Monthly Print Market Update

December, 2025

Office DEPOT

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My Top Three Direct Mail Reports of 2025 - To help remember what stood out to me this year, I went through my desktop folder of PDFs. Here's a quick look at 3 of the top direct mail studies that I read this year, and why they were relevant to me.

1. **In a time of digital ad clutter and fatigue, mail can be a profitable alternative.**
   Direct mail catalogs yielded an average order value of $75, well above the 3 retailers, the highest ROAS by far (55%), and the lowest per customer acquisition cost of $37.50.

2. **Direct mail's performance has improved over the last year compared to other channels.**
   67% of marketers said that their direct mail performance had improved in the previous 12 months, a higher figure than for any other channel or strategy.

3. **Mail sent to lapsed donors performed better than acquisition mail.**
   Renewals had a better response rate, average gift, and revenue per name than acquisition efforts.

This simply reinforces the fact of digital fatigue and the power of touch.

GPO Awarded $385M in Contracts with Private-Sector PSPs - The U.S. Government Publishing Office's (GPO) print procurement program awarded $385 million in contracts with private-sector printing companies across the country to meet the printing and publishing needs of Federal agencies in fiscal year 2025. This work represented more than 61,400 orders. Nearly 79 percent of all printing ordered by Federal agencies from GPO is performed by private sector firms working under contract with the Agency.

I know this is an opportunity you've looked at, it certainly has volume potential.

DISPLAY GRAPHICS & SIGNAGE TECHNOLOGY OUTLOOK—What Kind of Day Has It Been? - How did the display graphics and signage markets fare in 2025? What were the dominant trends? And what can we expect as we head into 2026?

The Story So Far
- By the end of the 2010s, the migration to wide-format on the part of general commercial printers had been slowing.
- The COVID pandemic of 2020 struck, and wide-format printing was a saving grace during the pandemic, what with the infamous "pivot" to safety signage, distancing dots, and all the other ephemera of the COVID lockdown that have all but been forgotten now.
- In 2021, things started to return to normal as we spent the year rebuilding the industry (and the economy).

- In 2022, it was "Virus? What virus?" while the infamous "supply chain challenges" dominated the headlines, and obtaining paper, certain types of vinyl, aluminum, and other materials and consumables was a challenge—and expensive.
- By 2023 and 2024, everything was back to normal—or to the "new normal." Shops that specialized in display graphics started to look at diversification into new areas.

This is a long and wide ranging article on the past, present and future of the Wide Format market with some bearish forecasts that I think are overdone, but there is no denying that the percentage growth from 5 years ago is certainly diminished, but 10 % or so growth on a much larger market still means substantial revenue growth.

Applying Disney Magic to Training - Glen Swyers, director of marketing integration at Imagine Group, didn't actually get his start in the print industry at all. On the contrary, he spent many years as a certified trainer with the Walt Disney Company, and now he brings that mentality of how to approach learning and team education to the printing industry.

He detailed the four-step process that all Disney trainers use to quickly get new hires up to speed:

- **Step 1: Trainer Says, Trainer Does**
- **Step 2: Trainee Says, Trainer Does**
- **Step 3: Trainee Says, Trainee Does**
- **Step 4: Trainee Does It**

Short, but sweet overview of getting new employees up-to-speed.

Shoppers Curl Up with Catalog This Holiday Season - Quad's latest report, "The Return of Touch Report: Holiday Shopping, Reconnected," finds that shoppers are highly engaged with printed catalogs. They enjoy them, they share them, and they re-engage with them throughout the season. Heidi Tolliver-Walker looks at the highlights.

Quad's research found:
- 69% say catalogs turn gift inspiration into an enjoyable experience rather than a chore.
- 68% find catalogs more relaxing than scrolling online.
- 51% plan to rely more on catalogs this year to reduce online scrolling.

This simply confirms what all of us in the industry have known for years, print engages like no other medium, which means it sells like no other medium!

2025 Largest In-plants - In-plants continue to thrive in North America. Some even rival commercial printers in size. To get a better understanding of the largest in-house printing operations, we surveyed

them and then ranked them according to full-time employees and annual sales. This list includes in-plants in higher-ed, insurance, government, nonprofit, and the K-12 sector.

Some changes that stand out in the 2025 rankings:

- Seven of the top 10 revenue-generating in-plants are government printers.
- 14 in-plants on our list have increased the size of their staffs since 2024.
- Higher-ed in-plants make up more than 43% of the largest in-plants ranked by employees.

This is an even larger view of In-plants, like the Universities below, but with even more analysis around them.

Graphic Arts Employment Flat to Down Slightly in September - Net printing employment in September 2025 saw printing industry employment decline 0.3% from August—overall, production employment was down 0.6% and non-production employment was up by 0.2%.

Sappi and UPM Propose New Joint Venture Company - Sappi Limited ("Sappi") and UPM-Kymmene Corporation ("UPM") have announced the signing of a non-binding letter of intent to form a non-listed, independent 50/50 Joint Venture for graphic paper.

This Joint Venture will bring together Sappi's European Graphic Paper business with UPM's Communication Papers business in Europe, the UK and the US. The transaction will be subject to the fulfilment of a number of regulatory and other conditions, including shareholder approval. The parties intend signing definitive agreements during the first half of calendar year 2026 and expect to close the proposed transaction by the end of calendar year 2026, once all conditions precedent are fulfilled.

This JV is being driven by two powerful factors: Declining demand for Graphic Papers and high power costs in the EU and paper machines consume huge amounts of energy. Sappi's goal is to reduce the percent of Graphic paper volume after the merger of the assests to around 20% of its volume.

First-of-its-Kind Printing Industry Census Reveals a Diverse Ecosystem - For the first time ever, we have put together a printing industry census. Led by PRINTING United Alliance Media Brands Editorial Director Denise Gustavson, the *2025 Printing Industry Census* offers the most comprehensive portrait to date of the people who power the modern printing industry. Through its blend of statistical insights, personal testimonies, and human-centered storytelling, the report paints a vibrant picture of an industry rooted in centuries-old craftsmanship while continually adapting to new technology, shifting workforce dynamics, and evolving cultural expectations. Far from a simple demographic survey, this census captures the lived experiences, motivations, and aspirations of the professionals who give the print medium its enduring relevance.

This report is stunning in its depth of details on personal information, not just the usual corporate info.

The Largest University In-plants - Six university in-plants generated more than $7 million in sales, and five have more than 50 ix University in-plants generated more than $7 million in sales, and five have more than 50 employees. Seven have increased their employee counts since 2024.

There's some serious business going on here, but most are not run as a profit-making enterprise.

Generative Engine Optimization (GEO) for Printing Companies – So, think of SEO, but optimized for Generative searches, where answers, rather than links are created.

This is a good overview of what it is and how it is in addition to, not replacing SEO.

Taking Your Graphics to the Next Dimension - Oh, how far print has come. It might have started off simple with just text on pages, but time, creativity, and advancing technologies gave us an explosion of ways to put ink on any number of substrates for vibrant, eye-catching applications. However, the industry wasn't content to stop there: It entered the third dimension. Today, dimensional graphics are exploding in popularity, and for good reason.

"When we look at the dimensional graphics space, a significant trend is the increasing use of tactile elements to create an engaging, multi-sensory experience," says April Lytle, regional marketing manager at Scodix North America. "This goes beyond traditional techniques, with brands now leveraging these elements for both aesthetic appeal and a more inclusive consumer experience."

So, we see continuing growth in the Embellishment Market. It just makes sense that embellishing Wide-format printing would follow, here's an overview.

The Future of Profitability in Print: Where We Go from Here - In the third installment of this new series, Nick Gawreluk continues to document his experiences starting up a new print software venture: Print Profit. In this episode: where the industry goes from here, and how a new generation of leaders are redefining how profitability is understood and achieved.

Thought provoking article on a different way to run your business/jobs, rather than continuing the "normal" way of processing.

Legislative and Regulatory Update: What You Need to Know – Political considerations are always an intrusion to our businesses, but you ignore them at your own peril.

Here are 3 topics that were addressed in this article:
- What is the most important thing that happened in your area of interest since the beginning of this year?
- What is the most important development in your area of interest that you expect to see for the year ahead?

- How can print businesses best prepare themselves to perform well in your area of interest, either in the presence or absence of regulatory guidance?

