

## Tracking the digital footpath from manufacturer to customer in the printing industry

What first comes to mind when you think about the technology that is shaping the printing and graphic arts industry? 3-D printers, inkjet and large format printing, digital design, perhaps. As well as these, the industry is being transformed by digital supply chains. These unified computing environments integrate numerous technologies, activities, outputs and supply chain flows. They are revolutionising procurement and inventory management and helping to promote sustainability across the industry. The flow on from these changes is a demand for new skills in all parts of the printing community, from the technology manufacturing hubs, paper merchants, consumable suppliers and the vast range of printing businesses, who cater to a myriad of end customers.

Brett Maishman, National Sales Manager, Channels Production at Fuji Xerox Australia is keenly aware of the importance of harnessing the power of contemporary supply chains. That's why he participated as a member of the Australian Government's Cross Sector Supply Chain Skills Project Reference Group, which has been helping to design new training products to help the industry upskill.

Brett, who has worked in the industry for over 30 years, is excited by what's on offer for all printing organisations, who can capitalise on improvements upstream in the procurement of ink, paper and machine manufacturing. To do this, it's critical they learn how to use all the data that's now available across their supply chains. Once they do this, they'll be able to go online to track their orders, calculate the time it'll take to get a delivery and therefore give more accurate quotes about costs and timing. It'll also be easier to understand total expenses involved in the business and to keep on top of invoices and payments. Brett explains that:

*'The team who has designed the new supply chain training products has drawn on our industry knowledge to understand the type of skills people will need to take advantage of the advances in global supply chains. The training will include units such as how to monitor a supply chain operation, administer inventory systems, and improve relations with customers.'*

Brett says digitalisation has created a new level of visibility across his business. Inventory management now involves everyone, including the people negotiating sales. They must understand how every digital footstep in a transaction contributes to efficiency. This changes the way they communicate with suppliers, warehouses and more importantly the purchaser.



With much tighter just-in-time operations, it is imperative everyone knows what's being promised to a customer, how products are travelling and when they'll arrive at their destination. Barcoding records a lot of this information. Now the data input is automated does not, however, mean people-to-people contact is no longer needed. Getting the system right requires the transfer of knowledge and experience and painstaking effort to finetune operations.

*'We've learnt this especially when leveraging third parties assisting with logistics. This can improve expenditure and extend your reach, especially in a place like Australia with the huge distances it takes to get into the regions. But you must invest the time to convey industry knowledge before transitioning to partners. Managing outsourced supply chain operations is another competency people will be able to study.'*

Customers are not only expecting quick turnarounds these days, they are also much more aware of the need to be environmentally and socially responsible. The paper and printing industries can now, thanks to the transparency of the supply chain, see exactly how to improve sustainability. Records about recycling rates, energy and water use, replanting programs and much more are informing environmental solutions at every stage of the paper and printing process from sourcing materials to managing a product's end of life.

*'This is opening new possibilities for savvy data and communication specialists to work in an industry that has for centuries contributed to human civilisation and is based on one of the globe's more renewable resources, paper.'*



Brett Maishman

