Recently CIP4 released its first catalog of JDF-enabled products called the “JDF Marketplace” (available for free download at www.cip4.org.). There are over 120 products listing in this first edition of the catalog and it provides us with some insight about what we can expect to see at drupa 2004. Although there will be several products introduced between now and then that are not covered in the “JDF Marketplace” what products are available gives us an idea of where things are moving.

For instance, there are seventeen products targeted towards creative user or origination programs. Most of the products in this category are from EFI and there are a couple of surprises. EFI is introducing a few variants of a JDF-enabled EFI Best PhotoXposure, which provides color and workflow management for digital photographers. I have to admit, as familiar as I am with JDF programs, I was a bit surprise to see an application for digital photographers in the very first “JDF Marketplace.”

In the areas of JDF-enabled font-office, preflighting and asset transfer applications there are nine entries and I’m aware that folks like Markzware will be making introductions in this area. There is more of a variety of JDF-solutions providers to choose from. EFI again makes an appearance with its Exchange print job order management system, but there is also a presence in this category from Dalim, Screen, OneVision Software AG, Enfocus, and Creo. This is an important category since much of the purpose of JDF is to preserve metadata about jobs and carry it forward from the customer into the prepress or printers systems. So new introductions like Enfocus’ Instant PDF with JDF job ticket creation or OneVision’s Asura Pro which supports preflighting and file correction via JDF, as well as the Internet job portal and asset transfer systems from the others in this category are now providing printers and prepress services with a method for improving communications with customers and saving some time and labor in the front office as well. From Vio’s Digital Workflow Suite, to Creo’s Synapse and Prepare products to Dalim’s PRiNTEMPO and Screen’s RiteOnline, there is an interesting variety of approaches to establishing a JDF customer interface.

The JDF-enabled prepress category of new products is second only to MIS and Workflow products for shear number of products. There are 30 products in this category covering everything from JDF-enabled prepress workflows, imposition, proofing, RIPs, CtP drivers and so on. There are a few surprises here. For instance, FujiFilm is quietly introducing three JDF-enabled products under the Celebra family name that provide workflow, TIFF workflow support, and RIP’ing. Heidelberg has several products in this category covering nearly every prepress function and even including a JDF-enabled Prinect SignaPack which is a layout and step & repeat software application specifically targeted to the packaging industry.

In the JDF-enabled press category there are nine entries. HP, NexPress, Heidelberg, and MAN Roland all have production management and workflow systems for use with their presses. An interesting appearance in this category is four product introductions from QuadTech, including QuadTech Color Control System, QuadTech Data Central (which supports setting advanced press controls from JDF data), QuadTech Ribbon Control System, and QuadTech Register Guidance System.
There are only four entries in the JDF-enabled postpress category from Wohlenberg, Horizon International, Colter & Peterson, and Heidelberg. The Horizon i2i product provides a single bridge between a JDF workflow or MIS system and all of Horizon’s bindery products, minimizing the need to upgrade individual devices … an interesting approach. Look for Müller-Martini to make a JDF debut at drupa as well.

There are 35 products listed in the MIS, Workflow & Production Management Systems category and JMF departmental controller category from a surprising variety of solutions suppliers both large and small. What constitutes an “MIS” system varies by company size and culture. Small printers may want something self-contained that includes both JDF-enabled workflows and production management and functions like invoicing, billing, estimating, management reporting. Really big companies will probably have completely distinct corporate IT applications, and there a lot of variation in between.

The products listed in this category reflect the breadth of this continuum options. There are JDF-enabled MIS systems that are comprehensive in their inclusion of corporate IT function support, such as EFI’s Hagen OA. Others, such as Hiflex Print, offer bridges to certain management functions such as accounting, inventory, CRM, and so on and other products are really better termed “production management” or “workflow” systems in that their function is solely focused on pressroom, prepress, or postpress production and operations. The majority of applications fit in this last category. For instance, Mitsubishi’s IPC Server II provides packages for scheduling and communicating with presses, monitoring press performance, and managing maintenance and diagnosis support. Where this package is pressroom focused, the largest number of applications in this category is focused on prepress workflow management.

Finally, the JDF Marketplace for the first time provides access to consultants that can provide training, planning, and implementation support. There are also JDF development tools listed from Objective Advantage that can be used to develop your own JDF systems, which may be of use for printers and prepress services that have customized legacy systems they want to make part of their JDF-enabled workflow.

The concentration of JDF-enabled products in the prepress, front-end, and MIS or Workflow categories make sense. If you are interested in automating your workflow there are three things that you need:

1.) The ability to deal with information provided from your customers,
2.) The ability to organize and automate the workflow and workflow management of jobs in production, and
3.) The ability to command and control the devices on the shop floor.

The number of devices that accept and use JDF and JMF data, such as stitchers, pocket folders, presses, and so on will expand greatly, but without users in the marketplace with ability to automate their production with JDF, the motivation to provide JDF enable devices wasn’t there. Now we see a broad variety of systems available that can be used to organize and management JDF-enabled workflows. This only makes sense. What is also encouraging is the number of these JDF-enabled products that provide a bridge to legacy systems. Printers and prepress services cannot be expected to replace all of their capital equipment to move to JDF … maybe over time,
but not all at once. By providing for the bridge between legacy and JDF-enabled systems, users will be able to implement and capitalize on JDF systems sooner rather than later. It appears that drupa 2004 will be “the JDF drupa” as advertised and I look forward to seeing these new systems in action!