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ENHANCING THE PRINT CUSTOMER CONNECTION

STRENGTHENING THE VALUE OF THE IN-PLANT

A NAPCO Research Study and White Paper
Sponsored by Canon U. S. A., Inc.

Strengthening the Value of the In-Plant

In-house printing operations play a vital role in their parent organizations but face many competitive threats, from commercial printing competition to print outsourcing. Taking action to enhance customer experiences can help strengthen an in-plant's merit in the eyes of its parent organization.

The value of an in-house printing operation is tied to its ability to meet the needs of internal clients, and that often goes beyond printing high-quality products to include value-added services and smooth customer interactions. Seamless job onboarding, easy order submission processes, ongoing communication, effective job management, value-added services, and security measures all strengthen a parent organization's perception of an in-plant.

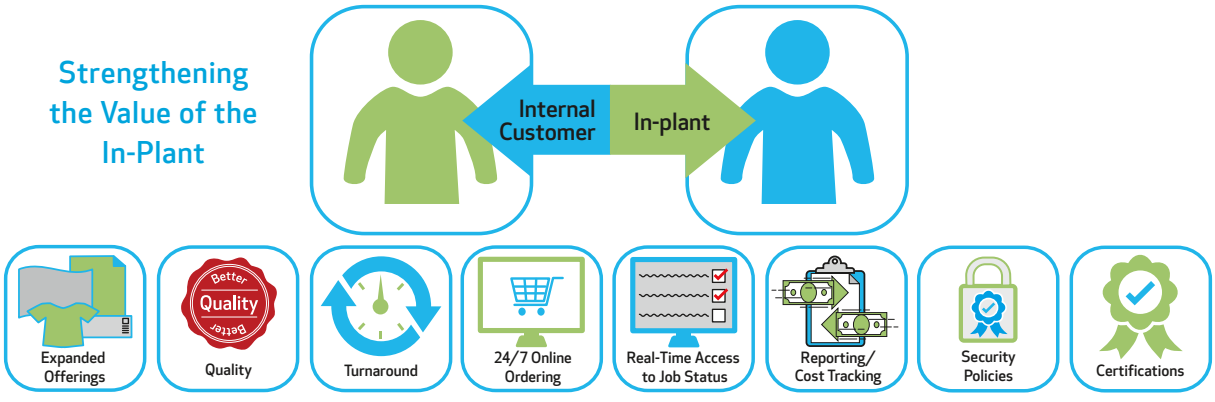
Looking to define and understand the best practices and methods for improving the print provider/customer connection, a 2021 NAPCO Research* study and white paper series, sponsored by Canon U.S.A., Inc., offers insights into job submission trends, customer communication requirements, data security preferences, and how the pandemic has impacted the customer business requirements.

The overarching theme of *Enhancing the Print Customer Connection* is that communication buyers expect virtually seamless and transparent experiences with their print providers — from job quotes through delivery.

Survey responses from in-plant printing operations and communication buyers from organizations with in-plants point to the role that process automation plays in enhancing the value in-housing printing operations offer their parent organizations.

This report will showcase the role and value automation offers in supporting in-plant printing operations in meeting parent organizations' needs. More automated production workflows can help ensure that all stages of the print manufacturing process are performing at peak efficiency, resulting in better customer experiences, productivity, and profitability. Automation supports in-plants in helping reduce workflow touch-points, allowing work to move through the production process fast while reducing errors and costs from reworking jobs.

Other key benefits of automation can include high productivity and print quality, virtual elimination of production bottlenecks, enhancements to service delivery, and improvements to customer satisfaction, productivity, and service delivery.



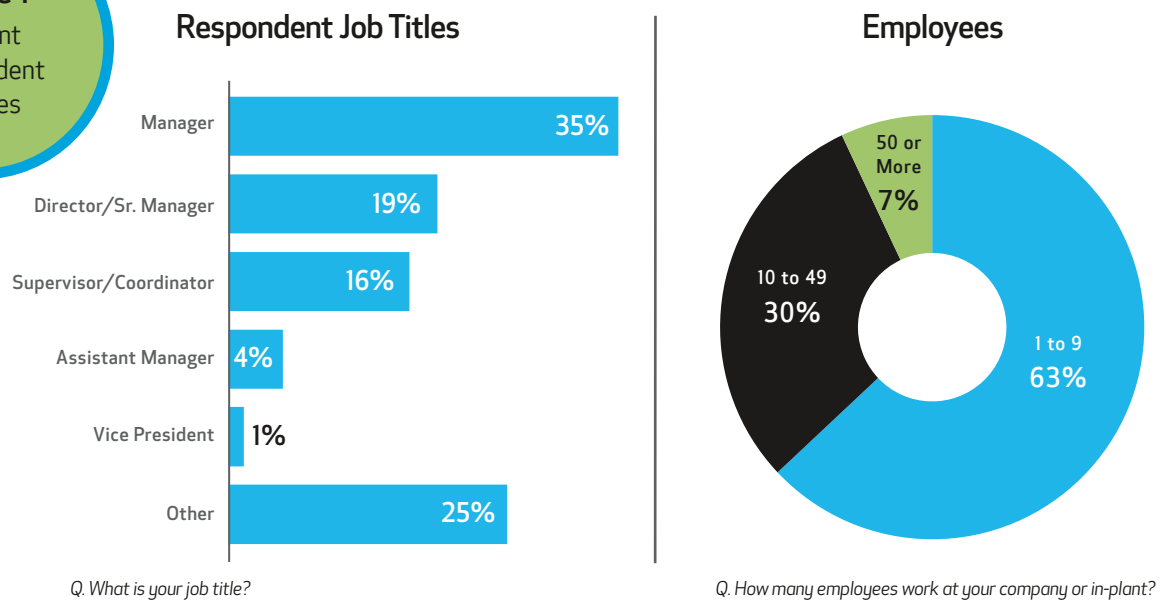
* A unit of NAPCO Media, the parent company of Printing Impressions and In-Plant Impressions.