Artificial Intelligence in Today's Workplaces - AI isn't replacing human intelligence at work; it's amplifying what people can achieve. When implemented thoughtfully, AI expands human potential in ways that we're only just beginning to understand. The result is workplaces that are simultaneously more efficient, more adaptive, and more human-centered than ever before.

The future of work will not be a contest that forces us to choose between human and artificial intelligence. It will be a partnership that blends analytical precision with human judgment to achieve outcomes neither could accomplish alone. Firms that embrace this synergy today are positioning themselves to lead the next era of the digital transformation. They will also help define AI automation for years to come.

My view is a bit different; what's happening with AI is a continuing path of pushing IT capabilities into the hands of the users and having fewer IT workers in general. Whether the users are ready, or capable of absorbing these tasks and mastering the skills will be a combination of their talents and desire to succeed and the companies and vendors making the tools accessible to the non-technical user.

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My Top Three Direct Mail Reports of 2025

Credit: MirageC, Getty Images

By Paul Bobnak

For years I've been collecting mail, because yes, it's been part of my career. But that only gives me a partial picture of what's going on at any one time in the universe of direct mail and marketing. So I'm always on the lookout for surveys, reports, and studies about mail, as well as print, marketing, retail, and whatever else that seems like it may offer some new way to understand the environment(s) that we and our customers all operate in.

As a quick aside, I have to tip my hat to Denise Gustavson and her team here at PI for their outstanding work producing The 2025 Printing Industry Census. It's a fun and interesting read that's about us, very visual and engaging. And hopefully, it will help guide how companies in the industry hire and grow their workforces.

To help remember what stood out to me this year, I went through my desktop folder of PDFs. Here's a quick look at 3 of the top direct mail studies that I read this year, and why they were relevant to me.

1. **In a time of digital ad clutter and fatigue, mail can be a profitable alternative.**
   Let's start with an article by Colorado State University business and marketing professor Jonathan Zhang, published in the Fall issue of MIT Sloan Management Review. In "How Direct Mail Delivers in the Age of Digital Marketing," he relates how he conducted a range of studies, tests, and surveys involving brands, marketing executives, and consumers. In one experiment, he paired with an e-commerce beauty/personal care company to test and measure Return on

Ad Spend (ROAS) for mailed catalogs vs. the digital ad platforms of Google, Facebook, and Amazon.

Direct mail catalogs yielded an average order value of $75, well above the 3 retailers, the highest ROAS by far (55%), and the lowest per customer acquisition cost of $37.50.

I love the empirical research that went into his work here, so if that's your thing, I recommend checking all of it out.

2. **Direct mail's performance has improved over the last year compared to other channels.**
Marketers and consumers were surveyed for Franklin Madison Direct about their use of and preferences for direct mail in the "2025 Direct Mail Marketing Benchmark Report."
67% of marketers said that their direct mail performance had improved in the previous 12 months, a higher figure than for any other channel or strategy.

Also, at least half consider mail to be more effective than digital for winback efforts, acquisition, and upselling or cross-selling. The study authors cite increased investments and testing as factors driving this improvement. Consumer attitudes about their enjoyment of mail and print are also worth considering.

3. **Mail sent to lapsed donors performed better than acquisition mail.**
That comes from the folks at Moore, who looked at results from hundreds of nonprofits totaling $1.5 billion in donations. This report, "2024 in Review Charitable Giving by the Numbers", includes quite a few sections dealing with direct mail either alone or as part of omnichannel campaigns.

Renewals had a better response rate, average gift, and revenue per name than acquisition efforts.

I've seen a lot of data and campaigns over the years, so this finding certainly helps to bolster the case for investing more in renewal mail. There's also an interesting point made later on about how some donors have a "preferred channel of giving" (offline or online), but that preference was influenced by mail. The study notes that mail has been under-attributed and "smart marketers" should incorporate it into omnichannel campaigns. I couldn't agree more.

There really is a lot of value in these studies. As dry as the writing can sometimes be, the findings provide important insights about trends, competitive intelligence, audience needs and pain points, and strategy. And with all of that, you can uncover and create opportunities to improve your mail and raise your ROI.

Printing Impressions – December 17

GPO Awarded $385M in Contracts with Private-Sector PSPs

The U.S. Government Publishing Office's (GPO) print procurement program awarded $385 million in contracts with private-sector printing companies across the country to meet the printing and publishing needs of Federal agencies in fiscal year 2025. This work represented more than 61,400 orders. Nearly 79 percent of all printing ordered by Federal agencies from GPO is performed by private sector firms working under contract with the Agency. GPO typically competitively awards contracts to approximately 1,000 printing contractors a year. Nearly 10,000 companies are registered to do business with the Agency, using GPO as their one-stop shop for print and related services contract opportunities. In fiscal year 2025, GPO awarded jobs to vendors in all 50 states, plus the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and Guam. GPO's relationship with the private sector dates to the 1940s. This program provides significant economic opportunity for the printing industry and local economies.

GPO's top contractors for FY2025:
- NPC, INC. – Pennsylvania $66.5 million
- XEROX CORPORATION – District of Columbia $43.8 million
- ACR III LSC HLD OWENSVILLE – Missouri $43.5 million
- ADVANTAGE MAILING LLC – California $32.9 million
- LEXMARK INTERNATIONAL, INC. – Kentucky $10.9 million
- WM. & HEINTZ MAP CORP. – Maryland $10.0 million
- VASTEC, INC. – Florida $7.5 million
- FEDEX OFFICE (GPOEXPRESS) – Tennessee $7.2 million
- QUALITY ASSOCIATES INC. – Maryland $6.6 million
- MAC PAPER CONVERTERS – Florida $6.4 million

"Every year, our partnerships with private-sector printers help support local economies while making it easier for Federal agencies to get the printing services they need," said GPO Director Hugh Nathanial Halpern. "The strength of our print procurement program really comes down to a few things: great industry partners, our first-rate customer service experience, and our commitment to the taxpayers we all serve."

Studies by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and the Joint Committee on Printing have shown that the most cost-effective use of Federal agency printing dollars is through GPO's partnership with the private sector printing and information product industry. Federal agencies realize significant savings by using GPO, as compared to printing products themselves. In addition, when agencies use GPO, their information products are made available to the public through GPO's GovInfo (link below), the Federal Depository Library, and Government Publication Sales programs.
Source: GPO

They Think – December 17

DISPLAY GRAPHICS & SIGNAGE TECHNOLOGY OUTLOOK—What Kind of Day Has It Been?

How did the display graphics and signage markets fare in 2025? What were the dominant trends? And what can we expect as we head into 2026?

By [Richard Romano](#)
Thursday, October 16, 2025

The Story So Far
- By the end of the 2010s, the migration to wide-format on the part of general commercial printers had been slowing.
- The COVID pandemic of 2020 struck, and wide-format printing was a saving grace during the pandemic, what with the infamous "pivot" to safety signage, distancing dots, and all the other ephemera of the COVID lockdown that have all but been forgotten now.
- In 2021, things started to return to normal as we spent the year rebuilding the industry (and the economy).
- In 2022, it was "Virus? What virus?" while the infamous "supply chain challenges" dominated the headlines, and obtaining paper, certain types of vinyl, aluminum, and other materials and consumables was a challenge—and expensive.
- By 2023 and 2024, everything was back to normal—or to the "new normal." Shops that specialized in display graphics started to look at diversification into new areas.

Where does that leave us in 2025?
Smithers has a fairly bearish forecast of the display graphics and signage market. In their report *[The Future of Printed Signage in a Digital World to 2028](#)*, they see the global value for "posters, banners, flags, backdrops, point-of-sale (PoS) displays, billboards, decals & transfers, vehicle/fleet graphics, building wraps, corporate graphics, and trade show materials" in 2023 will reach $40.99 billion—down ~$5 billion from their pre-pandemic value. They add:
- Volume of printed signage has fallen from 10.81 billion meters square in 2019, to 8.92 billion meters square in 2020, although demand for printed signage did recover in 2021–2022.
- Output for all printed signage is projected to reach 10.08 billion meters square in 2023
- Upward trajectory is now levelling off thanks to inflation, energy costs, and geopolitical issues.
- Demand for printed signage will only grow marginally—value increasing at 0.2% CAGR to $25.15 billion in 2028.
- Volumes have a 0.7% CAGR to 2028; global output will reach 10.43 billion meters square in 2028.

