"EFI Fiery Command WorkStation was a key decision on continuing to use EFI and Ricoh and avoid spending time and energy retraining on something we've been using for years," states Routman. "It meant that training on our new digital presses was centered around the specifics of the machines themselves, without needing to dive into the software our staff already knew."

Beyond an efficient staff

Allegra Tampa - Downtown made another advance to stay in front of the technology in 2015 when the company began automating much of its prepress work. This activity might seem unnecessary, given Routman's highly proficient prepress staff, but it made sense from a financial standpoint. According to Routman, while the company offers competitive pricing, he does not want to be in the business of giving things away without a reasonable markup. This means there must always be efficiencies in the company's work, especially for tasks that the company can't reasonably charge for.

Solution:

"I can correlate JobFlow to payroll savings because I don't have to bring in a new, specific person for typesetting, direct mail, social media, and campaign projects."

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With the need to automate at the top of his mind, Routman had a chance conversation with an EFI representative about Fiery JobFlow™ software at a Ricoh open house. That was when he had a realization: “While my mindset was on how we could be more efficient,” he says, “I had never considered how much those individually small mouse clicks and keyboard strokes all add up.”

Routman found that Fiery JobFlow was an affordable, easy-to-use product that was all about reducing the number of keyboard clicks. “Prior to JobFlow,” he says, “if I wasn’t running a machine to make it print, I was in prepress getting jobs set up to print. I felt I was working as fast as the most experienced person could, but it felt like a complete waste of time to sit there and do the same thing over and over.”

Routman’s team was already using hot folders to automate certain aspects of prepress, but he was intrigued by JobFlow’s ability to apply logic much more easily than just with hot folders. With no formal JobFlow training, Routman was able to build in rules through JobFlow and Enfocus PitStop. “This is so much more powerful than simply using human intervention to drag and drop files onto folders to perform specific tasks,” he says.

Adding Fiery JobFlow was “almost an epiphany,” says Routman. “It lets me focus my team members’ time working on the projects that need to be worked on.” He estimates that JobFlow now handles about two-thirds of jobs at Allegra Tampa - Downtown. He hasn’t yet created Fiery JobFlow workflows for the remaining third because they fall into the realm of custom work, but he’s considering adding a few more rules to winnow those down as well.

JobFlow was easy enough for Routman to master on his own. “I went through EFI’s cookbook of what you can create, downloaded workflows from their pre-built workflow library, and did a lot of trial and error playing with building my own workflows. I did some research and analysis on our most common projects and focused on industry-standard sizes. When I was done, I built a workflow that is a single-entry point for all of our digital products.”

Now, based on the specifics of the shop’s needs, Allegra Tampa - Downtown has set up Fiery JobFlow so that it inspects every file and converts it to PDF if needed, embeds/outlines fonts, converts all color to CMYK, and performs a preflight check. Jobs that pass get moved to a workflow where a preflight report is generated, and JobFlow continues the prepress process. The workflow uses Enfocus PitStop to deduce size, bleeds, and so forth to determine if a job is one of the shop’s 30 different types of standard jobs, such as rack cards, postcards, or large postcards.

While non-standard jobs pass through to a manual processing queue, standard jobs have all their prepress work performed automatically. Imposition is done automatically based on a Fiery Impose template for each job type. In the end, standard jobs land at the machine with the right imposition and are programmed with the right paper size, plexing, and so forth. The operator only needs to select the right paper and click start. Using Fiery JobFlow and Fiery Impose in this way has reduced at least 10 operator clicks and several minutes of prepress time for every job.



Allegra Tampa - Downtown's Jason Routman, Drew Justice, and Jeff Routman inspect collateral they have produced for a local auto dealership. Automated workflows established using Fiery JobFlow at the shop eliminate errors in producing these jobs while greatly reducing the time needed to get standard types of collateral on press.

Result:

Using Fiery JobFlow and Fiery Impose has reduced at least 10 operator clicks and several minutes of prepress time for every job.

"The time savings become impressive when you multiply the number of clicks it takes your operator or prepress person to do a task by the number of seconds each click takes and then multiply again by the number of projects in a day," Routman says.

Routman also has the tools and data in the workflow to continue building improvements. "I can look at my error jobs and see why they failed," he says. "Usually it's because I don't have a workflow for that size, which means that these projects are outside the norm, and it's a good use of my time to focus on these special jobs.

"If I notice that a type of non-standard job starts to become common, all I do is add in another workflow to handle it," he adds. "This lets me easily continue to expand to meet the needs of my clients without wasting a lot of time."

JobFlow even helps Allegra Tampa - Downtown with its offset jobs; the company converts offset job files to a PDF if needed, embeds any missing fonts – or outlines them if they cannot be embedded – then runs it through the Fiery preflight to check for ultra-thin lines, inappropriately low resolution, font errors, and so forth. The preflighting tools are part of the Fiery Graphic Arts Package, Premium Edition, software that Allegra Tampa - Downtown has, which also gives the franchisee the ability to preview full-resolution post-RIP raster files in Fiery ImageViewer, quickly make global color edits with curves, and more.

Offset jobs that pass through this thorough process are copied to a hardcopy proof workflow, which sends the PDF to one of the Ricoh Pro C901s for a printed production sample while also moving the file into the offset folder.

Routman attributes the reduced errors and waste he has with his digital print workflows to automatic preflighting and Fiery systems that do away with most common preflighting mistakes. Prior to Fiery JobFlow, Allegra Tampa - Downtown's two biggest problem areas had been related to fonts and colors, and Routman identified those problems early with JobFlow. Plus, says Routman, "We've been able to dial in our paper profiles so that operators are really just verifying that everything is properly registered rather than producing many trial-and-error test prints."

Routman isn't sending anyone home earlier, but automation through JobFlow is allowing his people to get more work done. Before, he had a true graphic designer doing typesetting. Now, a staff person using JobFlow spends 90 minutes a day doing typesetting work while the graphic designer does more lucrative true design tasks. Routman also reassigned staff to work on social media and direct mail efforts – campaigns that will drive more revenue for the company." With JobFlow one person can really do the work of 1.5 to 1.75 people," Routman says. "We can focus on what we need to be working on rather than on mundane, repetitive tasks."

"I can correlate JobFlow to payroll savings," he adds, "because I don't have to bring in a new, specific person for typesetting, direct mail, social media, and campaign projects."

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