In-plants and Organizations with In-plants Surveyed

The research study surveyed in-plants and communication buyers to assess print job submission and production trends across the print supply chain.

Figure 1 shows the job titles of in-plant participants and the size of their operations. Most in-plant respondents operate as full-cost recovery departments and charge for work (Figure 2).

Figure 1
In-Plant Respondent Profiles



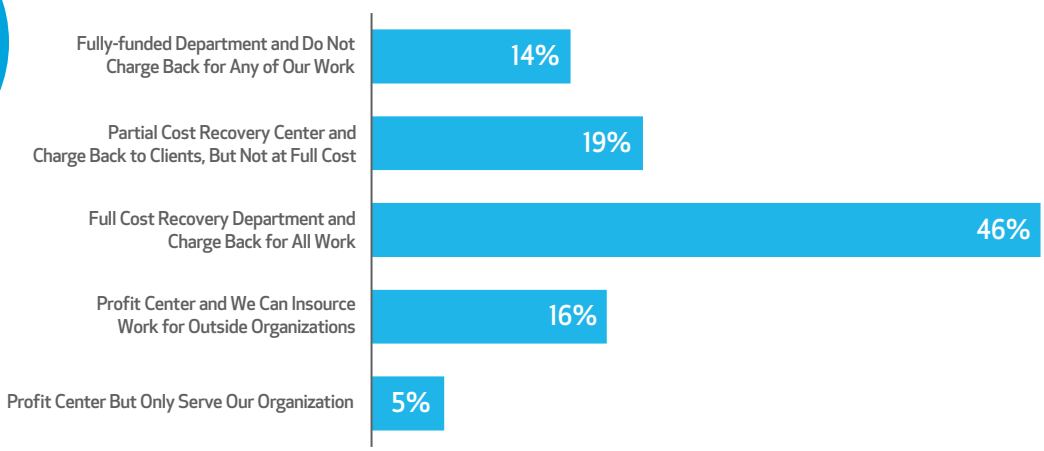
Q. What is your job title?

Q. How many employees work at your company or in-plant?

N = 80 In-Plants

Source: Enhancing the Print Customer Connection, NAPCO Research 2021

Figure 2
In-Plant Operating Models

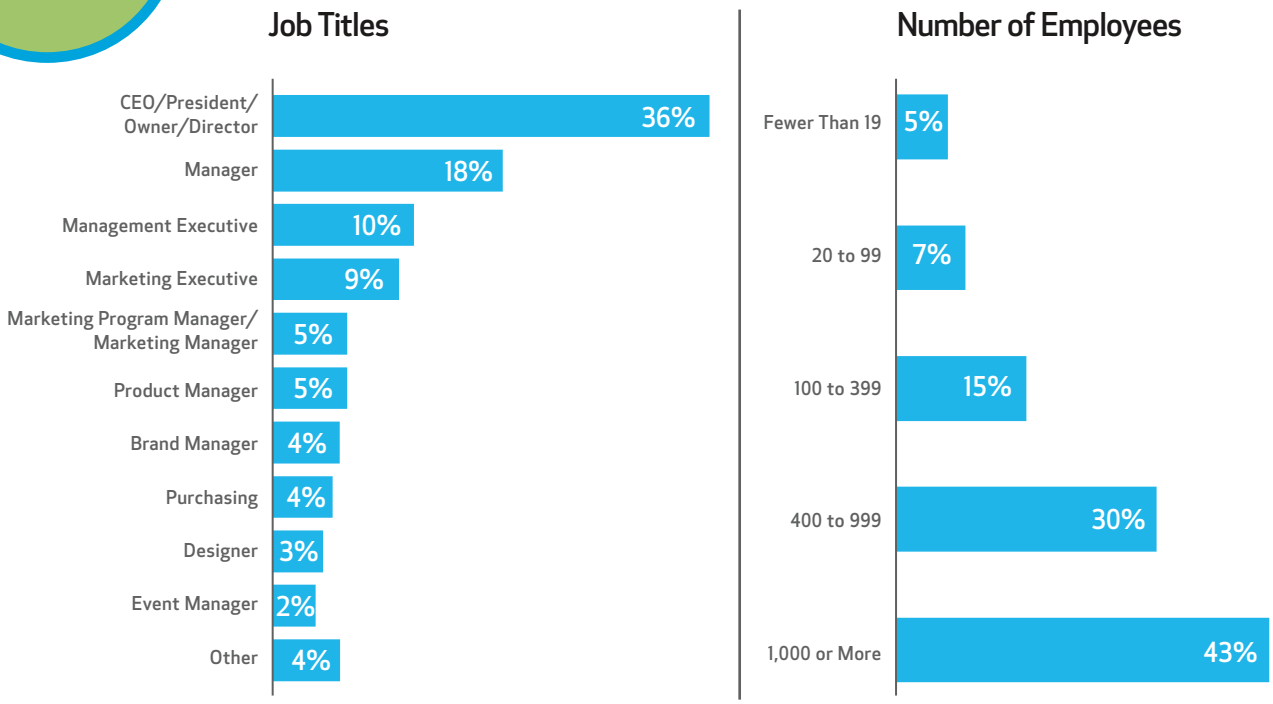


Q. Which of the following best describers your in-plant operation?
N = 80 In-Plants

Source: Enhancing the Print Customer Connection, NAPCO Research 2021

Over 150 communication buyers (print buyers and influencers) at organizations with in-plants participated in the survey. Respondents held top-level or key management positions and worked at organizations representing a mix of sizes, with most employing over 100 people (Figure 3).