Smithers is a bit more pessimistic than I would be, but their upshot is that there is an increased need to diversify into new application areas.

The Maturing of Wide Format
And it's true that our annual Print Business Outlook surveys have found a cooling—though admittedly stabilizing—of interest in wide-format printing as a *new* business opportunity (see Figure 1):
Figure 1. Adding Wide-Format Printing Capabilities as a New Business Opportunity
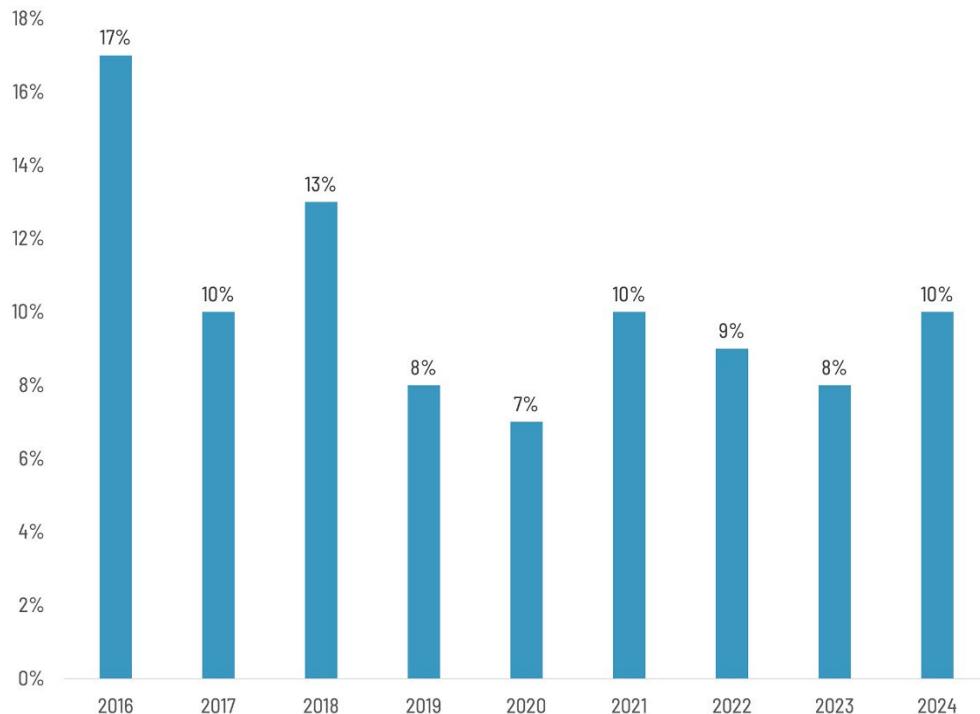
Source: WhatTheyThink Print Outlook surveys, 2016–2024

We have generally found that about one-third of the industry falls into the category of what I would call the "never wides," or who have no interest in adding wide-format equipment—or so they say now. Of course, there is no reason for anyone to add it if it falls outside the scope of what it is they produce. A publication printer or a data-driven direct mail business may legitimately have no interest in display graphics. And that's cool. (See Figure 2.)

Figure 2. Have You Already Added or Plan to Add Wide-Format Printing Capabilities?

Wide-Format Printing (like Signs, Displays, Banners)
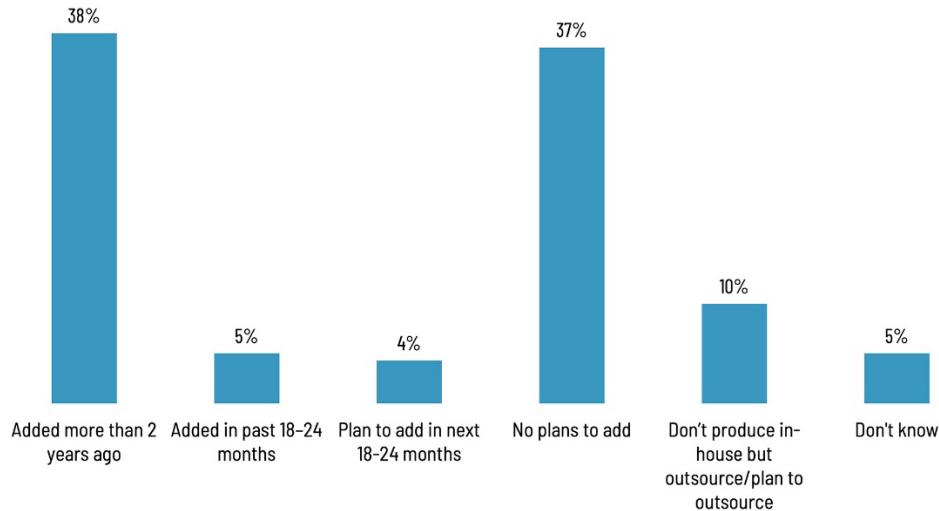
Source: WhatTheyThink Print Outlook survey, 2024

Investment in wide-format equipment continues, with particular interest in flatbed equipment, which has been a trend for the past few years (see Figure 3):

Figure 3. Planned Investment in Wide-Format Printing Technologies
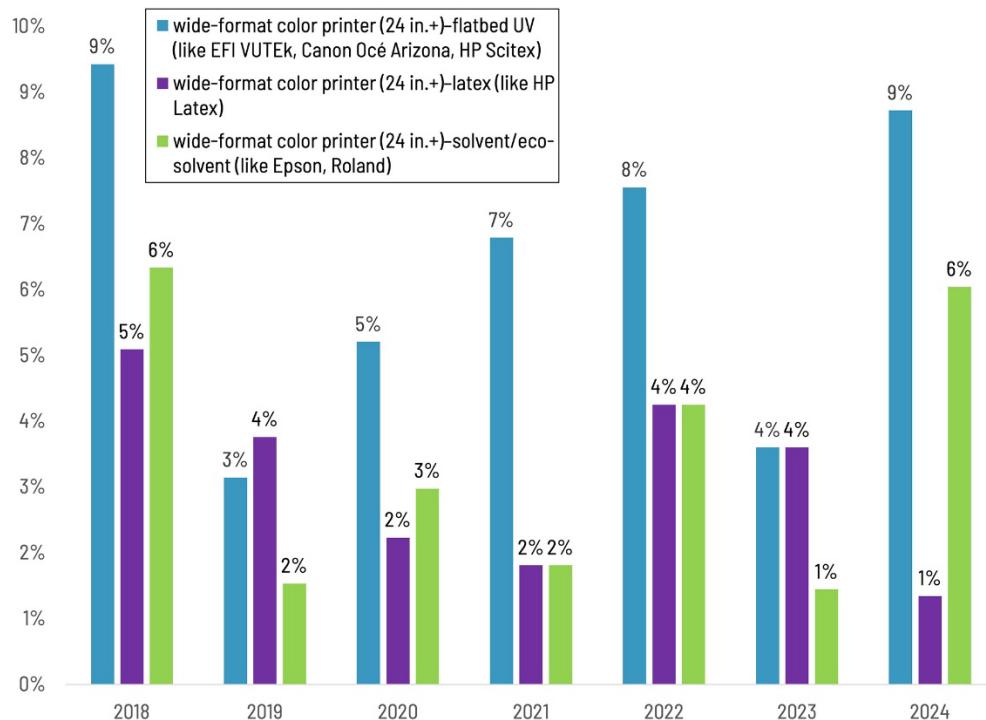
Source: WhatTheyThink Print Outlook surveys, 2018–2024

Solvent printers have also made a little bit of a rebound, particularly as "eco"-solvent ink formulations make them less hazardous than had previously been the case, and given their versatility they can be a less expensive option than UV flatbeds—and they also take up less room.

As for labels and packaging, packaging has been of more interest than labels—the percentage of our Print Outlook respondents who saw new business opportunities in adding packaging printing capabilities has averaged about 8–9% since 2016, peaking at 13% in 2021. This is likely because a lot of the same equipment they use for display work (i.e., flatbed printers) can also be used for packaging, such as corrugated materials. Indeed, Canon, to name one vendor, has introduced equipment configurations for its Colorado and Texas lines to produce various kinds of packaging.

