

WhatTheyTh!nk

Technology Outlook Week

Software & Workflow: The
Next AI-Powered Wave

Pat McGrew
McGrew
Group

Ryan McAbee
Pixel Dot
Consulting



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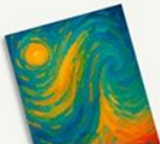
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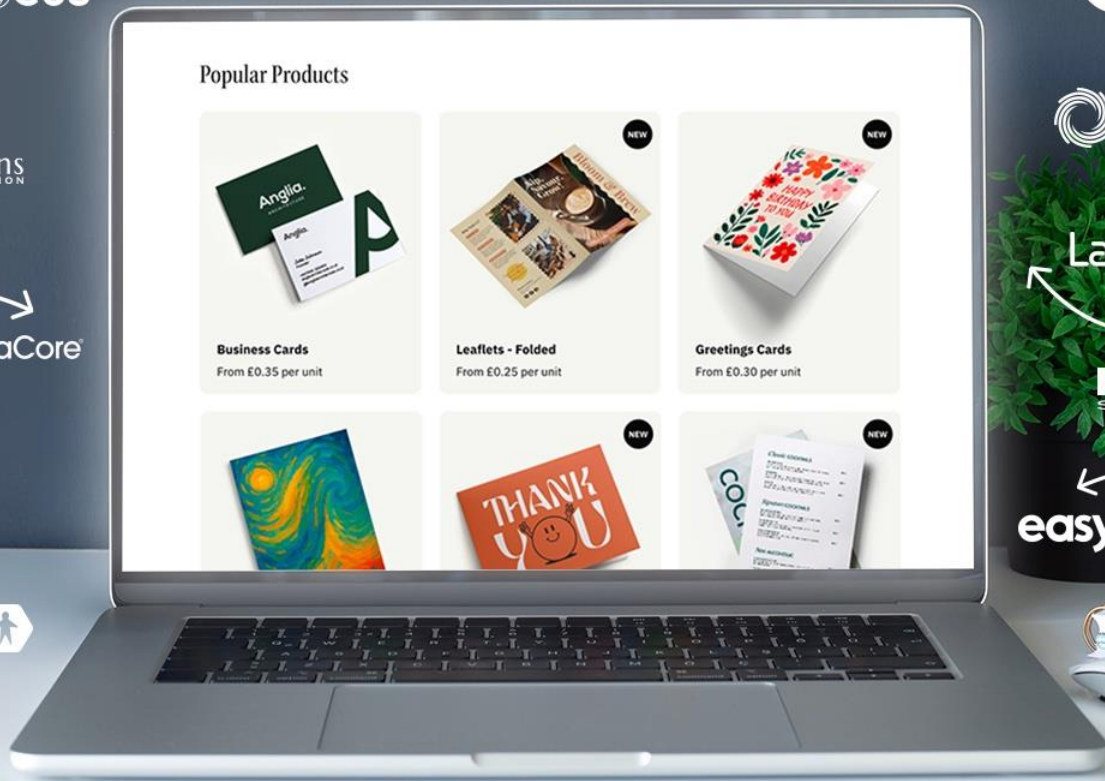
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PAT MCGREW

Managing Director

McGrewGroup, Inc.

PCM@McGrewGroup.com

+1.720.220.5097



RYAN MCABEE

Chief Analyst

Pixel Dot Consulting

Ryan.McAbee@pixeldotconsulting.com

+1.973.747.6826



Software & Workflow: The Next AI-Powered Wave

- **Current trends in software and workflow.**
- **How is AI being integrated into print workflow software—and what the practical benefits are.**
- **What automation options are there—and how can printers take advantage of them.**

Industry Context & Pressures

Market Challenges

- Shorter run lengths
- Faster turnaround demands
- Skilled labor shortages

Software's Critical Role

- Driving operational efficiency
- Enhancing customer experience
- Maintaining profitability

Industry Transformation

- IT trends reshaping print workflows
- Integration becoming essential
- Automation as competitive advantage

The print industry faces unprecedented challenges that require smarter software solutions and streamlined workflows to remain competitive in today's market.

Current Software Trends

API-First Integration

Print vendors now prioritize open APIs over closed ecosystems, making it easier to connect different solutions. For example, Dalim Software rebuilt its workflow platform with a GraphQL-based API layer for seamless integration with MIS, e-commerce, and other production systems.

Cloud-Native & SaaS

The industry is shifting toward cloud-native software and SaaS offerings, though on-premise solutions remain for certain cases. The global cloud printing market was estimated at \$1.65B in 2024 and growing ~11% CAGR.