Figure 3
Communication Buyer Respondent Profiles



Q. Which of the following describes your role in your organization?

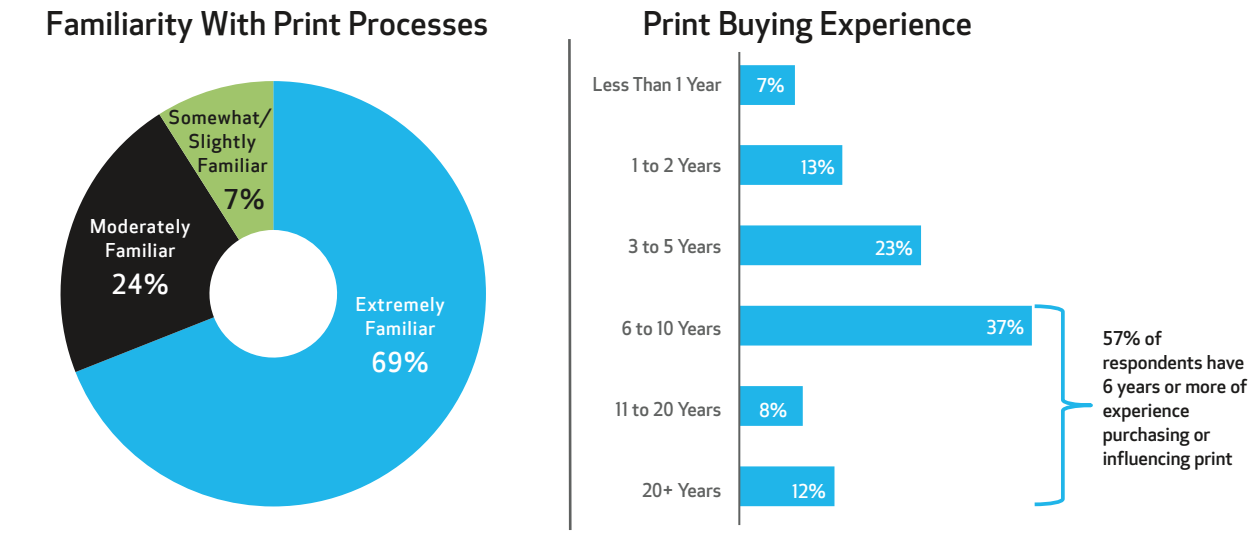
Q. In total, how many people does your organization employ?

N = 165 Communication Buyers and Influencers in Organizations with In-Plants

Source: Enhancing the Print Customer Connection, NAPCO Research 2021

To qualify to take the survey, buyer respondents needed to either purchase or influence print and be familiar with the methods used by their organizations to submit print jobs. Two-thirds of respondents (69%) report they're extremely familiar with printing processes used to produce their organizations' printing work, while 24% are moderately familiar, and 7% somewhat/slightly familiar (Figure 4). The majority of communication buyer respondents (57%) have been involved in purchasing or influencing print for six years or more.

Figure 4
Communication Buyers' Print Experience



Q. How familiar are you with the printing processes used to produce your company's printing?

Q. How long have you been involved in purchasing or influencing print?

N = 165 Communication Buyers and Influencers in Organizations with In-Plants

Source: Enhancing the Print Customer Connection, NAPCO Research 2021

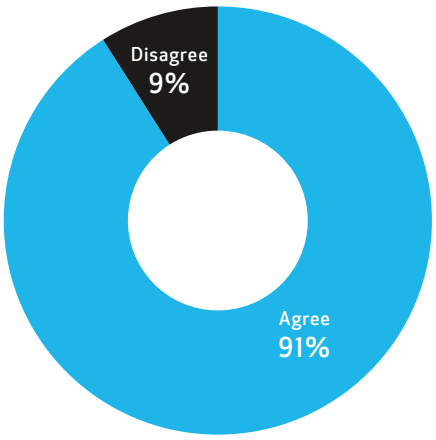
COVID-19 Pandemic Effect on In-Plants

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted all facets of business and forced all types of organizations, including in-plants, to rethink how they engage and connect with customers.

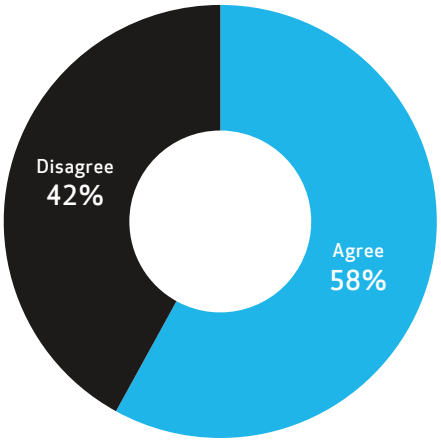
Ninety-one percent of in-plant respondents report that the COVID-19 pandemic reduced customer print volumes, but more than half noted the unprecedented event led to strengthening relationships with parent organizations (Figure 5).

Figure 5
COVID-19 Pandemic Influence on In-Plants

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, many of our customers reduced print use.



COVID-19 pandemic strengthened our customer relationships because we pivoted to new products that addressed emerging client needs.