Adding digital label printing has been a bit less exciting, never rising above 6% of respondents.

Wide-Format and Display Graphics Outlook
As we charge through to the end of 2025, here is what the dominant trends are going to be (in alphabetical order):

AI

Sign and display companies are starting to use so-called "artificial intelligence" (AI). The sign franchises in particular have been using AI for design, as well as for sales. For example, AI can be used for "role-playing" to help salespeople have better conversations with prospective customers in markets with which they may be unfamiliar. The sign franchises in particular are educating their franchisees on how to use AI for these various purposes, and tools like Adobe Firefly are helping these businesses generate design ideas. The idea is not to replace anyone with AI, but to allow employees to use it as a tool to be more productive.

Automation

And of course the ongoing demand for sustainability and automation—not just software automation but things like robotics (i.e., arms for loading and unloading boards). As economies of scale kick in, these add-ons will become more affordable for mid-size and maybe even small shops.

Robots aren't new, but in print, they've arrived with purpose. They're tackling labor shortages, improving efficiency, and helping in-plants stay competitive. This isn't a trend to wait out. It's a shift to lean into. As Mark Boyt puts it: "Don't wait for perfection—start exploring practical automation use cases now."

In-plants are a big market for wide-format equipment, so if they're thinking about robots, wide-format-compatible robotics are probably on a lot of their radars.

Diversification

Diversification is becoming important not just for commercial printers but display graphics producers as well, and now that the same equipment can produce display graphics as well as packaging, POP, etc., there has never been a better time to expand into new areas. (Also, too, textiles.) Wide-format equipment, especially UV units, have long been used to print on 3D objects—and Roland, to name one vendor, has officially branded their UV flatbeds as "VersaObject," indicating their suitability for printing on objects.

And diversification is the watchword for this demographic—Keypoint found that more than half of the businesses surveyed plan to expand their application mix in the next 12 to 24 months.

Education

For signmakers in particular, education has become a major vertical—more so than it ever was. WhatTheyThink has been involved in judging the FASTSIGNS Project of the Year Awards for the past few years and well over half of this year's entries were schools, and not just colleges, but middle schools, high schools, grammar schools—there was even a Catholic school entry which was very cool. Schools at all levels have become more competitive than they used to be, and the overall look of the institution is a big part of student recruitment and retention.

FASTSIGNS' 2025 Project of the Year was won by FASTSIGNS Missoula, Mont., who revamped the University of Montana's Lodge Dining Center.

Economy

Of course, the print business is ultimately at the mercy of overall economic conditions, and, well, there are signs of trouble. GDP growth has been pretty good, but slowing compared to 2024. The job market is showing signs of weakening, and inflation is on the rise. How this will impact demand for print—and the business conditions of print providers, particularly in the display graphics space—remains to be seen.

Employment

There are two sides to the employment issue: production staff shortages, will continue but more entrepreneurial business owners, especially in franchises. Since COVID, there have been more entrepreneurial workers overall. New business formation spiked in 2020 (The Great Resignation) and while current Census Bureau data show that it's down from its peak, it's still at historic highs. Many of these new businesses are in traditional wide-format and signage verticals like retail. New businesses represent good opportunities for new customers as they often need a lot of the things that printers and sign shops produce.

Real Estate

One indicator I periodically check in on is the American Institute of Architects (AIA)/Deltek Architecture Billings Index (ABI), which is a leading indicator for new commercial real estate investment—and thus potential new signage projects. According to the AIA, in July 2025, demand for design services continued to be relatively sluggish, although there is a glimmer of optimism. The Billings Index has been below 50 for the last year and a half except for October 2024 (anything below 50 is poor). Inflation and a slowing job market were cited as the big issues.

Tariffs

The recent "tariffopolooza" will likely impact display graphics producers and signmakers—traditional signmakers use a lot of aluminum construction materials which have already been subject to tariffs (we saw this in 2017). We do know that the uncertainty surrounding US trade policy is leading many businesses to forestall major capital investments until things settle down, although that may not be very soon. But, then again, no small number of companies are saying "Damn the torpedoes—full speed ahead!" and are continuing as usual.

Applying Disney Magic to Training

By Toni McQuilken

Glen Swyers, director of marketing integration at Imagine Group, and former Disney-certified trainer, spoke at PRINTING United Expo 2025. | Credit: Toni McQuilken

Glen Swyers, director of marketing integration at Imagine Group, didn't actually get his start in the print industry at all. On the contrary, he spent many years as a certified trainer with the Walt Disney Company, and now he brings that mentality of how to approach learning and team education to the printing industry.

He detailed the four-step process that all Disney trainers use to quickly get new hires up to speed:

Step 1: Trainer Says, Trainer Does.
Initially, he notes, do the activity while also describing it. Go through it a few times, so both those who learn audibly can hear the instructions a few times, and those who learn by watching can see how it comes together at the same time. It's a great way to engage both types of learners and ensure everyone can get the information in the way that works for them.

Step 2: Trainee Says, Trainer Does.
Next, have the trainees describe the process and walk the trainer through the steps, with the trainer still actually doing the actions, and being able to offer on-the-spot corrections, or ask questions such as "are you sure" to help reinforce the steps.

Step 3: Trainee Says, Trainee Does.
The next step is to have the trainees actually give the process a try themselves. Have them describe what they're doing as they do it, and again, the trainer can be there to gently guide, answer questions, and help them commit the actions to memory correctly. This engages those who learn best by actually doing something.

Step 4: Trainee Does It.
Finally, the trainer steps back and offers no feedback as the trainees go through the process themselves. At the end of the task feedback can be given, but hopefully by this point it is just demonstrating that they understand the steps and can repeat them reliably every time without further instruction.

"Even ourselves, as individuals, when we receive just a little bit of information in a way that's understandable, our IQ didn't change, but our output definitely changed," Swyers notes. He stressed that following a process like this engages every type of learner, and means that someone who learns best one way isn't going to be frustrated and fall behind — or worse, walk away from the company and the industry because they think it's not for them.

He also stressed that it's not just about presenting the information in a way that each type of learner can connect with, it's also about ensuring people understand why they are learning the information to begin with. Without that component, even the best training system will never work.

Swyers notes, "So basic learning concepts for adults, believe it or not, us adults, we learn differently than kids. One of the things that we learn better on is when it's relevant to our needs. Probably a bad example now, but I'm old enough to remember when we would get an entire Owner's Manual with our car, and it would be in the glove box. Have you ever read the entire Owner's Manual? Have you ever had to change a tire and you're trying to figure out where the heck you put this thing in? So you go to that page. That's an example of us as adults — we learn the things that are relevant to us. When it's relevant, I want to learn it. Part of my challenge to you is, when you're teaching and training individuals

at your organization, you'll have to explain why it's important for them to learn this, because if it's not relevant to them, they don't want to do it right."

For printers looking to train new press operators on equipment, new prepress specialists on workflow, or anyone in the company on automation initiatives, this is good advice. First establish why the new information is relevant and important to each person and their job specifically, and then train them in such a way that all three sensory learning types are engaged — those who learn hearing something, those who learn seeing something, and those who learn doing something.

Finally, he said that training isn't necessarily and one-and-done endeavor. Instead, after the primary training is done, reinforce and give feedback as needed to really help the new process or equipment become second nature. And feedback should be immediate — just like with dogs, he joked, you don't try to discipline or reward them for something that happened two weeks ago. People are much the same.

"In 24 hours you really want to be giving them that feedback," Swyers stresses. "And I really, really, really, really, mean this. This is something I really try hard to do, and it doesn't matter if it's physical, in a room like this, or nowadays, if it's in a team group chat, or if it's an email blast, etc. — do all your praise in public, but do all your critique in private."

If someone does something right, gets it on the first try, is really nailing the new procedures, has that new press up and purring beautifully, make sure to give that feedback out in the open. Let everyone hear and see that you recognize and reward when things go right. But at the same time, if someone missies a step, or is struggling with something, pull them aside and give that feedback privately. And make it specific — I noticed you're having trouble with this sequence of steps, lets walk through it a few more times together, for example. Or you keep forgetting to ensure files are properly organized and pushed into this new workflow, and I don't want it to impact your productivity. Obviously every situation will be different, but don't just tear someone down — make your feedback constructive, along with suggestions on exactly what they can to do to help improve and why taking those steps is relevant to them.