Microservices Architecture

Breaking monolithic applications into independent, scalable services that run on demand. This modular approach improves reliability and flexibility, allowing components to be updated without overhauling the entire system.

Customer Self-Service

Modern print MIS and web-to-print platforms emphasize user-friendly portals, real-time status visibility, and automation of customer touchpoints to reduce phone calls and emails.

Walk Your Workflow to Win

Document People, Process, & Tools Identify Gaps

Before automation and AI can be applied to the business and production workflows, every process must be documented. Walking your workflow, physically following job paths, provides the roadmap to take the next steps.

Identify Automation & AI Opportunities

Now that the gaps are understood, evaluate automation and AI opportunities to remove or improve the bottleneck. Start with existing vendors and solutions to see if there are features in solutions already owned that can be applied.

Review processes from walking your workflow and identify processes that should be eliminated, improved, or created. Also identify bottlenecks — what caused the issue, how did it get resolved, and how to close the gap.

Implementation Plan

Rank process change and automation/AI opportunities by speed to implement vs. expected return. Start with the fastest to implement for a quick win to build momentum with staff, then work the rest of the list.

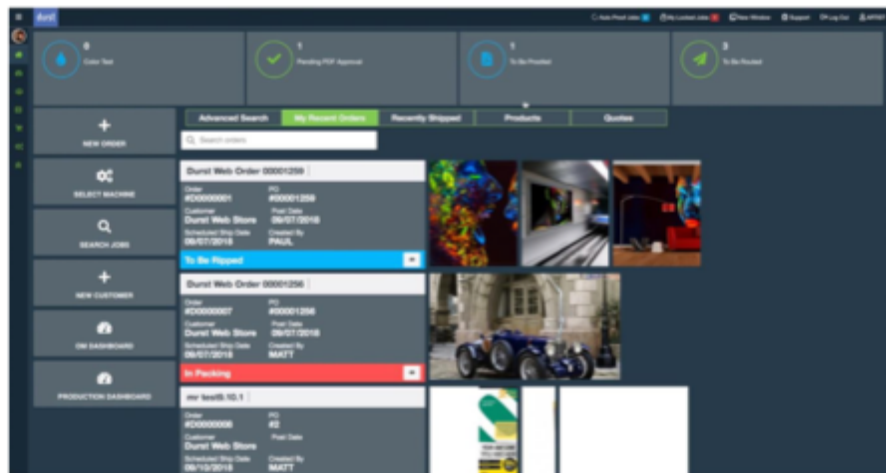
REMEMBER, SOME PROCESSES SHOULD NOT BE AUTOMATED!

Streamline Your Print Process With Lift ERP, An ERP System Developed For Today's Print Service Provider

Durst Lift ERP is a cloud-based, print-specific ERP system built to optimize every aspect of your print shop's operations from quotation, order entry, preflight, production, purchasing, inventory, shipping, accounting, and everything in between. It replaces paper-intensive processes with a fully digital, customizable, and scalable platform that “speaks your language,” ensuring your workflows are mirrored in the software rather than altered for it.

With features such as rule-based estimating, real-time visibility, push notifications, customer portals, and seamless integrations, Lift ERP empowers you to reduce manual data entry, eliminate errors, streamline production, and enhance customer engagement all while boosting productivity and profitability.

Whether accessing dashboards from anywhere or managing customer orders online, your team and clients stay connected. Lift ERP transforms your print business into a lean, automated, paperless, and highly responsive operation, delivering more with less effort.



Lift
Software

Generative AI Enters Print

Over the past year, the industry has seen the **beginnings of generative AI** being applied to print business challenges. The wave of popular AI tools in late 2023–2024 has sparked print-specific R&D.

Content Creation

AI-assisted artwork generation, automated copywriting for marketing materials, and personalized design templates

Business Intelligence

Using large language models to analyze print job data for insights and predictive analytics

Customer Engagement

AI chatbots to guide print buyers through ordering process and answer common questions

According to industry research, **56% of organizations plan to increase investment in AI/ML in the next year**, though adoption remains cautious due to privacy and quality concerns.

AI Use Case 1: Design & Prepress



Text-to-Image Generation

Web-to-print platforms now integrate generative APIs, enabling users to instantly produce custom, print-ready visuals from simple text prompts



Image Enhancement

AI upscaling, background removal, and color optimization ensure even low-resolution customer images are print-worthy



Content Creation

AI assists with marketing copy, personalization text, and proofreading for p



Benefits: Faster artwork creation, improved file quality, and enhanced mass-personalization capabilities

AI Use Case 2: Job Onboarding & Support

Email-to-Job Ticket Automation

Solutions like Good2Go's *Order Pilot* use AI to read customer email orders and automatically create structured job tickets in the system. The AI parses details like product type, quantity, size, finishing requirements, and due dates.