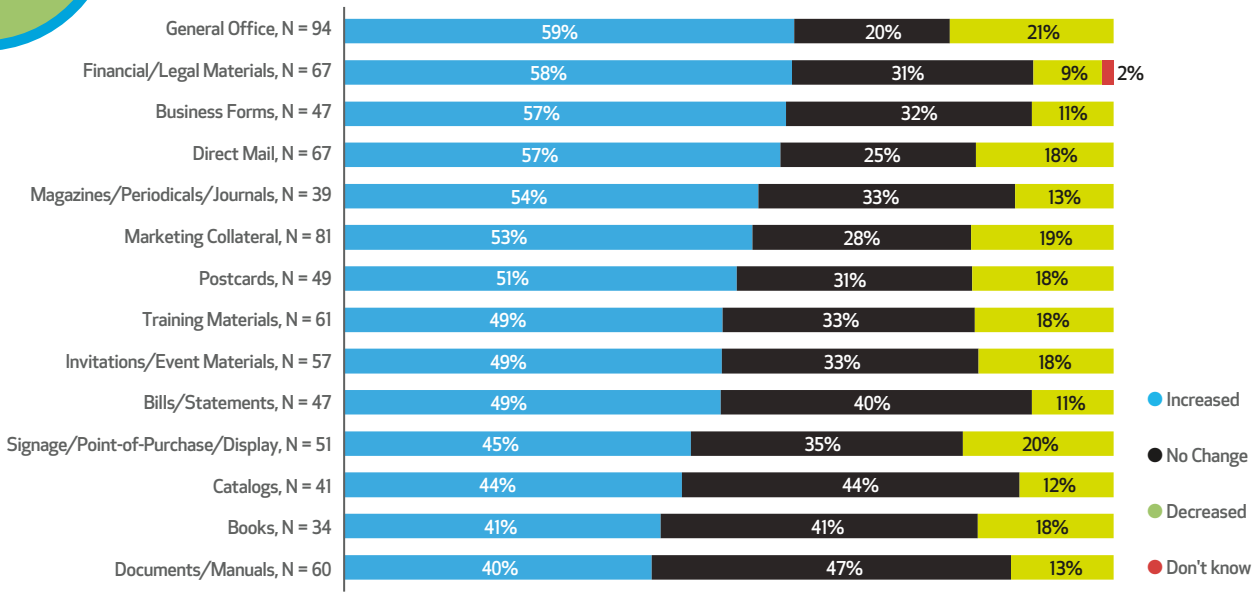
N = 80 In-Plants

Source: Enhancing The Print Customer Connection, NAPCO Research 2021

Throughout the pandemic, in-plants demonstrated resilience and pursued opportunities created by this event. Many added new services, adapted production processes to incorporate social distancing, and continued to serve their parent organizations — often in ways they had not done previously.

Communication buyers with in-plants report a different perspective on print volumes than in-plant respondents. Print buyers in organizations with in-plants indicated that volume for core print applications increased more often than decreased (Figure 6). Over half of respondents with in-plants report that print volumes for general office, financial/legal documents, business forms, direct mail, magazines, marketing materials, and post cards increased.

Figure 6
COVID-19 Effect on Print Application Volume



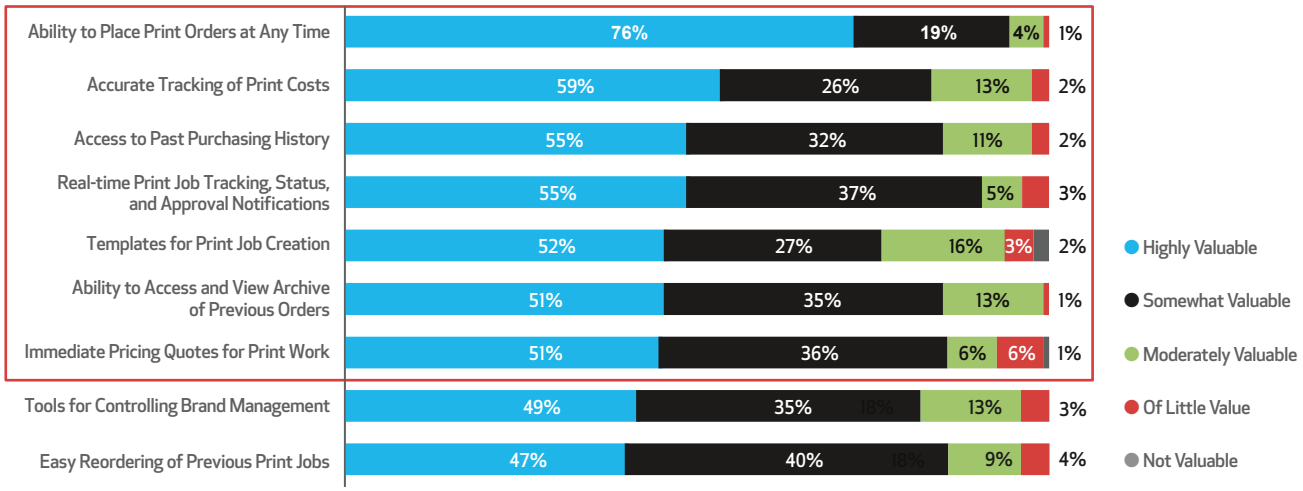
Q. Of the print applications you influence or purchase, how has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced print volume?
Base = Communication Buyers and Influencers in Organizations with In-Plants

Source: Enhancing The Print Customer Connection, NAPCO Research 2021

What Do Parent Organizations Value?

Offering parent organizations excellent experiences starts with identifying what capabilities they value. A little over three-quarters of buyer respondents (76%) report that placing print orders at any time is highly valuable (Figure 7). In addition, over half of respondents value accurate cost tracking, access to purchasing histories and orders, real-time access to print job status and price quotes, and print templates.

