



Change is hard, but so is winning

Jeff Davidson, VP of Corporate Strategy & Owner at Modern Litho

At Modern Litho, we've been through a lot in our eight-decade history, so we know that change is hard but required to grow. We also knew that technology would always be at the forefront of every move we make. We started out by investing in our pre-press and press systems, adding automation to streamline our production and make us more efficient. That technology update brought us more potential capacity, but we didn't have the technology in place to get the work to the production floor efficiently. Our biggest bottlenecks were the software systems we relied on for sales order management, estimating, and job entry.

We recognized that the human element of our processes created a limiting factor. We needed people to collect and enter information, and the legacy systems we were using were not user-friendly, limiting our team productivity. We could see that if we kept adding people to the process, the impact on our payroll would become significant. More payroll, while print pricing is stagnant, would only lead to profit compression. Our future relied on finding a better way to win, no matter how hard it was.

Our vision was to update our front-end technology. We wanted to create growth opportunities for our staff; to bring more value to our processes and eliminate the menial, redundant tasks that lead to mistakes. We needed new technology to create the bridge from the administrative tasks and systems, integrating the CRM, Print MIS, and ERP, to the automation in production. We needed to capture more data at each process step to give us more insights.

Conquering the Administrative Mountain

To realize a technology-driven vision is as hard as the change that drives it. Changing systems isn't appealing, but as we grew, we had to recognize and come to terms with the fact that our underlying technology no longer met our requirements. It couldn't support us in the future. The bottlenecks were constraining our growth! We were falling behind.

From sales to estimating to order entry, our processes were steeped in manual touchpoints. We needed to lift the intensity of our processes to meet business requirements in the 21st century. We began with a target to update our Print MIS. When we installed the current system a decade ago, it was the perfect choice for us. But growing to four locations with new equipment and new types of production, it wasn't integrated with the rest of our systems. We kept adding manual processes and found we were adding costs without accounting for them.

I see administrative tasks as a funnel. I saw how the bottlenecks formed. We had a growing number of opportunities trying to feed a rigid legacy-based workflow. We couldn't move orders through sales, job information capture, and estimating or issue Purchase Orders fast enough. Our sales team was frustrated with the inefficiencies. Our billing was out of sync with the rest of our processes. The business and production platforms operated separately, with no consistent way to capture and share data. We had data stored in separate databases using different structures.

We were not as efficient or modern as we thought. We needed technology to support business and production workflows, share data across applications, and enable administrative automation. It had to be integrated, not a directory full of APIs and SDKs that would take months, if not years, to code, test, and implement.

By investigating our bottlenecks and workflows, we concluded that we were defeating ourselves if we didn't address the current state of all the systems used to manage the business. It was a big undertaking, but the company's future depended on using technology to empower an integrated business infrastructure.

Using Technology to Find the Data

Every business knows that metrics help guide decisions. But you can't report on data you don't have. We realized that we were capturing the usual data to keep track of sheet waste and running speeds, but some elements of our business were hidden because we weren't capturing data that could guide us.

We didn't know how long it took to estimate a job or turn an estimate into a quote. We didn't have a good picture of how long salespeople took to prepare estimates or how much time Customer Service Reps took to resolve problems. We couldn't say which customers represented most of our bottlenecks or which produced our highest margins. We always thought in terms of cost per thousand sheets of print without considering our cost to support that production.

Without sharing data between the business and production systems, we made inaccurate assumptions. We weren't learning from our mistakes because we didn't have the data to expose them. Even the User Interfaces on the solutions in place looked old. Menus and tabs with complicated paths made it hard to train new staff and created more opportunities for error. To manage that risk, we had to look for new solutions that offered more intuitive User Interfaces that would lead to faster staff training.

We needed a partner who could apply a critical eye to the Modern Litho strategy. What data should we be capturing to give us better insight? Which systems should we update, and which should be replaced? Where was a lack of connectivity costing us money? We weren't sure what was possible, but we knew we needed guidance and support to identify an implementation path that wouldn't stop daily output.

Futureproofing for Growth

When we began looking for new technologies to support modernizing our administrative systems, we believed we needed a new Print MIS. We thought we knew what problems we were trying to solve, and that we were in the market for a piece of software to insert into our existing processes. We didn't know what we didn't know, but we did know the print business!

We know our customers, and we know our equipment. We had been through an expensive automation project to make our production hardware as efficient as possible. Still, we hadn't applied the same rigor to the administrative workflows that feed production. There are upstream and downstream impacts for every process change, so we needed a collaborative technology partner.

Choosing the right technology and technology partner was essential. We needed to build an end-to-end workflow that addressed our pain points and empowered us to make the best decisions for Modern Litho. We learned that leveraging cloud-based solutions to support cloud and on-premises servers could create a unified environment across all locations. With a common infrastructure for business and production systems, we could share the data we captured to provide deeper insights into all cost elements, not just the cost of the machines, ink, and paper.

We learned what data we should capture to give us the most significant impact. We identified how each element of the Print MIS, the prepress touchpoints, and business management worked inside Modern Litho so we could work effectively with our technology partner to get their best recommendations. We wanted to find a partner to stay with us during the due diligence process and technology vetting to show us how Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning could improve our efficiency.

We choose Kodak to help us re-align our business strategy, mitigate risks and take advantage of technologies to eliminate business and production roadblocks. The solution is an integrated platform, not a box of APIs and SDKs. Before the end of 2021, we expect to be operational in each of our plants with a state-of-the-art end-to-end workflow that brings business intelligence and production insights to our fingertips.

When I'm asked how we could change technology platforms in such a short time, I smile. We decided to endure the short-term challenges and run parallel systems until cutover. The result is proof that we found a great technology platform and the right partner to help us. As more clients come to us with new requirements, we now leverage our technology investments to support them as we expand into new segments, geographies, and capabilities.

**We knew that change would be hard,
but Modern Litho could not continue
to grow and move forward without it.**

Not growing is never an option for Modern Litho.