"Applying AI to email orders speeds up processing, reduces errors, and ensures consistent data handling – improving efficiency and client satisfaction."

Outcome: Reduced manual data entry, fewer errors, faster customer responses, and freed staff time for higher-value tasks.

AI Assistants for Customer Support

PlanProphet's *AI Agent* serves as an always-on support assistant via website chat, customer portal, SMS, or phone calls. It taps into live MIS data to instantly answer questions like:

- "What's the status of my order?"
- "When will I get my proof?"
- "Can I get a quote for X product?"

The system escalates complex queries to humans when needed.

AI Use Case 3: Production Optimization



Smarter Estimating

Dataline's MultiPress AI Assistant mines historical quotes, orders, and financial data to generate actionable insights for pricing optimization and profitability analysis.



AI Imposition & Ganging

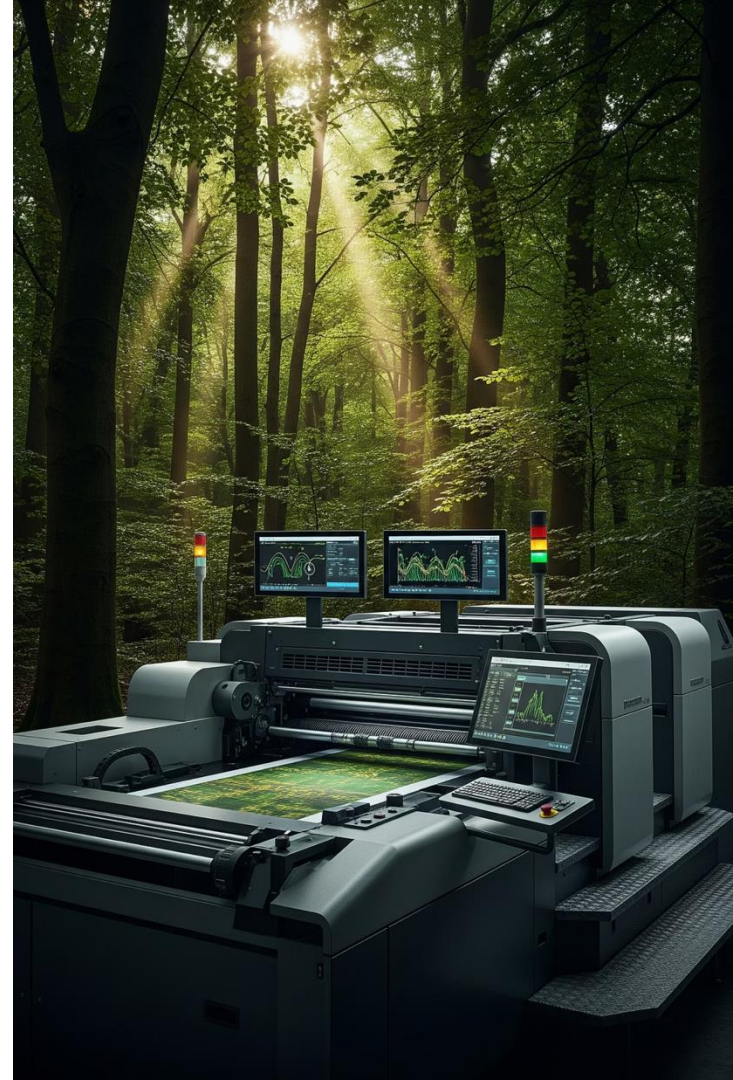
Tilia Labs Phoenix uses "Imposition AI" to automatically arrange various print orders in the most efficient layout, trying countless combinations to minimize waste and setup



AI-Driven Press QC

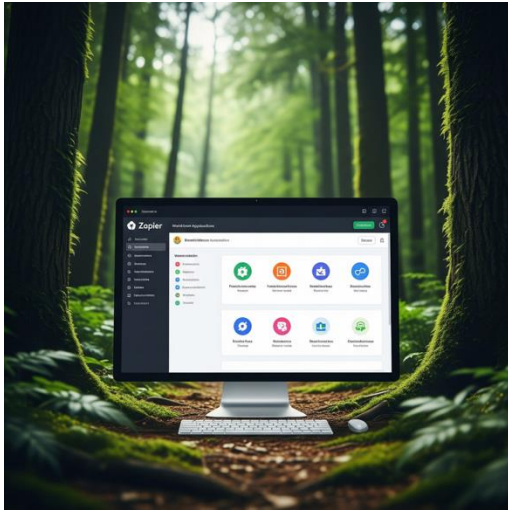
Konica Minolta's IQ-501 and Ricoh's SmartStart use AI algorithms to perform real-time adjustments for image registration, alignment, and color quality, reducing waste and operator intervention.