Figure 7
Capabilities Parent Organizations Value



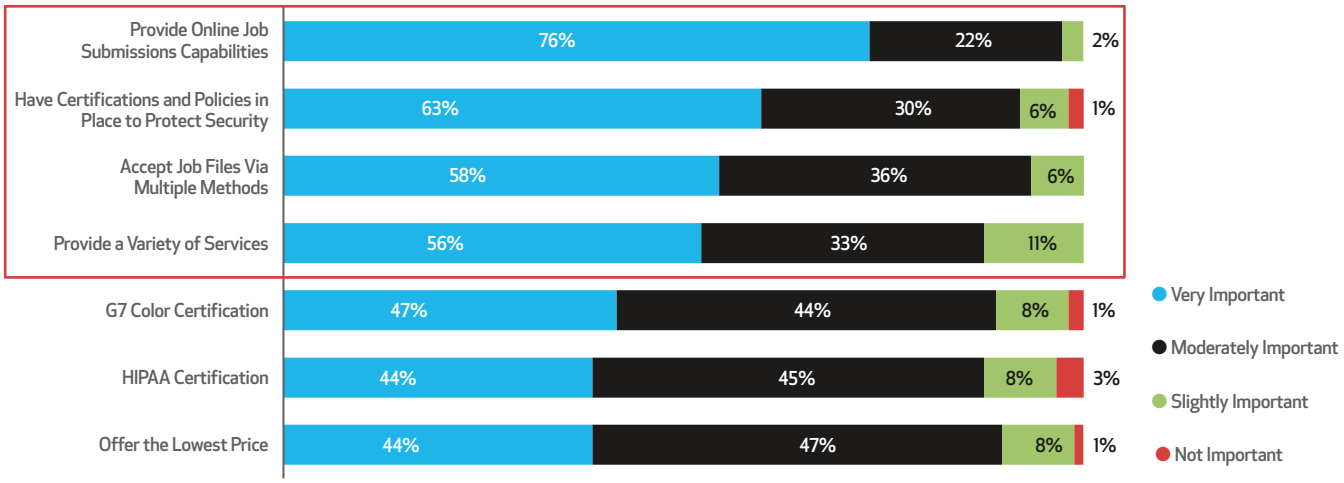
Q. Please rank the value that the following capabilities provide to your organization.
N = 144 Communication Buyers and Influencers

Source: Enhancing The Print Customer Connection, NAPCO Research 2021

These findings indicate that today's communication buyers demand higher levels of management control over their print ordering and spending. Many communication buyers are under enormous pressure to reduce costs and maximize the return on their communication investments. This presents an opportunity for an in-plant to meet its organization's requirement for tools and processes to better access, manage, create, and control print production and spending. Offering ways to help improve results can potentially build stronger customer bonds that are not easily broken by outside competitors.

Another important survey question focused on what parent organizations value. Communication buyers and influencers at organizations with in-plants rated the importance of various factors they considered when selecting a print provider. Over half of respondents with in-house printing operations report that online job submission, security certifications and policies, multiple job submission methods, and offering a variety of services are very important features considered when selecting a print provider (Figure 8).

Figure 8
Factors Influencing Print Provider Selections

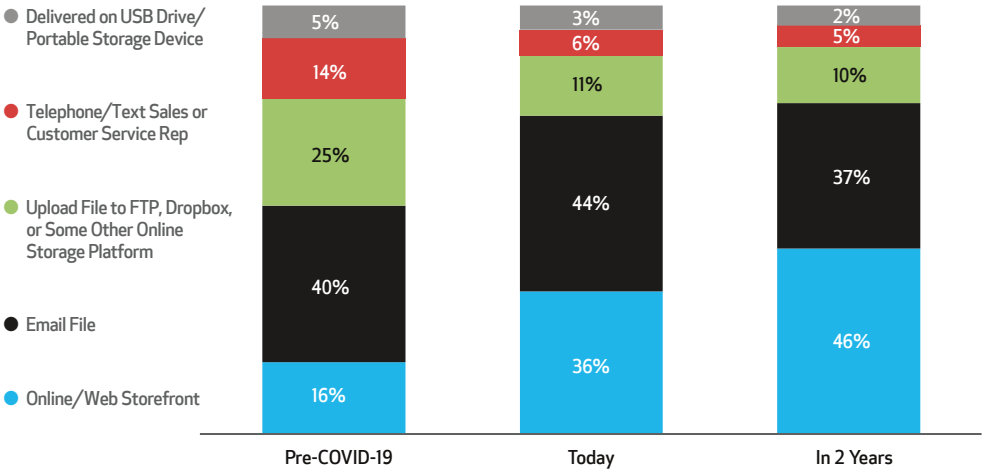


Q. How important are the following services and features when selecting a print provider?
N = 144 Communication Buyers and Influencers in Organizations with In-Plants

Source: Enhancing The Print Customer Connection, NAPCO Research 2021

The top selection factor, providing online job submission, was reflected in the in-plant survey results. In-plant respondents reported a 125% increase in online job submission pre-COVID-19 to today, increasing from 16% to 36% (Figure 9). A likely explanation for this substantial increase in online ordering among in-plants — and its importance in provider selection — is that the pandemic forced parent organizations to review and support new workflow processes, such as online ordering, that accommodated remote employees.

Figure 9
In-Plants' Digital Print Job Submission Methods



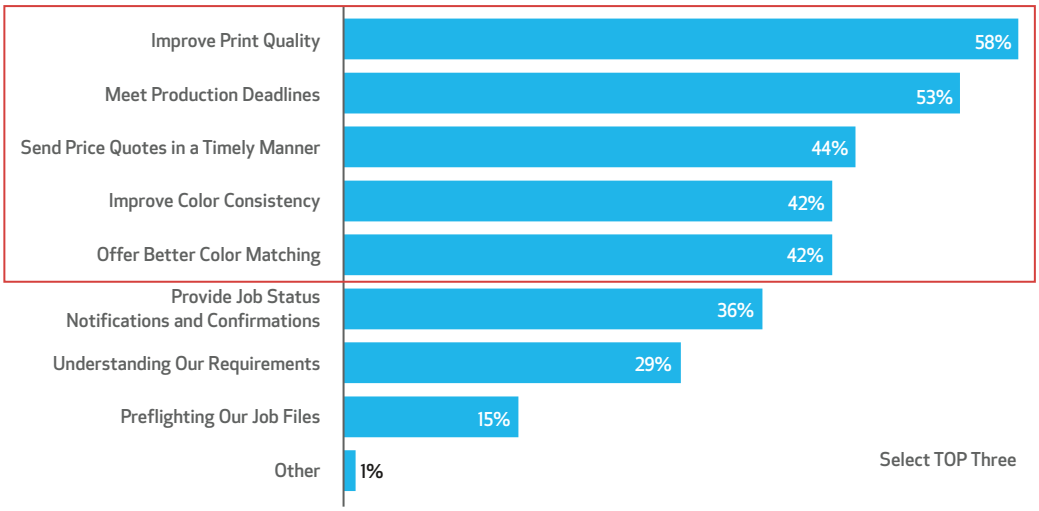
Q. What is the breakdown of how digital print jobs are submitted to your operation pre-COVID-19, today and what do you expect in 2 years?
N = 80 In-Plants

Source: Enhancing The Print Customer Connection, NAPCO Research 2021

Print Customers Expect High Levels of Productivity and Service

The survey asked communication buyers to identify the three main areas their print providers can improve. While the top response from buyers with in-plants was print quality, other key priorities center on productivity and service delivery (Figure 10). Communication buyers report that their print providers can do a better job of meeting production deadlines, sending price quotes in a timely manner, and improving color consistency and matching.