The entire presentation that Swyers gave at the 2025 PRINTING United Expo, was full of even more great tips and information to help attendees become better, more effective, and more empathetic trainers. Make sure to mark your calendar now for PRINTING United Expo 2026 in Las Vegas, Sept. 23-25, to hear more great speakers and educational sessions like this.

What They Think – December 12

Shoppers Curl Up with Catalog This Holiday Season

Quad's latest report, "The Return of Touch Report: Holiday Shopping, Reconnected," finds that shoppers are highly engaged with printed catalogs. They enjoy them, they share them, and they re-engage with them throughout the season. Heidi Tolliver-Walker looks at the highlights.

By Heidi Tolliver-Walker
Wednesday, December 10, 2025

Digital screens? Bah, humbug! Shoppers are rediscovering the value of the tangible. This is one of the key takeaways from Quad's latest report, "The Return of Touch Report: Holiday Shopping, Reconnected."

In the survey, conducted September 18-20 by the Harris Poll, Quad found that Americans value in-store shopping as a holiday ritual and are increasingly focused on shopping local. As part of this re-connection with the physical world, they are also e-engaging with printed catalogs.

According to the report, 70% of Americans see catalogs as a good starting point for holiday shopping, and 69% agree that catalogs often spark gift ideas they wouldn't have found online.

The latter is an interesting data point, considering the now-ubiquity of personalized recommendations. But personalized recommendation engines have their downsides, too: "We only show you what we think you'll like." We all love the curated recommendations, but what happens if there's something we might like that the recommendation engine is hiding from us? FOMO!

Tapping the Value of the Experience
Catalogs also tap into the growing value shoppers are placing on experience. There is a big difference between doom scrolling on Amazon and sitting on the couch, sipping a great cup of coffee, and flipping through a well-designed catalog.

Quad's research found:
- 69% say catalogs turn gift inspiration into an enjoyable experience rather than a chore.
- 68% find catalogs more relaxing than scrolling online.
- 51% plan to rely more on catalogs this year to reduce online scrolling.

Can you just see a woman in a Santa hat curled up on the couch, steaming cup o' Joe in her hand, and a catalog on her lap? (In case you're having trouble visualizing, we created an AI-generated image to help you.)

Give Me That Old-Fashioned Emotional Connection
Then there is that emotional connection. According to the survey, 42% of Americans feel excited when a holiday catalog arrives, rising to 54% of Gen Z and 51% of Millennials. Forty-one percent (41%) say receiving a catalog makes them feel more connected to the retailer, increasing to 52% of Gen Z and 50% of Millennials.

One of the reasons that shoppers feel more connected? Because they are physically interacting with the pages in their hands:
- 42% mark or circle items they'd like to give.
- 36% mark items they'd like to receive.
- 29% scan QR codes or visit product websites directly from catalogs, rising to 49% of Gen Z and 39% of Millennials.

Like picking up a puppy in the pet store—you pick it up (interact with it), the more you like it.

Print Hangs Around
Marketers like print, too, because it sticks around. It is the gift that keeps on giving. Indeed, nearly one in four (39%) survey respondents keeps catalogs in their homes throughout the season, and another 39% share them with household members.

Furthermore:

- 37% of survey respondents use catalogs to start conversations with kids or family about holiday wish lists.
- 60% revisit catalogs multiple times throughout the season.
- 59% share and discuss catalog gift ideas with others.

In this industry, we know that printed catalogs have power, and the Quad survey gives us more insight into why. It's not only the fact that it's tangible. It's all the things we do *because* it's tangible. We sit with it, we spill coffee on it, we circle things and circle back to look at them again. We share it with others. That's quite a stat sheet for a stack of bound paper.

Happy (Cataloging) holidays!

2025 Largest In-plants

Full Report Attached

We have ranked the country's largest in-plant printing operations.

In-plants continue to thrive in North America. Some even rival commercial printers in size. To get a better understanding of the largest in-house printing operations, we surveyed them and then ranked them according to full-time employees and annual sales. This list includes in-plants in higher-ed, insurance, government, nonprofit, and the K-12 sector.

Some changes that stand out in the 2025 rankings:

- Seven of the top 10 revenue-generating in-plants are government printers.
- 14 in-plants on our list have increased the size of their staffs since 2024.
- Higher-ed in-plants make up more than 43% of the largest in-plants ranked by employees.

We have also analyzed trends at the largest in-plants and included data on their use of AI, services they provide, revenue increases, major challenges, equipment upgrade plans, and more.

Download our list to find out who the largest in-plants are and where you rank among your peers.

Offered Free by: In-plant Impressions

What They Think – December 8

Graphic Arts Employment Flat to Down Slightly in September

Net printing employment in September 2025 saw printing industry employment decline 0.3% from August—overall, production employment was down 0.6% and non-production employment was up by 0.2%.

Friday, December 05, 2025

Employment in thousands of workers	August 2024	August 2025	Y/Y Change	September 2024	September 2025	Y/Y Change
Printing, all	355.8	348.0	-2.2%	354.4	346.8	-2.1%
Printing, production	245.0	240.5	-1.8%	242.9	239.1	-1.6%
Printing, less production	110.8	107.5	-3.0%	111.5	107.7	-3.4%
Signs, all	76.5	77.6	1.4%	76.7		
Signs, production	43.9	41.9	-4.6%	44.6		
Signs, less production	32.6	35.7	9.5%	32.1		
Converted paper products	270.1	274.0	1.4%	270.4		
Paperboard containers	160.4	161.9	0.9%	160.2		
Paper bags and coated and treated paper	53.7	54.9	2.2%	54.2		
Stationery and other converted paper products	56.0	57.2	2.1%	56.0		
Plastics packaging materials, film, and sheet	103.5	105.6	2.0%	103.3		
Publishing	915.4	927.7	1.3%	916.0	931.9	1.7%
Newspaper, periodical, book, and directory publishers	267.0	260.6	-2.4%	264.9		
Newspaper publishers	88.2	84.5	-4.2%	87.2		
Periodical publishers	65.1	63.6	-2.3%	64.5		
Book publishers	56.9	56.4	-0.9%	56.3		
Directory, mailing list, and other publishers	56.8	56.1	-1.2%	56.9		
Graphic design services	54.0	51.9	-3.9%	53.7		
Advertising and related services	496.4	496.4	0.0%	496.4	493.3	-0.6%
Advertising agencies	219.0	222.9	1.8%	217.8		
Public relations agencies	69.6	64.7	-7.0%	69.6		
Media buying agencies and media representatives	35.0	32.6	-6.9%	35.0		
Display advertising	30.3	30.0	-1.0%	30.0		
Direct mail advertising	30.9	28.5	-7.8%	30.6		
Advertising material distribution and other advertising services	111.6	117.7	5.5%	113.4		

We finally got September employment numbers (but we will not be getting an October report because of the government shutdown during the time the data would have been collected.)

As we have been tracking, throughout spring 2025, printing employment had been generally flat, but started to decline as we headed into summer. Heading into September, it has remained fairly

flattish/declining, depending how you want to define "flat" and "declining." Net printing employment in September 2025 saw printing industry employment decline 0.3% from August—overall, production employment was down 0.3% and non-production employment up 0.2%.

Publishing employment was up 0.5% from August to July.

Looking at other business categories, the reporting of which lags a month:
Overall employment in the signage industry was down 0.5% from July to August 2025, with sign production employment unchanged, but non-production down 1.1%.

Converted paper products employment was unchanged from July to August, with paperboard container employment down 0.4% and paper bags and coated and treated paper employment also down 0.2%. These are all much smaller drops than we had seen from June to July.

Looking at some specific publishing and creative segments, from July to August, periodical publishing employment was down 0.5%, while newspaper publishing employment was down 1.5% and book publishing was up 0.2%. Graphic design employment was down 0.2%, ad agency employment was up 0.3%, and PR agency employment was down 1.8%. Direct mail advertising employment was up 1.8%—a turnaround from its having been down 2.8% from June to July.

Printing Impressions – December 4

Sappi and UPM Propose New Joint Venture Company

Sappi Limited ("Sappi") and UPM-Kymmene Corporation ("UPM") have announced the signing of a non-binding letter of intent to form a non-listed, independent 50/50 Joint Venture for graphic paper.

