

Facing Myself



Frank Cost

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by
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*For my children
who have seen them all before*



Introduction

This book was conceived, produced, and published all during the afternoon and evening of a single day—January 8, 2006.

For the past six or seven years I have used the same photograph of myself to send out for publicity prior to lectures and speaking engagements. The photo depicts me as a younger man, dressed in a jacket and tie that are no longer fashionable, if ever they were.

Shortly after lunch on January 8, I decided to set up a camera on a tripod and take some pictures of myself to see whether I could create an updated portrait and avoid having to make an appointment with a professional photographer. I used an old Nikon Coolpix 990 digital camera with a lens that can swivel around for self portraits. After a few attempts to make a portrait of myself suitable for use as a publicity shot, my session with the camera took a different direction. I quickly accumulated a couple hundred pictures of myself, not a single one usable for my original purpose.

When I reviewed the images on the camera monitor, I found myself amused and wanting to show other people the results of my solitary photo session. I decided that my work warranted a more dignified presentation format. Shortly before 3:00 pm I decided to turn my new collection of photographs into a book. I wrote a Photoshop program to batch process all of the digital photos for print publishing. I then used an InDesign book template from a previous book project to design the book. From InDesign, I exported two PDF files—one for the cover and one for the inside pages of the book. I uploaded the PDF files to Lulu.com and the book was available for purchase worldwide well before bedtime on the same day I began the project.

Whenever someone orders a copy of the book from Lulu it is produced and shipped on demand by ColorCentric Corporation, an automated factory in Rochester, New York, using Xerox digital printing and book production systems. What a world!

Frank Cost
January 8, 2006
Rochester, New York

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New Web-Integrated Commercial Print Services

There has been a great deal of animated discussion during the past decade about the potential value of computer integrated manufacturing (CIM) methodologies to the commercial printing industry. The discussion reached a crescendo a few years back when the big printing equipment manufacturers began introducing new devices that were JDF-enabled. For a brief time, JDF took on an almost messianic aura as the latest great technological hope for the beleaguered commercial printing industry. With JDF, productivity would skyrocket, waste would plummet, and profits would soar.

This vision has given way to a more sober view of the prospects for increased productivity, as JDF slowly works its way into production workflows with the purchase of new equipment. But even if you were building a new commercial printing plant and filling it entirely with new JDF-enabled machines, there would be a limit to how much of a gain in productivity over existing non JDF-enabled systems you would see. This is because of the custom nature of the products that most commercial printers manufacture.

The number of discrete product types that are available from a typical commercial printer is effectively infinite, and each custom job requires a custom-designed workflow with custom machine setups to process materials selected from a vast array of possibilities. The best commercial printers are able to engineer unique solutions for their customers that make the most efficient use of materials and equipment. This takes a lot of deliberation and flexibility. The value of the work goes well beyond the physical product. Increasingly, buyers of commercial printing services are paying for the expertise of the print services provider to deliver the right solution to a specific communication problem. The most progressive commercial printers understand that their customers are not interested in buying print. They are interested in buying a communication service that will help them make money.

There are real limits to how much these kinds of services can be automated. The most valuable forms of automation are in discrete processes that must be performed routinely. Automated imposition software is a good example. Software that filters and cleans database files is another. Commercial printers are constantly on

the lookout for pieces of technology that will allow them to save time and labor. But the custom nature of the work makes it unlikely that commercial printing plants will look like robotized consumer product mass assembly plants any time soon.

There is, however, an emerging corner of the printing industry where nearly fully automated factories are becoming the norm. These factories manufacture products as a result of business transactions that take place on the Internet.

One of the most interesting examples of such a factory is ColorCentric, a company in Rochester, New York that specializes in the on-demand production of books. ColorCentric was established in 2002 with a simple but unprecedented mission: to be able to profitably produce and ship books in quantities as low as a single book by automatically processing data obtained from customers—sight unseen!

How does ColorCentric do this? The basic building blocks are a combination of enabling technologies, carefully engineered workflows and strategic partnerships with a selected group of extraordinary customers.