Figure 10
Areas Print Providers Can Improve

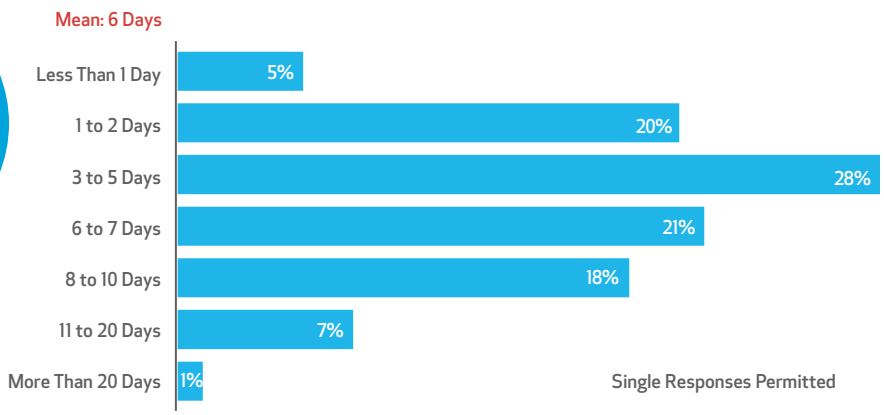


Q. What are the top areas where your print provider(s) can improve in producing your jobs?
N = 144 Communication Buyers and Influencers in Organizations with In-Plants

Source: Enhancing The Print Customer Connection, NAPCO Research 2021

Another important requirement is fast job turnaround. Communication buyer respondents report the average turnaround time for their print work is six days, with 53% reporting five days or less (Figure 11).

Figure 11
Buyers Demand Quick Job Turnaround



Q. What is the average turnaround time you require for your print work?
N = 165 Communication Buyers and Influencers in Organizations with In-Plants

Source: Enhancing The Print Customer Connection, NAPCO Research 2021

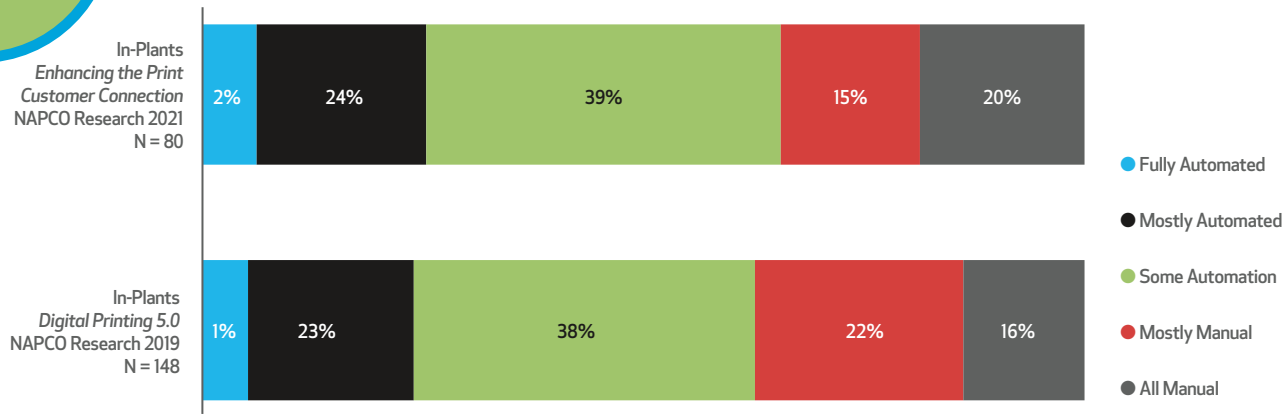
Workflow automation supports in-plants in meeting customer requirements for fast turnaround, better communication, and quality.

In-plant Challenges in Productivity and Service Delivery

In-plant respondents report that, while their operations have some level of automation, there's room to expand. Figure 12 compares how in-plants participating in the current survey and those in the NAPCO Research and Canon U.S.A. 2019 Digital Printing 5.0 survey describe their operations' levels of automation. Automation levels reported in both surveys are about the same.

Figure 12
Automation Levels: Current vs. Previous Survey

Fully automated means that, after a job enters the workflow, it needs no further operator intervention to move through all production-related steps.

