

Outsourcing printing helps streamline operations

THERE IS not always power in numbers. Whether an organization is local, national or global, the process of centralizing commercial printing, promotional products, warehousing and fulfillment has proven to be successful on many levels.

Centralizing printing requires moving away from a project-by-project mentality to a philosophy of business processing outsourcing and procurement management with one source.

The idea of BPO, while not new to the corporate world, is fairly new to the graphic-communications industry. If executed effectively, BPO can help an organization achieve print consolidation and deliver a faster, more convenient and cost effective print-management process. And the organization's brand police will sleep better knowing brand guidelines are being protected across departments, locations and marketing literature.

Leaders jump on board

AOL, BP, 1-800-flowers and E-Trade Financial are all leaders in the irrespctive industries. And as leaders often do, they are adapting a new method for managing their printing by outsourcing printing, promotional products, warehousing and fulfillment.

Before outsourcing and centralizing its collateral, E-Trade had about 30 printers nationwide servicing its branch network. This lack of centralization meant E-Trade could not easily estimate the amount of money spent on printing, fulfillment and warehousing. More importantly, it was not accurately managing its master and 20 sub-brands.

E-Trade isn't alone. Whether an organization has five offices or 500, print-management responsibilities traditionally fall on the shoulders of individual departments or local offices. This makes it difficult for corporations to accurately manage printing costs and budgets. Additionally, it is unlikely the brand is being managed effectively.

Gain Control

Organizations may fear losing control of the print-management process and experiencing a drop in quality. However, those with the courage to outsource actually gain control of the process and experience quality improvements.

The key to a manageable and smooth transition is working with the right business partner. Here are a few considerations:

Workflow experts. Does the print-management company focus on the entire supply chain process? Or are they simply focused on getting an organization the best printing prices? What is important is that the print-management company has workflow expertise, and with that will come printing cost efficiencies.

Standard or customizable solutions. Will the organization benefit from an online-procurement program that is turnkey or a program that is flexible and can accommodate growth and changing needs? Additionally, there are solutions that enable organizations to customize the look and feel of the procurement site.

Software requirements. There is no need to purchase additional software to run a successful e-procurement program. Programs are

typically run through intranets or Enterprise Resource Planning systems, such as Ariba, SAP and Oracle.

Customer support. While most online-procurement programs are simple to learn and navigate, customer support is still a necessary component. Inquire about online support, as well as staffed help desks. Customer support will be essential not only for the launch of the program but also on an ongoing basis.

Upgrades. How often does the print-management organization conduct upgrades of

the e-procurement system? Some have more ongoing, rigorous upgrade programs than others, enabling an organization to provide feedback and see the changes implemented to the entire system in as little as three months.

Digital-assessment management. Managing digital files is just as important as managing printed pieces. An online-procurement system that allows organizations to store and share digital files — logos, photos, sales materials, videos and sound bites — can help manage the brand by ensuring the correct

digital files are being used and also simplifies the process of file sharing among multiple locations.

Additional considerations. Is there a hosting fee? Does the system have a maximum number of users? Does the online-procurement program have a good track record? ■

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