CASE STUDY

Empire's Print-to-Mail Balancing Act

"Lasermax Roll Systems' sophisticated engineering helped us achieve a breakthrough."

Robert Hartnett, manager of financial systems, Empire Medicare Services

Industry
Health Care

Application
Medicare summary notices and check printing

Printers
IBM 3900

Solution
RS Roll-to-Roll SD:
RS Unwind
RS Rewind

As printer and inserter speeds shoot up at a rate of 25 percent a year, Robert J. Hartnett's job title might as well be acrobat. As manager of financial systems at Empire Medicare Services, his job possesses elements of risk coupled with day-to-day conflicting agendas which he must precariously balance.

In the last 12 months, Hartnett has gracefully faced budget reductions and downsizing by turning them to the company's advantage. He's overseen capital equipment investments and the total upgrade of the print-to-mail capabilities. The investments have paid off resulting in increased capacity, improved productivity, and remarkable cost savings.

The Syracuse, New York-based subcontractor to the Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA) began revamping its print and mail operations with an eye towards improving customer service and developing new business.

The print mail department employs 24 persons on three shifts, five days a week. Each year, it processes 68 million pages and 22 million envelopes. The bulk of their work consists of printing and processing Medicare Summary Notices and check printing.

A programmer by trade, Hartnett's tenure with Empire spans 13 years. His principal agenda has been that of introducing his department to innovative pre-and-post processing technology.

"When we set out to re-engineer our print-to-mail facilities we were looking for accountability and control through a closed loop solution, but we also had to reduce costs and show a dramatic improvement in our operation's efficiencies," Hartnett said.

Empire partnered with Lasermax Roll Systems, IBM, and Pitney Bowes to balance its many and varying agendas. Upgrading the technology was a paramount step; achieving balance and synchronization among the varied equipment (Lasermax Roll Systems pre-and-post processing solutions; IBM's print engines; and Pitney Bowes 8 Series and 9 Series inserters) would prove to be the key to achieving a seamless, non-stop, no jam journey for the paper path.

"Lasermax Roll Systems continuous, non-stop roll-to-roll printing was a major contributing factor to productivity improvements."

"This was crucial," emphasized Hartnett. "So much time, money and resources come to a grinding halt when we have to stop the inserter or the printer because of a paper jam. Lasermax Roll Systems' gamut of equipment solutions and their sophisticated engineering process helped us achieve a continuous, fluid, non-stop path for the flow of paper. It was a breakthrough."

Empire's print-to-mail operation is unique in that the number of pages in Medicare notices varies from two to eight pages, so the Pitney Bowes inserters run at different speeds depending on the job. Maintaining control of the paper and preventing curling, bottlenecks, or jamming is critical.

Six months into the business process re-engineering phase and working with Lasermax Roll Systems, Empire converted 65 percent of its volume from cut sheet to roll-to-roll format.

"Lasermax Roll Systems introduced us to continuous, non-stop, large volume, roll-to-roll printing," noted Hartnett. "And it was a major contributing factor to productivity improvements. We achieved sizable productivity gains, reduced operator intervention, and increased quality control by shifting from cut sheet to continuous roll."

Empire's purchases included five Lasermax Roll Systems RS Roll-to-Roll solutions for the IBM 3900 Advanced Function Wide Duplex Printing System. Lasermax Roll Systems Unwinders feed three Pitney Bowes 8 Series and 9 Series inserters.

The high speed, print-to-mail facility continues to be in the throes of upgrading and upscaling its technology. The printers are getting faster, but so are the inserters, and options to outfit these facilities are becoming more wide-ranging.

The newest pre-and-post processing equipment on the block is Lasermax Roll Systems' Inserter Unwinder which automates the feeding of paper forms to today's high speed inserting systems. Running at speeds of up to 320 feet-per-minute, it allows mail equipment to run non-stop and virtually unattended for hours.

"The new Inserter Unwinder, in tandem with the Pitney Bowes inserters, is giving us higher throughput without the interruptions traditionally associated with this kind of operation," explained Hartnett. "Lasermax Roll Systems worked with Empire and designed a way to keep the loop of the roll paper feeding continuously into the cutters.

"We are getting the most efficient cycle and it is the biggest improvement yet."

Next generation customized software solutions that are part of the Pitney Bowes inserters contribute significantly to the efficiency of the operation.

For example, Empire has done away with window envelopes, thereby eliminating the challenges and production delays associated with aligning the address to the window at such high speeds. Instead, Scitex inkjet printers attached to the inserters spray both the outgoing and incoming addresses onto the envelope. Jobs can also have multiple return addresses.

With the technology in place and a set of integrated solutions from Lasermax Roll Systems, Pitney Bowes, and IBM, Hartnett's horizon of challenges seems less daunting. Empire is now meeting or exceeding government deadlines and government cost targets. Empire now processes all applications promptly, usually in time periods ranging from one to seven days.

"By eliminating more expensive, pre-printed forms, and shifting to two-up duplex printing we can also meet the government's lower cost targets for processing Medicare claims," concluded Hartnett.

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