This Joint Venture will bring together Sappi's European Graphic Paper business with UPM's Communication Papers business in Europe, the UK and the US. The transaction will be subject to the fulfilment of a number of regulatory and other conditions, including shareholder approval. The parties intend signing definitive agreements during the first half of calendar year 2026 and expect to close the proposed transaction by the end of calendar year 2026, once all conditions precedent are fulfilled. Commenting on their decision to create the Joint Venture, Sappi Limited CEO Steve Binnie and UPM President and CEO Massimo Reynaudo said: "The proposed joint venture represents a decisive response to the structural changes in the European graphic paper industry, offering a path to strengthen its resilience and provide long-term commitment and supply security to customers." Commenting on the benefits to Sappi, Steve Binnie said: "Sappi is very excited by the potential that this joint venture, if approved, will bring. We have been searching for a solution to secure a long-term profitable future for our European business. This innovative partnership with UPM will deliver a focused business bringing the best assets and people together to create a strong future which can ensure sustained support for our customers and can also ensure that the European manufacturing base is protected.

He continued: "The proposed joint venture provides a unique opportunity to unlock value for our shareholders. The transaction delivers on Sappi's Thrive strategy to reduce our direct exposure to the graphic paper segment and enables us to reposition our portfolio towards higher-growth, higher value segments. Sappi's direct sales volume exposure to the graphic paper segment will decrease to below 20% after the transaction is completed and our 50% shareholding in the joint venture is anticipated to generate more value than the standalone Sappi graphic paper business.

He concluded: "Ultimately the transaction will enable Sappi to reduce debt in the medium term and in the future the cash dividends from the joint venture will further lower debt." The launch of this proposed joint venture takes place against a backdrop of sustained structural decline in demand within

the graphic paper market alongside overcapacity and low utilization rates of assets in Europe. This significant erosion has been caused by a number of factors including a structural shift toward digital media, declining print advertising revenues, falling newspaper and magazine circulations, and the rapid adoption of electronic media and workflows.

This deterioration has been further intensified by rising costs (in particular energy) in Europe. Recent trade tensions and tariffs have further disrupted trade flows resulting in increased Asian exports to the European Union (the EU).

Marco Eikelenboom, CEO of Sappi Europe commented: "To remain competitive and sustainable in the long term, consolidation is needed. Consolidation will contribute to a more robust and resilient European graphic paper industry, safeguarding security of domestic supply for the printing sector."

The key benefits of the consolidation of Sappi and UPM's graphic paper assets are:
- By strategically reallocating production volumes to the most efficient paper machines, the Joint Venture will achieve more sustainable capacity utilisation and stronger operational performance, while continuing to serve customers with a broad portfolio of European graphic paper products.
- The operational synergies created through the Joint Venture (which are anticipated to be at least €100 million per annum once the Transaction is implemented) provide a pathway to realise greater value from the combined asset base, delivering enhanced profitability and stronger cash-flow generation compared to what the independent operations could achieve on their own, to the benefit of all stakeholders including shareholders.
- By optimising capacity utilisation, enhancing operational efficiencies and continuing to invest in decarbonisation, the Joint Venture can reduce its overall climate impact, helping to advance the EU's Clean Industrial Deal objectives.

The proposed transaction will be structured to enable the parties to respectively contribute the assets detailed below to the newly formed Joint Venture with Sappi and UPM as founding shareholders and each holding 50% of the issued shares.

Sappi and UPM will sell their respective businesses and assets mentioned below to the newly formed Joint Venture with a combined enterprise value of €1,420 million. At closing the Joint Venture will raise debt to fund the purchase prices payable to Sappi and UPM respectively. The Joint Venture's dividend policy will be to distribute all excess cash to its shareholders.

The Sappi business is valued at €320 million which, based on an FY2025 EBITDA of €64 million represents a 5x multiple. Sappi will transfer pension and other liabilities of €53 million and net assets valued at €267 million to the Joint Venture. In return Sappi will receive cash of €139 million and 50% shareholding in the Joint Venture.

The UPM business is valued at €1,100 million, which represents a 4.6x multiple of the last reported 12 months to September 2025 EBITDA. UPM will transfer pension and other liabilities of €360 million and net assets of €740 million to the Joint Venture. In return UPM will receive cash of €613 million and 50% shareholding in the Joint Venture.

Sappi will contribute the following assets: Gratkorn Mill (Austria); Ehingen Mill (Germany), Maastricht Mill (The Netherlands), and Kirkniemi Mill (Finland); as well as Sappi Europe's wood supply Joint Ventures.

UPM will contribute their Communication Papers business assets which are located at the following UPM mills: Augsburg (Germany), Schongau (Germany), Nordland paper lines 1 and 4 (Germany), Rauma including UPM RaumaCell (Finland), Kymi (Finland), Jämsänkoski paper line 6 (Finland), Caledonian (United Kingdom), and Blandin (United States of America).

During the transition phase, both Sappi and UPM will provide relevant operational and administrative support to the Joint Venture to ensure it can operate optimally.
Source: Sappi

Printing Impressions – December 3

First-of-its-Kind Printing Industry Census Reveals a Diverse Ecosystem

By Ashley Roberts

Full Report Attached

For the first time ever, we have put together a printing industry census. Led by PRINTING United Alliance Media Brands Editorial Director Denise Gustavson, the *2025 Printing Industry Census* offers the most comprehensive portrait to date of the people who power the modern printing industry. Through its blend of statistical insights, personal testimonies, and human-centered storytelling, the report paints a vibrant picture of an industry rooted in centuries-old craftsmanship while continually adapting to new technology, shifting workforce dynamics, and evolving cultural expectations. Far from a simple demographic survey, this census captures the lived experiences, motivations, and aspirations of the professionals who give the print medium its enduring relevance.

At its core, the census demonstrates that print is — and always has been — a people-driven industry. Respondents highlight deep pride in their craft, with more than 80% saying they would choose printing again if given the chance. Their comments reveal passion for quality, creativity, and the tangible satisfaction that comes from transforming ideas into physical products. Many describe printing as both an art and a science, a field where technical mastery meets inventive problem-solving. This pride is strongly reflected in the anecdotes shared throughout the report, from memories of first learning the craft to stories of leading teams, innovating processes, and keeping family printing legacies alive.

Demographically, the industry remains anchored by experienced professionals — nearly half of respondents are between 55 and 64 — while still attracting new talent, with 16% under 45. The census reveals an industry that values learning: 25% have returned to school for additional training, and 42% hold a four-year degree.

The personal profiles included — covering everything from hair color and height to hobbies, cuisine preferences, and vacation habits — serve not as frivolous curiosities but as reminders that the industry is a diverse ecosystem of individuals whose personal lives enrich their professional contributions. Civic engagement emerges as another defining characteristic. According to the census, 86-92% of respondents vote in every election, and 40% have lobbied on behalf of the industry. This reflects a workforce deeply invested not only in their craft but also in the policies affecting its future — from postal rates to environmental standards.

Perhaps most telling is the industry's complex relationship with technology. While 61% express concerns about AI, a majority already use AI-driven tools and remain open to innovation. This mirrors the larger narrative of an industry simultaneously honoring centuries-old traditions and embracing the tools shaping tomorrow's production landscape.

Ultimately, *The 2025 Printing Industry Census* reveals a sector defined by resilience, creativity, and human connection. It affirms that while technologies evolve, the soul of the print industry remains in the people who continue to shape it—one sheet, one idea, and one story at a time.

In-plant Impressions – December 3

2025 Largest University In-plants

2025
The Largest In-plants:
Universities

In-plant Impressions

The 30 Largest University In-plants

Six university in-plants generated more than $7 million in sales, and five have more than 50 employees. Seven have increased their employee counts since 2024.

