A New Era in Print on Demand

“We saw a change coming,” says Robert Reeder, CTO at Wilde. “It seemed very clear to us that the path of print on demand was heading to ‘content on demand’ and document self-assembly. Before long, we knew designers would build templates based on business rules and use these rules to drive the insertion of data-driven content into the document at run time. The end result would be documents so personalized it would be as if they were created one at a time. As always, we wanted to be ahead of this curve.”

The leaders at Wilde knew they needed technology that was robust enough to respond to this new way of thinking. At the same time, they also needed to find a solution that would enhance the efficiency of their production environment. Wilde had two separate document preparation groups operating within the company—a high-volume print/mail department that operated on a mainframe and handled large-scale laser work, bindery, and fulfillment and a print-on-demand department that was producing a variety of simple customized and personalized marketing materials using laser printers. Workflow options between the two departments were so limited it was beginning to affect productivity.

“Based on our two main goals—to establish a more unified production environment and dynamically build highly personalized documents—we set some very specific criteria for the new technology,” said Reeder.

The requirements were these: a document engine that would allow Wilde to design...
applications once and deliver the output through multiple channels, the ability to pull specific resources at run-time, a robust content management system that would allow for storing and accessing variable objects for re-use across multiple applications, and the scalability to execute any future ideas Wilde might want to implement.

Uncovering the Solution

“We looked at a lot of products,” states Reeder, “but most were engineered in a world that still viewed document creation as a procedural process rather than one driven dynamically. And so many of them didn’t really solve our issues—they just offered another environment with a different set of limitations.”

The team at Wilde went to Xplor 2001 in Orlando and stopped by the Exstream Software booth for a demonstration of its enterprise personalization software suite, Dialogue.

“I knew within 30 minutes that Dialogue had the framework for fulfilling our vision,” said Reeder. “After 25 years of experience with all types of technology, it was easy to recognize that Dialogue offered an object-oriented environment from the ground up. It provided the scalability we needed, and had the ability to dynamically add relevant content to the document. Plus, it would completely remove us from the procedural flow, which was exactly what we wanted—an elegant way to step back and let the technology dynamically build a document almost as if by hand. You know you are on the right path any time you can emulate that.”

With Dialogue meeting every one of the team’s initial requirements, Exstream was invited in to show the rest of the development staff what the software could do. Dialogue quickly proved its worth when Reeder’s team was able to easily design and implement a difficult application that dynamically pulled content from a large library of variable text and images to build complex personalized booklets (including a personalized table of contents). Enthused over its ease of use and robust capabilities, Dialogue was immediately implemented in the print-on-demand department. Today, it is the only software they use to implement new projects.

Expanded Capabilities

“With Dialogue we are creating more sophisticated applications than we ever thought possible,” reports Reeder. “We are building entire 401(k) booklets for customers that are in color and offer personalized fact sheets and enrollment forms. Dialogue also made it possible for us to create highly customized booklets for a healthcare provider that involve three levels of personalized promotional information, as well as a personalized business card and return envelope. Personalizing at this level not only reduced the overall cost of responding to requests for additional information, but it also tripled the response rate and provided our customer an overall savings of 30 percent. Needless to say, they were thrilled with the results—and so were we.”

Dialogue’s ease of use has made it possible for Wilde to cross-train its production staff, allowing for an expanded labor pool. “Since implementing Dialogue, we have reduced operating costs and time to market, increased response rates for our customers, and enhanced productivity with the same number of staff. We couldn’t be happier,” states Reeder.

New Paths to Explore

What’s next for Wilde? The team reports there is still much to discover when it comes to Dialogue’s breadth of capabilities. The more they learn, the more value-added services they envision offering customers in the future.

Reeder summarizes Wilde’s experiences with Dialogue by saying, “The very best way to get the most out of this software is to look for inefficiencies with current processes and then use Dialogue to simplify them. In fact, it is such an amazing solution, I want to give everyone who is considering implementing it some important advice: Give it to your development staff, be creative with it—and whatever you do, don’t put Dialogue in a print corner. It is way too powerful for that.”