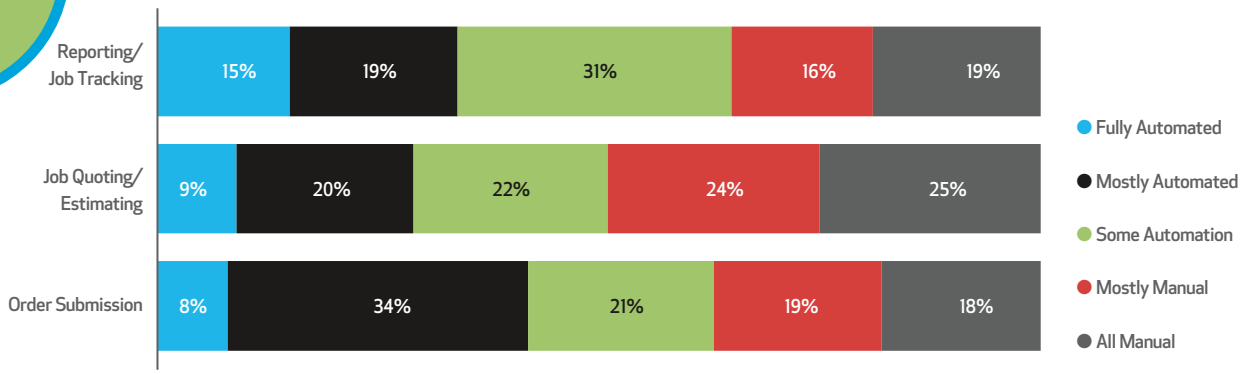


Q. What best describes your operation's level of workflow automation?

Source: Enhancing The Print Customer Connection, NAPCO Research 2021

Another survey finding pointing to a gap in automation asked in-plant respondents to describe their operations' level of automation for specific customer experience areas, such as job tracking, ordering, and quoting. Few reported that these areas were fully automated, with most reporting some or no automation (Figure 13).

Figure 13
Automation Levels by Customer Interaction Points

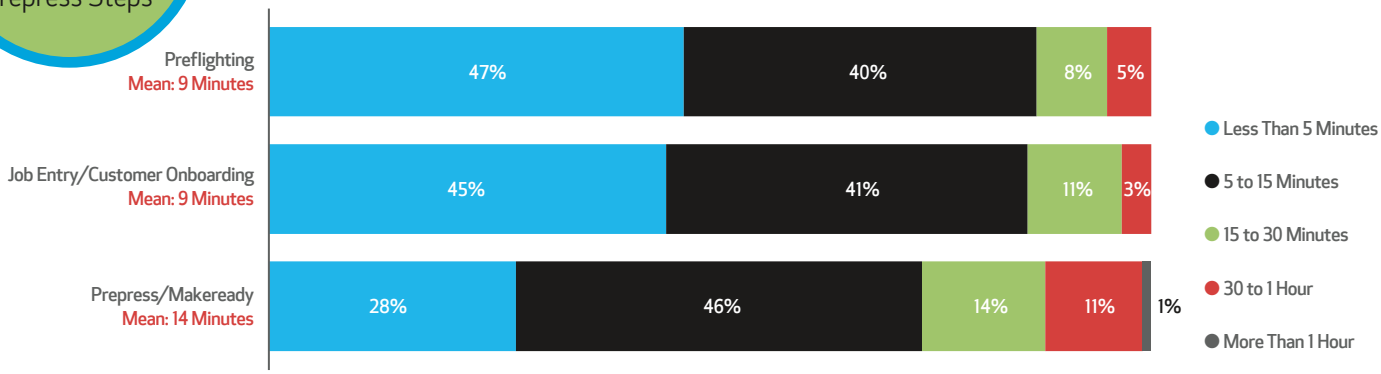


Q. What best describes your operation's level of automation for the following customer interactions?
N = 80 In-Plants

Source: Enhancing The Print Customer Connection, NAPCO Research 2021

One more indicator on the need for automation is the amount of time in-plant printer respondents require for essential steps in creating print-ready files. As shown in Figure 14, in-plant respondents report that, when creating print-ready files, prepress took the most time, with an average of 14 minutes, while both preflighting files and job entry/onboarding took 9 minutes each.

Figure 14
Process Time for Key Prepress Steps

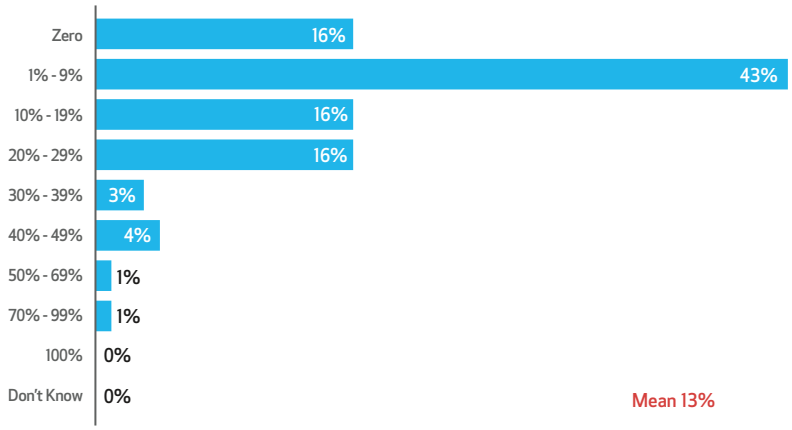


Q. What is the average time required for each of the following steps in creating a print-ready file?
N = 80 In-Plants

Source: Enhancing The Print Customer Connection, NAPCO Research 2021

Overall, in-plant respondents report that, on average, 13% of incoming customer job files for digital printing require some type of prepress preparation (Figure 15).

Figure 15
Percentage of Job Files Requiring Prepress Preparation



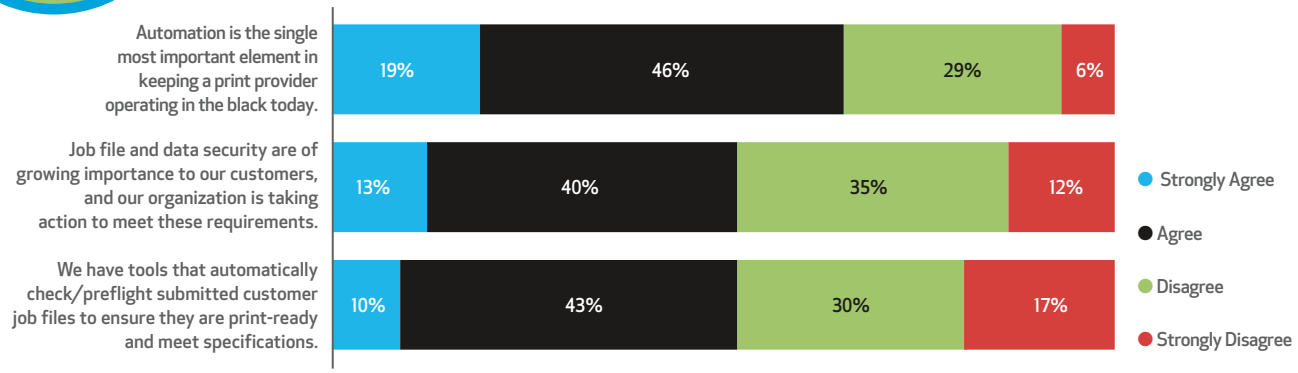
Q. What percentage of incoming customer job files for digital printing require some type of prepress preparation to make the file print-ready?
N = 80 In-Plants