Ranked by Employees

	In-plant	Employees 2025	2024
1	Brigham Young University	212	212
2	University of Washington	59	61
3	University of Tennessee - Knoxville	56.5	49
4	University of Oklahoma	55	54.5
5	University of Texas at Austin	52.5	52.5
6	Yale University	40	40.5
7	University of Alabama	38.5	35
8	Penn State University	37	40
9	University of Utah	36	32
10	Oregon State University	30	33
11	University of Nebraska - Lincoln	29.5	33
12	Utah State University	28.5	26
13	Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center	28	N/A
14	New York University	26	29
14	Ohio State University	26	27
14	University of Minnesota	26	23.5
17	Iowa State University	25.5	26.5
18	University of Virginia	24.5	24.5
19	University of Houston	23	23
20	University of Michigan	22.5	22.5
21	University of California, San Francisco	22	23
22	McMaster University	21	21
22	University of Alabama at Birmingham	21	22
24	Arizona State University	18	20.5
24	Columbia University	18	17
24	Indiana University	18	19.5
27	University of California, Davis	17.5	18.5
28	Bucknell University	15	16
29	University of Illinois	15	15.5
30	Ohio University	12.5	14

Ranked by Annual Sales

	In-plant	Budget ($)	Sales ($)
1	Brigham Young University	17,400,000	18,270,000
2	University of Oklahoma	11,900,000*	N/A
3	University of Texas at Austin	10,086,887	10,086,887
4	Yale University	9,086,703	8,725,765
5	University of Washington	7,687,013	8,181,697
6	Oregon State University	7,250,000	7,250,000
7	University of California, San Francisco	6,854,482	6,868,965
8	University of Nebraska - Lincoln	6,597,668	6,597,668
9	Ohio State University	6,250,000	6,250,000
10	University of Tennessee - Knoxville	5,200,000	5,200,000
11	University of Virginia	N/A	5,149,222
12	University of California, Davis	N/A	5,136,457
13	University of Minnesota	4,900,527	4,991,485
14	University of Alabama	4,451,678	4,451,678
15	University of Oregon	3,829,950	4,074,878
16	Utah State University	4,000,000*	N/A
17	Arizona State University	3,500,000	3,836,133
18	Columbia University	N/A	3,753,140
19	Iowa State University	3,405,882	3,405,882
20	New York University	5,200,000	3,100,000
21	McMaster University	2,600,000	3,000,000
22	University of Alabama at Birmingham	3,021,146	2,984,277
23	Texas Tech University HSC	3,627,719	2,927,445
24	Ohio University	2,800,000	2,800,000
25	University of Houston	2,400,400	2,427,576
26	Indiana University	2,100,000	2,100,000
27	University of Delaware	1,675,000	1,700,000
28	University of Illinois	1,265,000	1,400,000
29	Lake Land College	1,319,167*	N/A
30	Western Carolina University	985,682	1,069,739

* Ranked by annual budget

Wide-format Impressions – December 30, 2025

Generative Engine Optimization for Printing Companies
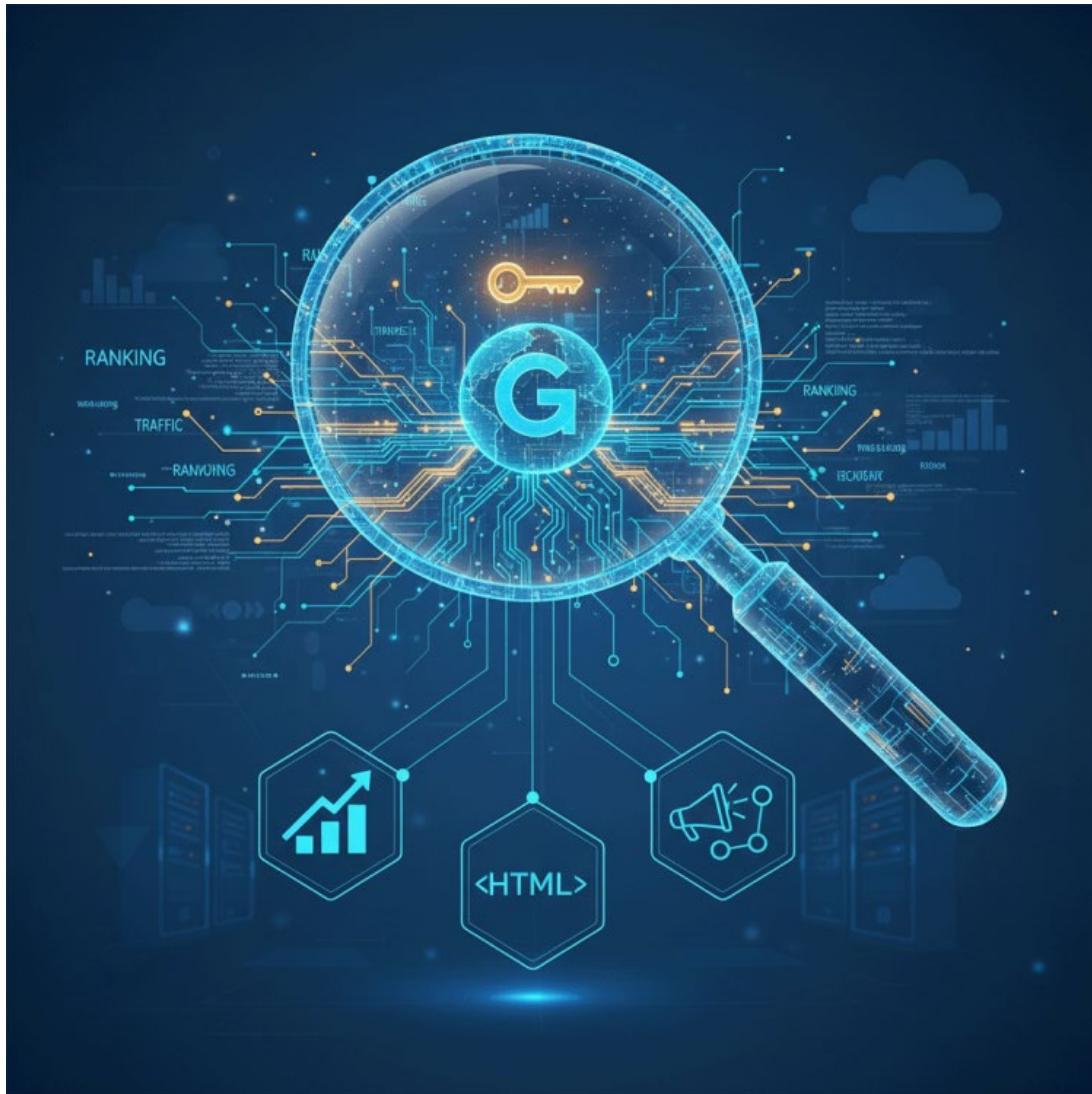
By Alyssa Summers

The following post was originally published by Printing Impressions. To read more of their content, subscribe to their newsletter, Today on PIWorld.

What Is Generative Engine Optimization (GEO), and Why Should Printing Companies Care?

As a CEO of digital marketing SaaS for the printing industry, I spend my days helping print companies navigate a market that's changing faster than ever. And lately, I keep hearing a worrying trend from shop owners. They'll tell me, "Our website is ranking number one for 'custom brochure printing,' but our lead volume is slowly drying up." You are not imagining it. The game has changed. Your customers are still searching, but they are getting answers *before* they ever click on your link. AI-driven engines, like Google's AI Overviews and tools like ChatGPT, are answering their questions directly. Generative Engine Optimization, or GEO, (or AI SEO) is the practice of making sure your print shop's expertise is the source for that AI-generated answer. It's the new frontier of visibility, and ignoring it is no longer an option.

The 'Zero-Click' Problem - How Print Buyers Find You Now
For decades, the goal of SEO was simple: get your "Large Format Printing" page to the top of Google. The user would see your link, click it, and become a lead. That process is breaking down.

Today, a marketing manager or a B2B print buyer is far more specific. They don't just search for "custom boxes." They ask a full question:
- "What are the most durable mailer box options for shipping a 5 lb. product?"
- "What's the difference between offset and digital printing for a 500-page book run?"
- "Eco-friendly packaging printing options for cosmetics."

Instead of a list of ten blue links, Google's AI Overview, Bing's Copilot, or Perplexity will provide a direct, summarized answer. That answer is often so complete that the user never needs to click any of the source links. This is the "zero-click" search.

If your print shop is not cited inside that AI-generated answer, you have lost the lead before you even knew it existed. You were invisible during their decision-making process.

Key Takeaway: In this new engine experience, being part of the AI-generated answer matters as much as, or more than, being the number one traditional link. Your new goal is to become a citable authority.