The first enabling technology is high-speed production digital printing. ColorCentric is a Xerox shop, using Docutech and IGen3 engines to produce single-color and full-color books respectively. Although ColorCentric chose Xerox platforms, similar systems have been constructed by other companies around Kodak and HP digital printing technologies. Thus the model is not at all platform-dependent.

ColorCentric connects to its customers via the Internet. But what makes the business viable is the fact that millions of end users are now connected to the Internet with high-speed services that make graphic-intensive applications possible. ColorCentric's customers are companies that offer Internet-based services that involve the production and distribution of books to mass markets. The content of the book can be anything under the sun. But the formats of the books produced by ColorCentric are highly constrained to a relatively small number of standardized products.

At the moment ColorCentric produces books in a handful of different sizes, with three different binding options in full color or black and white. With five different sizes, three different binding options, and two different printing options (on two different papers respectively), the total number of discrete catalog products that ColorCentric produces for its customers is 30 ($5 \times 3 \times 2 = 30$). Unlike a typical general commercial printer that offers, literally, an infinite number of custom choices,

ColorCentric is able to rigorously determine the exact production workflows for a limited number of standardized products.

ColorCentric also works closely with its customers to precisely specify the format of the PDF files that can be submitted for each different catalog product. For a 6 by 9 inch perfect bound color book, for example, there is only one right way for the PDF file to be constructed. It is the responsibility of ColorCentric's customers to ensure that files conform rigorously to these specifications. ColorCentric uses the term "trusted PDF" to describe the files obtained from its customers.

Along with the trusted PDF, ColorCentric has established a standard XML-based format for all metadata about a particular book order. This metadata format was developed by ColorCentric to enable customers to transmit the necessary information relevant to the production and distribution of books without being overly complex. For ColorCentric's purposes, the complexity of JDF that enables it to be flexible enough to serve the needs of general commercial printers is simply not required. Because ColorCentric specializes in a very clearly-defined product segment, manufacturing a relatively small number of discrete catalog products, simplicity is the key to profitability.

So how does it all work? The best way to find out is to have ColorCentric print and ship a single book to you. You can do this by visiting one of ColorCentric's most innovative customers on the web. Lulu.com is a web-based book publishing engine that enables anyone who owns content to publish and distribute books globally for free. If you visit Lulu.com, you can order books published by tens of thousands of its customers as easily as from Amazon. If you type my name in the Lulu search engine, you will find a selection of books that I have written that are available for purchase. One of the books is entitled "The New Medium of Print: Material Communication in the Internet Age," published by the RIT Cary Graphic Arts Press. If you order the book from Lulu.com, the order is transmitted immediately to ColorCentric. ColorCentric, in turn, retrieves the PDF files from Lulu, and prints and ships the book to you. Orders are fulfilled in matter of a few days.

Even more exciting is the fact that Lulu provides anyone in the world with the same capability to publish and sell books through this mechanism. All you need to publish a custom-designed book are two files, one for the inside pages of the book, and one for the cover. The inside pages of the book can be in an application format such as Microsoft Word or PDF. When you upload the file to Lulu, it is automati-

cally processed to produce the “trusted PDF” required by ColorCentric. Lulu offers a number of pre-designed cover options, or lets you submit your own custom design in PDF form. Using Lulu, you have complete control over the design of your book, and the quality of the printed product that ColorCentric ships is hard to distinguish from any book you would find on the shelf at a bookstore.

With businesses like ColorCentric and Lulu we are witnessing the emergence of an entirely new form of commercial printing, one that is capable of producing the smallest quantities of custom-designed products with almost no transaction or setup costs to get in the way of profit. As time goes by, companies like ColorCentric will expand their offerings one catalog product at a time to address the expanding demand for a wider variety of services. The integration of automated print manufacturing with automated Web-based businesses serving both producers and consumers of print has been realized. This model is the seed for the new printing industry and will expand into wider markets in coming years.

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will gain value with the passing of time.

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