

# 2 0 0 9 A W A R D S

## Flex-Production Control System: Middleware for Print API

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Flex-Production Control System (Flex-PCS) is a workflow engine for connecting existing equipment with existing front-office MIS applications integrating JDF workflows with those that do not support this. The open application programming interface (API) for the technology allows integration with many application and disparate systems in JDF and non-JDF environments. SoftSolutions' Flex-PCS provides a "rules engine" for automated production workflows. Its Open System (OS) interface enables virtually any front-office Management Information Systems (MIS) and virtually any shop-floor equipment to share accurate, real-time information more cost-effectively. If end-users are able to export their existing MIS data to Microsoft Excel, it can be ported live into Flex-OS. Likewise, any legacy equipment with an electronic counter can be connected in real-time to the Flex-OS platform.

Flex-PCS provides the bridge that can connect with machine counters and weigh scales to automate count control and job costing and then integrate with existing MIS and estimating systems. Budget to actual reporting and real-time alerts and notifications provide a powerful extension to MIS systems and both legacy and new equipment.

The judges said the open API approach is something the industry has been searching for, and this system solves many of the integration problems. SoftSolutions' product strategy allows for full integration across the whole production environment independent of the existing device capabilities. This expands on the real-time feedback that is provided by the existing MIS to provide actual production data that can be used to optimize and manage based on the machine, consumables used or operators.

The Flex-OS interface enables the free flow of data necessary for Computer Integrated Manufacturing. Flex-OS enables workflow automation beyond prepress, across both press and postpress equipment using international standards such as JDF and JMF.

A growing number of graphic arts end-users ranging from Sheridan Book to Arkay Packaging to Edwards Brothers to Cenveo have licensed Flex-PCS to capture real-time Job

Costing from existing and new equipment in the context of Job Estimating data from existing MIS systems. Likewise, a growing number of strategic partners such as Timsons Press, PrintStream, Muller Martini, Prestige Scheduler and Hiflex are leveraging Flex-OS to accelerate and simplify their data integration solutions for customers seeking real-time visibility on performance metrics via any standard web browser.

"We already offer a data integration solution into SoftSolutions' Flex-Production Control System," says Laurence Snyder, president of software partner Streamline Solutions, San Rafael, CA. "We are now able to subscribe to real-time JMF updates from a growing list of print equipment that SoftSolutions is adding to their Open Flex-OS platform. We are also responding to market demand for real-time job status and job costing using the Direct Machine Interface (DMI) to legacy equipment via the Open Flex-OS platform."

In June, the Cadmus division of Cenveo selected Flex-PCS to monitor real-time performance metrics directly from an existing high-speed web press. Two weeks later, it expanded to its second press. The Flex-DMI data collector integrated with a Cadmus PLC programmed directly to the outputs of the triple-delivery web. A basic Flex-MIS data connector was configured to load job data directly from a custom DB2 database. The Flex-Timesheet brought this data together on an electronic job ticket that required minimal operator input: Just click on the Job Number, then let the machine record accurate MR time, run time, downtime, waste and speed against MIS estimates.

Also this past June, after running the Flex-PCS pilot program, book printer Edwards Brothers, Inc. awarded SoftSolutions a contract to expand Flex-PCS across its Ann Arbor, MI and Lillington, NC facilities to monitor real-time production results against front-office job estimate targets.