A&E – The Graphics Complex, founded in 1964 as A&E Products, is no longer the corner reprographics shop that C.A. "Chuck" Gremillion launched in his in-laws garage. A&E employees more than 250, offers services from three Houston locations (including a 100,000 square foot production center), and operates more than 50 facilities management locations.

The range of services A&E offers is very wide: sale and service of printers, copiers and plotters; designing and staffing on-site copy/print centers; providing graphic design services; large and small format black and white and color printing/copying; printing and distribution of construction documents; customized scanning and archiving solutions; bindery, dry mounting and laminating; banners, signs and vehicle graphics; direct mail and customized marketing solutions and self-service copy/print centers. And, they top it off with online print procurement and variable data printing (VDP)!

The Challenge

It was a case of being too successful… Several years ago, A&E began to offer VDP solutions using Datalogics' DL Formatter® DL-100. More and more customers began taking advantage of the new service, and A&E was winning more jobs over their competition because they could do more than just print. They could increase their customers' marketing effectiveness!

As a result, A&E's need for more efficient VDP processes increased. After attempting to build an in-house server-based system, the company concluded that acquiring a solution would be not only more cost effective, but would also provide a much wider range of applications.

The Solution

A&E abandoned the DL-100 application and moved to Printable's **PrintFusion3™, FusionPro,** and the **PrintOne Customer Center™** to simplify and streamline the process of creating, ordering, proofing, and processing variable data print jobs. While DL Formatter DL-100 was ideal for companies with simple document layouts or a smaller number of records, it only gave A&E the ability to create variable data documents; now with PrintFusion3, A&E can create variable data documents, turn them into templates for modification, and enable catalog customers the ability to order online.

"Once we saw the demo and considered all the internal and external expenses, we realized that it was more cost-efficient for us to go with PrintFusion3 from Printable," said Allie Kemp, Assistant Operations Manager, A&E – The Graphics Complex. "The new online platform enables us to put a customer's entire catalog of documents online, then let them modify and personalize documents from their own e-catalogue." Working from their own PrintOne Customer Center online portal, the customer drives the entire process, from order entry to personalization and proofing, to RIPing and directing the bindery, and finally to distribution.

PrintFusion3 produces PDF templates from artwork created in standard desktop publishing and graphics applications like QuarkXPress™; Adobe® PageMaker®, InDesign®, and Illustrator®; and others. Customers then typeset and proof their own jobs from these templates online at order time. A&E gets imposed, press-ready files with all components present and accurate, including crop marks and take-off bars, and a detailed job ticket.

The Result

For A&E, using PrintFusion3 to create variable documents online is an invaluable tool. Production time has been greatly reduced, particularly for incoming files. Traditional print jobs are first handled by an expediter and then passed on to the prepress department. VDP/direct mail jobs now go to two specially trained VDP experts for processing. All incoming and outgoing customer communication, job specifications, and file transfer is handled through the Printable Dashboard, which provides a consolidated view of online customer activity and integrated e-business services.

On the back-end, time is saved, too. The DL-100 Desktop application provided only part of the VDP workflow, giving A&E the capability to create sophisticated variable documents and tag those documents to merge the variable data. Now with PrintFusion3, A&E goes the next step by letting customers add their own variable data, proof their work in real-time, and deliver a print-ready file to be printed and distributed.

A&E's customers benefit as well. On the PrintOne Customer Center, they can modify and order exactly what they need with a few mouse clicks. Storage of their documents in private document libraries makes it easier to locate documents and improves version control. Reports provide ordering and usage history.

At the end of the day, the greatest benefit of all is that print representatives and pre-press technicians now have time to provide more design and marketing advice to A&E's customers. For Allie Kemp, "This is one of those rare situations where it's truly a win-win for all concerned. It's very gratifying for the customer to be able to go online, type in the text to be merged into their PDF-based document, see proofs, and create personalized pieces on-the-fly. We've given them new control through their own branded portal. Meanwhile, we spend far less time on production management because the workflow is 95 % automated. Sometimes, technology can be a beautiful thing!"

Benefits:
- Reduces RIP time for VDP jobs by about 50%
- Eliminates paper proofs and invoices
- Eliminates preflighting for VDP jobs
- Streamlines workflow and order process
- Improved font handling
- Makes prepress staff more productive
- Provides better version control
- Easier to meet tight customer due dates

> "PrintFusion3 really took us to the next level. It was like going from Fisher-Price® toys to Craftsman® tools."
> Matt Kohl, Variable Printing Specialist, A&E – The Graphics Complex