These AI implementations deliver tangible benefits: less material waste, higher print consistency, reduced operator workload, and data-driven decision making.



Automation Options

General-Purpose Tools

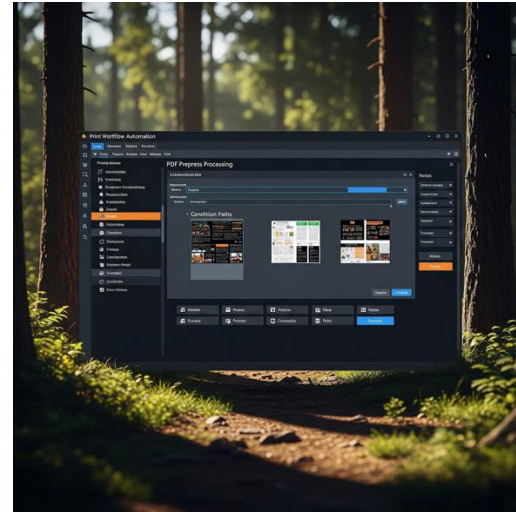


Examples: Zapier, Make, n8n

Cloud-based, no-code integration tools that connect apps and automate routine tasks. Excel at linking print shop systems with other business applications like CRMs, accounting software, and messaging platforms.

These automation approaches are complementary – use general tools for "back office" workflows and print-specific systems for "factory floor" processes, linking them via APIs or JDF for end-to-end automation.

Print-Specific Platforms



Examples: Enfocus Switch, Prinergy, Prinect, Esko

Purpose-built for automating production workflows: moving job files through prepress steps, applying imposition, driving platesetters or digital presses, and integrating with MIS via standards like JDF/JMF.

Automation Pathways for Printers

Task Automation

Automating individual, repetitive tasks to eliminate small inefficiencies. Ideal for smaller shops or those just starting with automation.

Examples: Hot folders, auto-preflight actions, email filters, desktop macros

Benefit: Reduces errors and frees up time for more valuable work

Process Automation

Multiple tasks linked into a cohesive workflow spanning part of the production process. Common in mid-sized print companies.

Examples: MIS to prepress integration, JDF job tickets moving between systems, automated imposition and plate making

Benefit: Significant labor savings, speed improvements, and accuracy gains

Business Automation

Fully integrated, "lights-out" workflow from customer order to shipping and invoicing. Pursued by larger enterprises or tech-forward companies.

Examples: Web orders flowing through MIS to production to shipping with minimal human intervention, real-time status updates to customers

Benefit: Faster throughput, lower labor costs, scalability, and improved customer experience

Start your automation journey where you'll see immediate impact, then expand strategically as you build expertise and integration capabilities.

Takeaways & Next Steps

Software Enables Workflow

Modern, API-first software is the foundation for efficient workflows. Evaluate your current stack for integration capabilities and cloud readiness.

AI is Already Practical

AI implementations in print are delivering real benefits today – not future hype. Identify areas where AI could solve specific business challenges.

Start Small, Think Big

Begin your automation journey with quick wins that show immediate ROI, then expand strategically toward end-to-end workflow automation.

Integration is Essential

The era of isolated, "one-stop" print systems is ending. Prioritize solutions with open APIs and integration capabilities to build a connected ecosystem.

The goal is a more connected, intelligent, and automated print operation that improves internal efficiency and profitability while delivering a better customer experience through speed, self-service, and reliability.



McGrew
Group



pcm@mcgrewgroup.com



+1 720 220 5097



[/patmcgrew](https://www.linkedin.com/company/mcgrew-group)



www.McGrewGroup.com



PIXEL DOT

Elevating Print with Tech



ryan@pixeldotconsulting.com



[/mbossed](https://www.linkedin.com/company/pixel-dot)



+1 973 747 6826



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The 6 Levels of Fiery Workflow Automation

Hot folders
& presets

Imposition
templates

Prepress with
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Base

Advanced
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JobFlow

Post-press
finishing


Connect to
MIS, W2P
systems



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Q&A

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- Technology Outlook Week Continues!
 - Thursday, September 11—Wide-Format & Signage and Textiles & Apparel w/Richard Romano and Cary Sherburne, sponsored by EFI
 - Friday, September 12—Finishing & Embelishments w/Patrick Henry, sponsored by Tecnav

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