The printing industry has been working towards process automation since 1995, and now with JDF we’ve reached the consensus among vendors and users on a single common standard upon which we can build process automation. There were a surprising number of JDF-enabled product introductions at drupa 2004 and many demonstrations of interoperability between multiple vendors, including several whom had never publicly worked with each other prior to drupa. JDF is now available and JDF works.

Now, there are naysayers out there, and that’s alright by me. I believe that exuberance and optimism need to be balanced by a healthy dose of pessimism. It is the pessimists who inspire us to double check our work, challenge our assumptions, and who point out things that we’ve overlooked. Its part of the everyday Zen of progress, development, and discovery, and I for one do not believe in building expectations up beyond what is currently possible. There have been comments, criticisms, and suggestions made that have resulted in clarifying the role of databases in JDF-workflows, eliminating hundreds ambiguities in JDF 1.2, and new training and communications programs that are now available and others that are still in development so that we can provide better clarity to printers and prepress experts on the subject of JDF.

It’s also important to put JDF in it proper perspective. JDF is not a magic bullet that is going to cure all your ills. If you automate an inefficient and not-well-thought out process that is losing money, you’re just going to lose money faster that you were before you automated.

However there are industry authors and pundits out there that are the source of some myths about JDF and untruths that are being spread to the public. These are not comments, criticisms, and suggestions that CIP4 members can put to good use, but rather misconceptions or hearsay about JDF that serve no purpose. Here are some examples and my reply to each:

**Myth:** JDF uses PDF as a way of carrying a job and all its information to the printing process

**Truth:** JDF is not carried in PDF (perhaps actually reading the JDF specification is in order!) JDF, (which is XML) can move with content using MIME encoding as defined in the JDF specification or can be exchanged by itself.

**Myth:** JDF can only work if the printing press, the cutting machine and the binding machine each know how to use the data.

**Truth:** There are several methods of incorporating legacy systems into JDF workflows. For instance, both Heidelberg and MAN Roland provide bridging software that enables their older proprietary-language automated press systems to participate fully in JDF workflows. EFI offers the AutoCount system that can be used to bring a press into a CIM system. Several companies provide JDF controllers that can take JMF commands and JDF from a workflow or MIS system and broker it out to the appropriate device. For instance, bielomatik’s BoD Server acts as a postpress departmental server. It will pass JMF and JDF along to those devices that understand it or provide data in bielomatik’s own language for its legacy devices. You can even deal with off-line devices by providing data to a computer or keypad system for use by the operator. Once the job is done, the operator can respond with information like, time done, final count, waste numbers, etc.

**Myth:** Very few printers have JDF enabled equipment; they would need to spend a lot of money to upgrade ALL of their equipment.

**Truth:** Nobody is suggesting that the only way to implement JDF is to replace or upgrade everything in the plant. In fact, of the 100 or so pioneering printers and prepress services that we
are aware of, not one has implemented end-to-end JDF … and yet, so far we’ve not heard any negative case-studies or ROI experiences. What are they doing? Well, as CIP4 suggests, these printers have looked at their environment to identify bottlenecks, sources of errors or miscommunication, and where capital replacement is scheduled and have put a limited JDF implementation into place; perhaps the front-end exchange with customers, or prepress, pressroom, or postpress. With some JDF experience in hand, these printers then have a place to expand from and over time they may achieve enterprise-wide JDF-enabled process automation.

**Myth:** JDF only promises limited personnel savings and there is no ROI for JDF.

**Truth:** Scott R. Borhauer, Central Imaging Manager at Brown Printing Company, reported at Vue/Point this year that he was able to trim 120 positions from a prepress operation of about 360 people as a result of implementing JDF. Whattheythink.com reports that RR Donnelley’s JDF pilot project at its Nielsen plant in Cincinnati, Ohio has scored high marks on each of its five objectives within only the first two months of operations, (see [http://members.whattheythink.com/news/newslink.cfm?id=15472.](http://members.whattheythink.com/news/newslink.cfm?id=15472.)) Those objectives include:

- Reduce the overall cost of manufacturing,
- Reduce cycle times to 48 hours or less,
- Increase throughput with less staff,
- Achieve a production process that is integrated for repeatable and predictable results, and
- Optimize equipment utilization to improve ROI.

Other printers, large and small, have reported different results depending on the nature of their implementation, but uniformly the results are very positive and not “limited.” A 2002 study by Profectus showed that a printer averaging about $10 million a year in revenue would increase their net by a low of $1.2 million (conservative) to a high of $5 million (liberal) over the course of five years as a result of implanting process automation. The author himself is inconsistent. He says in the article that “CTP mandated automated workflows, and this cut labor and increased productivity” and that was only a very limited example of process automation at work.

**Myth:** There are already automated press and postpress systems on the market, why do we need JDF?

**Truth:** Admittedly, process automation and Computer Integrated Manufacturing (CIM) are not new to the printing industry. JDF simply brings the cost of process automation down so that it is affordable to, and achievable by, the majority of printers. Gone is the high cost of training, maintenance, custom programming, and custom integration required to get various automated but proprietary systems to work together.

**Myth:** Automation has a downside: lights-out automation kills the advantage differentiation between printers and value-added pricing, and it puts the customer in control of production.

**Truth:** Has automation in the automotive industry has led to a lack of differentiation? Is your Chrysler Prowler or Ford Expedition a comparable substitute for my Chevy Ventura? (Want to trade?) Automation doesn’t mean standard workflows, standard processes, or standard products … that’s just ridiculous. As Gareth O’Brien of Objective Advantage put it, “Value-added pricing requires that you add value! So if automation means that jobs actually get produced to spec as ordered and on time by any printer as a matter of course, this would be bad?”

And do customers provide enough job data and instructions to run processes on your shop floor? No! JDF isn’t providing customers with the ability to drive a printing plant like they do a desktop printer. It is allowing them to provide input that can be used directly, and that can lead to things like faster payment of bills that have a direct relationship (and documentation trail) to customer specifications and approvals.
**Myth:** It will be a long time until we see gains from JDF because most printers have equipment from multiple vendors.

**Truth:** Interoperability between vendors of different systems, even competing systems, is the point of JDF. Our vendors have realized that they can compete on function, feature, and price, but not interoperability. At drupa there were just 21 companies demonstrating in the JDF Parc, (its all we had room for, but there were 70+ companies at drupa providing JDF solutions), and among them there were over 90 pairings of interoperable products being demonstrated. JDF interoperability between products of different vendors works today. If you live in a multi-vendor production environment, then JDF is only more important to you and the future of your company!

I hope printers will have the good sense to distinguish between punditry and factual reporting about JDF and will look into JDF for themselves. I have not met one person involved in CIP4 and the JDF development process that thinks they know it all and is unwilling to listen to new ideas and we can never get enough direct input from printers and prepress service professionals! All printers, prepress services, and other users can get involved in CIP4 activities for next to nothing where they can get real answers and real facts.