

EFI Auto-Count helps Classic Graphics achieve smart equipment management across two plants and three dozen devices.

Challenge:

Managing operations across two plants with a total of 36 pieces of equipment was challenging, and Charlotte, N.C.-based Classic Graphics was seeking a way to obtain better shop floor information in real time as the basis for fact-based decision-making and ongoing operational improvements. The company has an EFI™ Enterprise Print Suite featuring EFI Monarch™ MIS/ERP software and integrated dynamic scheduling software to manage two very busy production floors that include five offset presses, four small-format digital presses, and four superwide-format digital printers; a full bindery; kitting and fulfillment equipment; a hand-assembly fulfillment line; and mailing equipment.



Solution:

Classic Graphics expanded its business and production workflow capabilities by implementing EFI Auto-Count® shop floor production intelligence technology on all equipment across both plants to collect real-time direct machine interface (DMI) data that is fed into the Enterprise Print Suite. The company has also implemented non-DMI Auto-Count terminals to monitor and track superwide-format, cutting, kitting, and other manual activities.

Shop-floor production intelligence provides the details Classic Graphics executives and managers need to work smarter across the two facilities. The company's Charlotte plant consists of 246,000 square feet with 330 employees while the smaller Raleigh plant operates out of 26,000 square feet with 40 employees. According to Plant Manager Chris Reynolds, "We were already achieving significant benefits from our EFI workflow, but we needed to take our data collection to a new level. It's all about productivity and throughput."

"Our scheduler just opens up Auto-Count's Plant Manager software and instantly has the data he needs to do his job, getting a real-time update and status across both plants. If he were to try to acquire all of that information manually, it would take him an hour or more."

CHRIS REYNOLDS, PLANT MANAGER
CLASSIC GRAPHICS



Classic Graphics, an award-winning, full-service graphic communications company, has been in business since 1982 and currently operates two plants, one in Charlotte, N.C., and one in Raleigh, N.C., with about 375 total employees. The company has been a wholly owned subsidiary of Minnesota-based Imagine! Print Solutions since 2013. Classic Graphics is ISO 9001:2008 and 27001 certified, qualified by IDEAlliance® as a G7® Master, and holds a FSC certification.

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Reynolds was seeking a technology that could eliminate or reduce the time operators spend recording their activities as opposed to the time they spend producing work. "Like most printing operations, we are busy, and I didn't want operators having to walk over to a terminal to manually input data from memory. Plus, I couldn't count on the accuracy of data collected that way."

Reynolds points out that the company's growth made data collection that involved training all of the operators to correctly input data manually impractical. "And the thought of putting full-blown PCs on that many machines, when we were accustomed to centralized data collection for a group of machines, was too much," he adds.

Result:

Reynolds set about searching for a solution and determined that EFI Auto-Count would fit the bill. Auto-Count DMI was installed on 36 items of equipment, including presses, mailing equipment, bindery equipment, and small-format digital printers, across two plants. "It is wired into the computer systems of the machines," he explains, "and keeps count as work is underway, automatically delivering machine counts to update our schedule."

But Reynolds did not stop there. "We also wanted to be able to capture data in grand format, cutting, and kitting," he says. "A cutting operation does not have a consistently moving paper path where paper crosses over a sensor, and with wide format, sheets are often hand-loaded one at a time. So neither is optimum for DMI. And kitting is, of course, a manual operation." In those instances, operators or line managers manually enter data periodically during the job to keep the company's dynamic schedule updated, using cost-effective WYSE terminals with no need to install a full PC. So, while Classic Graphics has saved on some of the expense, Reynolds explains, "I can still centrally control everything from the IT Department for updates and maintenance."





While the workflow makes many things simpler at Classic Graphics, its implementation involved some complex IT set-up, which EFI handled working in conjunction with Classic Graphics' IT staff. "We were very lucky to have EFI's Bob Howard help us with the installation. He and the rest of the team are fantastic," says Reynolds. "They know their products inside-out. They held our hands throughout the entire process to the extent we wanted them to, and it was just a really nice experience working with them."

"EFI Auto-Count was the most comprehensive and integrated shop floor data collection system we could find," Reynolds adds. "It is plug-and-play with the rest of our EFI workflow. The components work seamlessly together without the need for any custom integration or code writing."

"In bindery, for example, the operator simply logs into a job. Auto-Count monitors the activity of the machine; it knows when you are in makeready and when you start production. It knows when you completed the job and how long it took. It is automated and accurate, and the schedule is always up-to-date."

Reynolds states that not only does this provide him with reliable, accurate, and up-to-the-minute production data, but it streamlines other parts of the workflow. Classic Graphics' scheduler can do much more in less time. Instead of having to spend at least an hour of time speaking to various departments to get updates on jobs in production, the scheduler can view the progress in real-time through Auto-Count and manage schedule updates accordingly.

"If I am going to spend my time analyzing data and working with the department managers on productivity improvement strategies, I'd better have accurate data. Auto-Count has done a great job of that for me by eliminating worries about bad data."

CHRIS REYNOLDS,
PLANT MANAGER
CLASSIC GRAPHICS

This is especially important because Classic often has jobs split across both of its plants with each facility juggling jobs that have tight deadlines.

"People often overlook the value and benefit of having productivity data at your fingertips," Reynolds says. "I can't even begin to tell you what a big difference Auto-Count has made. I can look at every machine in my company, see its status and history, view what was scheduled for the last shift, and view what is scheduled for the next. I can easily monitor how fast they are running, how long makeready is taking, how many sheets were run, and how long until they complete the job they're working on."

"All of our department managers have access, as well, and will be able to view the dashboard from their smartphones," Reynolds adds. "Just being able to have that level of access and creating awareness throughout the plant that we are serious about productivity, and we are monitoring it and working to improve it, has become a rallying point for productivity improvement. That alone has given us a rise in productivity."

Reynolds likens the emphasis on performance to the way teams in another classic North Carolina organization, NASCAR, closely study their work to reduce time in pit stops. "We might look at job that is taking 13 steps," Reynolds says, "and look for ways to reduce them to five. After we do more Lean analysis, I expect to be able to achieve even better results based on the wealth of data we now have available."

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