Source: Enhancing The Print Customer Connection, NAPCO Research 2021

In-Plants Value Automation, but There's Room for More

In-plant respondents understand the value of automation and 65% say automation is the single most important element in keeping their operation profitable (Figure 16). They also report making investments in tools like automatic file checking/preflighting to help enhance automation and implement data security features to meet clients' needs.

Figure 16
Trends in Automation



Q. What is your level of agreement with the following statements?
N = 80 In-Plants

Source: Enhancing The Print Customer Connection, NAPCO Research 2021

Checking or preflighting job files for technical issues that could potentially cause problems with the actual printing of the job is an important step in helping to improve productivity and reduce costs associated with needing to reprint work.

Focusing on workflow methods and tools that support high levels of productivity can result in the ability to overcome the challenges identified by survey respondents and better meet customer expectations. Ongoing evaluation and automation of workflow processes — from job receipt to preflighting, prepress, and production — are best practices for in-plants to consider.

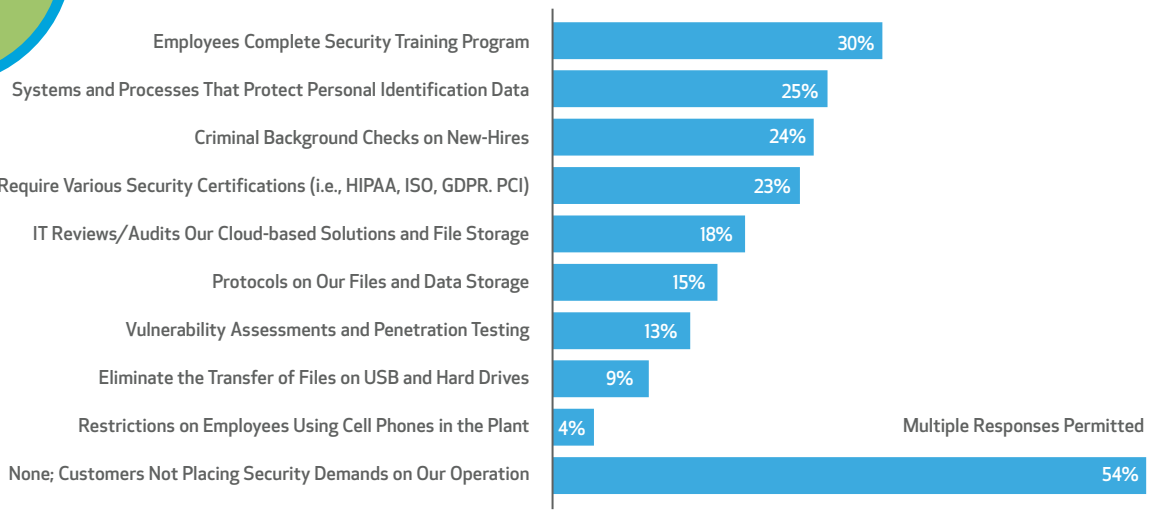
Customers Demand Data Security Features

Data security is of key importance to many organizations as they're faced with taking preemptive measures to thwart cyberattacks and database breaches. Close to two-thirds of communication buyer respondents with in-plants (63%) say that, when they select a print provider, it's very important they have data security certifications and processes in place (Figure 8).

Security services is an area that offers in-plants an opportunity to help enhance their value to their parent organization. Over half of in-plant respondents (53%) agreed that job file and data security features are of growing importance to their customers, and their organizations are taking action to meet these requirements (Figure 16).

In-plant respondents report their customers' top security demands include requiring employees to complete a security training program (30%), having systems and processes that protect personal identification data (25%), doing criminal background checks on new-hires (24%), and having various security certifications such as HIPAA, ISO, GDPR, and PCI (23%) (Figure 17).

Figure 17
Communication Buyer Security Demands



Q. Which of the following security demands are customers placing on your operation?
N = 80 In-Plants

Source: Enhancing The Print Customer Connection, NAPCO Research 2021

Conclusion

Parent organizations expect their in-plants to deliver smooth onboarding, easy order submission processes, ongoing communication, effective job management, value-added services, and security measures.

While in-plants understand the value of automation and are taking action to automate processes, there's still room for investment.

Meeting customer expectations may require in-plants to make ongoing investments that improve communications with customers, achieve color quality requirements, speed turnaround times, enhance security, and ensure on-time product delivery.

Workflow automation is at the heart of productivity and profitability for both in-plants and their parent organizations. Automated print production workflows can help reduce costs, improve productivity and color consistency, optimize equipment and communication investments, enable more profitable revenue streams, and meet requirements for fast turnaround.

About Enhancing the Print Customer Connection

Enhancing the Print Customer Connection is a series of thought-leadership content pieces based on a NAPCO Research survey of communication buyers, commercial printers, and in-plants that was sponsored by Canon.

1. Delivering Client Experiences that Build Competitive Advantage
2. The Job Submission Challenge – Onboarding Your Customers
3. Navigating a New Customer Environment
4. Advancing Productivity and Service Delivery
5. Strengthening the Value of the In-Plant

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