The Market for JDF-enabled Solutions Takes Shape
By James E. Harvey, Executive Director of CIP4

Among the most common questions asked about JDF are: are there real choices in for JDF-enabled solutions in the market place that really work, how many JDF installations are there, and what to printers really want out of JDF implementations? Now we have the first glimpse of what is really happening out there and we can see that the market for JDF-enabled solutions is shaping up and quickly too.

We conducted a poll of CIP4 vendors concerning installations of JDF that we will repeat quarterly to mark the progress of JDF in the market place. We learned that, at a 95% confidence level, there are between 1405 and 1859 installations of JDF worldwide. In the future we hope there will be more member respondents so we can narrow that reported range, but none the less, that is many more than most folks would have guessed. Probably, (in the author’s humble estimate) half of those installations are where the printer or prepress service is using JDF-enabled software and they don’t even know it. But even if half of the installations are cases where printers and prepress services are actively pursuing the benefits of process automation with JDF, then we see that the market is beginning to adopt JDF in the field.

Even more encouraging yet, we also found (at a 95% confidence level) that there are between 1261 and 1714 prospective JDF users that are either pending a contract signature or are in negotiations with member vendors with respect to JDF-enabled installations. This seems to be an indication that JDF adoption is also beginning to accelerate, and that fits with what we’ve learned from the printing community.

In July CIP4 also conducted a survey of American Printer magazine readers. Since this is a reader poll, we cannot claim that the results are scientific or entirely accurate, but only that they provide an indication of what printers are doing and thinking. In that poll we found that most respondent have MIS & Workflow systems with 65% reporting that had an MIS or workflow system that followed a job from estimating through production; 27% reporting that they had an MIS system that handled front office functions only; and 8% reporting that they had no MIS system or only department level workflow systems. As expected most of the respondent buy their MIS and Workflow systems as off-the-shelf software used as is or with customization (86%) while a smaller percentage built their systems internally (14%). When asked what they were using those MIS and workflow systems for, the results were hardly surprising:

91%  Estimating
91%  Billing Information
77%  Order Entry
77%  Scheduling
77%  Sales Information
73%  Paper and Product Inventory
73%  Shop Floor Data Collection
50%  Delivery Status
36%  CRM
36% Maintenance schedules
36% Workflow analysis & job or load balancing
23% DAM/Asset management & asset transfer
18% Web-site/Ecommerce Front End
5% In-line quality control data

However, when asked what they wanted to do with their MIS and workflow systems that they were not doing today (e.g., what they expected from upgrades), 82% expected to upgrade their MIS and workflow systems and the functions they were looking for were:

11% Estimating
11% Billing Information
17% Order Entry
28% Scheduling
11% Sales Information
22% Paper and Product Inventory
22% Shop Floor Data Collection
44% Delivery Status
28% CRM
33% Maintenance schedules
50% Workflow analysis & job or load balancing
22% DAM/Asset management & asset transfer
44% Web-site/Ecommerce Front End
50% In-line quality control data

Note that the priority of interest is almost the inverse of the above list. Most notably, functions associated with process automation such as being able to connect to customers via the internet, collecting in-line quality control data, and being able to analyze workflows, balance jobs and getting and reporting job delivery status were the most desired functions.

But that begs the question, if these are features that can be added to current systems, why automate with JDF-enabled solutions? While 92% of respondents said that MIS and workflow system allowed them to enhance efficiency; 86% said that MIS and workflow systems allowed them improve their level of customer service; and 83% said that MIS and workflow systems allowed them to improve turn around times, they also reported that (57%) employees will work around the system if it adds requirements to their workload. In order to get the benefits that printers are looking for they need to consider how to preserve data as it moves between systems and eliminate re-keying so that employees are not burdened with additional labor requirements … and that is one of the primary functions of JDF.

However, while 87% of respondents have now at least heard of JDF, only 22% consider themselves to be knowledgeable of JDF or are seriously studying JDF, yet 43% of all respondents reported that they plan on implementing JDF-enabled solutions within the next 18 months. The message? Printers are after the benefits of JDF-enabled process
automation, but JDF itself is just tool … a detail for technical staff or department managers and supplying vendors of systems and software. So what do the printers who reported that they will be implementing JDF expect to achieve? According to our respondents:

- 75% Streamline information between systems/applications
- 75% Smoother flow of production
- 75% Reduce human error in data entry
- 75% Reduce labor
- 75% Improve responsiveness to customer requirements
- 69% Improve command and control of all operations
- 69% Reduce waste, including process waste
- 63% Increase capacity without increasing capital footprint
- 56% Ability to link customers with production process
- 44% Ability to link suppliers to business

These results are consistent with the reported uses and desired uses above and what we are seeing in the developing JDF solutions market. Finally, there are now choices as well for printers and prepress services to choose from, and that too is important in a developing market. In the October edition of the JDF Marketplace there are 161 JDF-enabled products and services in 311 listings (some products and services serve more than one function). This is nearly triple the listing we had in the JDF Marketplace at drupa. Furthermore, there are still CIP4 members that we are aware of that have JDF products that have not completed their JDF Marketplace listing yet and there are non-member companies, including many small MIS systems companies, with JDF-enabled products in the market. The total number of JDF-enable products in services available today is probably around 200.

So the JDF market is shaping up: products are out there that are working and printers, prepress services and other users are now putting JDF to work. The pace is quickening and the 2005 promises to be an exciting year of change and opportunity for the graphic arts community.