GEO vs. SEO, What's the Difference for a Printer?
Let's make this simple. Think of it in terms of your print shop's services.
- Traditional SEO was about ranking your main service page. The goal was to get your "Business Card Printing" page to rank No. 1 when someone typed in "business cards." It focused on keywords and technical site health.
- Generative Engine Optimization (GEO) is about having the AI *quote your website* when it explains *what makes a good business card*. When a user asks, "What's the difference between 14pt and 16pt card stock?" the AI answer should pull that information directly from *your* blog post or website page.

GEO does not replace SEO. It builds directly on top of it. You absolutely still need a technically sound, fast, mobile-friendly website with a clean structure. AI engines, just like search engines, will not bother with a site that is slow or broken. GEO is the next layer: optimizing your *content and authority* so those AI systems see you as a trustworthy source worth quoting.

The New Playbook - How to Implement GEO for Your Printing Business
GEO isn't one single trick. It's a set of practices that signal to AI engines that you are a genuine expert in the print world. Here is your playbook, tailored specifically for printing companies.

1. Prove You're a Real Printing Expert (E-E-A-T)

AI models are being trained to spot and prioritize content that demonstrates high levels of E-E-A-T: Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trustworthiness. You can't just claim you're an expert; you must prove it.
- Show Experience: Don't just say you do "custom packaging." Post a detailed case study: "How We Designed and Printed 50,000 Custom Rigid Boxes for [Client Type]." Show photos of the final product, the press it ran on, and the design file.
- Show Expertise: Create clear, named author bios for your blog posts. Let your lead prepress manager write an article on "The 5 Biggest File Setup Mistakes We See (And How to Fix Them)." This attaches a real human expert to your content.
- Build Trust: Be transparent. Have a clear "About Us" page that shows your facility, your team, and your history. List your physical address and contact information. Make it obvious you are a real, operating business with heavy machinery and skilled people.

2. Answer Questions, Don't Just Target Keywords

Your customers are asking specific, conversational questions. Your website content must answer them directly. Stop thinking only about keywords and start thinking about *intent*.
Go to Google and type in one of your main services, like "sticker printing." Look at the "People Also Ask" box. You'll see questions like:
- "What is the difference between die-cut and kiss-cut stickers?"
- "Is vinyl or paper better for stickers?"
- "How long do custom vinyl stickers last outside?"

Each of these should be a subheading (H2 or H3) in your content, followed by a clear, concise, and direct answer. When you frame your content as a direct answer to a real question, you make it incredibly easy for an AI to extract that answer and present it to a user.

3. Speak AI's Language with Structured Data (Schema)

Schema markup is a "cheat sheet" you add to your website's code. It's invisible to users, but it explicitly tells search engines and AI what your content is. It's like adding labels to your files.
For printers, these are the most valuable types of schema:
- Product Schema: Use this on your e-commerce pages. It clearly labels your "1000 Tri-Fold Brochures" with the price, description, and, most importantly, customer reviews.
- FAQ Schema: Take those common questions from the previous step and wrap them in FAQ schema on your service pages. This directly feeds the AI a list of questions and answers.
- How To Schema: Are you writing a guide on "How to Set Up a File with Bleed"? Use HowTo schema to break down each step. This makes your guide a prime candidate to be pulled into an AI response.

4. Go Beyond Text: Show, Don't Just Tell

AI engines don't just read text. They analyze images, videos, and podcasts. The printing industry is visual. This is a massive opportunity.
- Videos: Post short videos of your new digital press in action. Show a complex die-cutting job being run. Create a 60-second explainer on "Aqueous vs. UV Coating."
- Infographics: Create a simple chart that compares paper weights (e.g., 80lb text vs. 100lb cover vs. 16pt card stock).
- High-Quality Photos: Showcasing your specialty work (foil stamping, embossing, spot UV) is critical.

Crucial Step: You must optimize this media. Use descriptive file names (custom-foil-embossed-invitation.jpg) and detailed alt text ("Close-up of a gold foil embossed logo on a black matte business card printed by [Your Company]"). AI uses this data to understand what the image is.

5. Build Your 'Digital Reputation' (Digital PR and Backlinks)

AI, much like Google, learns who to trust by seeing who *other* trusted sites talk about. When a reputable packaging design blog features your work, or a local business journal mentions your new sustainable printing initiative, it sends a powerful signal.

This isn't just about "getting links." It's about getting *mentions* and *citations* from authoritative voices in the design, marketing, and business worlds. This builds a web of credibility that tells AI you are a legitimate, recognized authority.

6. Own the Conversation with Topic Clusters

One-off articles are not enough to prove expertise. You need to demonstrate deep knowledge across an entire subject. This is done with topic clusters.
1. Pillar Page: You create one massive, in-depth "pillar" page. Example: "The Ultimate Guide to Custom Sticker Printing." This page covers everything at a high level.
2. Cluster Posts: You then write multiple, specific posts on subtopics. Examples: "Vinyl vs. Paper Stickers: A Printer's Advice," "How to Design a Die-Cut Sticker," "Lamination Options for Outdoor Stickers."
3. Link Them: All the cluster posts link back to the main pillar page, and the pillar page links out to them.

This strategy signals to AI that you don't just know *about* stickers; you are the *expert* on stickers.
How Do You Even Know if GEO Is Working?

This is the new challenge. Tracking GEO is not as simple as checking your rank for a keyword. The tools are still catching up, but you can track it.
- Manual Checks: This is your best starting point. Go to ChatGPT, Perplexity, and Google. Ask the questions your customers ask. "Who are the best trade show display printers in [Your City]?" "What is the most cost-effective way to print 500 catalogs?" See who gets cited. Is it you? Is it your competitor? This gives you a real-world baseline.
- Reporting Tools: Professional SEO platforms are now starting to report on "AI Overview" rankings and citations. You can see if your domain is being pulled into the AI answers for your target queries.
- Referral Traffic: Keep an eye on your website analytics. You may start to see new sources of referral traffic from AI platforms as they begin to cite your website more prominently.

The Future: Voice, Visual, and Predictive Search in Print
This is all moving very fast. GEO is the foundation for what comes next.
- Visual Search: Soon, a potential client will take a photo of a competitor's amazing, foil-embossed invitation and ask their phone, "Where can I get this printed?" Your highly-optimized, well-described product images will be your only way to be found.
- Voice Search: A marketer on the go will say, "Hey Google, find a print shop near me that does same-day banner printing." Your Local SEO efforts, combined with your GEO content that *mentions* "same-day" services, will determine if you are the answer.

AI-driven search is not a "later" project. It is actively reshaping how your customers find you, right now. Every day, more searches are ending inside an AI-generated answer box. If your brand isn't showing up there, you are losing visibility you may never get back.

The printing shops that thrive will be the ones that adapt. The playbook is straightforward: create trustworthy, expert content, structure it so AI can understand it, and prove you are a real-world

authority. The printers who ignore this shift risk becoming invisible, even if their old-school rankings still look good on a report. Start today. Pick your three most profitable services and write down the top five questions your customers ask about them. Answering those questions on your website is your first step into Generative Engine Optimization.

Wide-format Impressions – December 2

Taking Your Graphics to the Next Dimension

Wallcoverings don't have to be flat — using dimensional effects can help create stunning immersive spaces. | Credit: Roland DGA

By [Toni McQuilken](#)

Oh, how far print has come. It might have started off simple with just text on pages, but time, creativity, and advancing technologies gave us an explosion of ways to put ink on any number of substrates for vibrant, eye-catching applications. However, the industry wasn't content to stop there: It entered the third dimension. Today, dimensional graphics are exploding in popularity, and for good reason.

"When we look at the dimensional graphics space, a significant trend is the increasing use of tactile elements to create an engaging, multi-sensory experience," says April Lytle, regional marketing manager at Scodix North America. "This goes beyond traditional techniques, with brands now leveraging these elements for both aesthetic appeal and a more inclusive consumer experience."

Dimensional textures help bring this wallcovering to life. Even using a repeated pattern can make a big difference. | Credit: Roland DGA

And it's not just adding dimensional elements to flat graphics that has seen an uptick in popularity, Philip Chu, Roland DG's UV printer product manager notes. He says, "The power of UV printing makes it easy and cost-effective for users to incorporate eye-catching dimensional and textural effects into their prints, adding value and visual appeal. Such effects can be printed directly onto three-dimensional objects (including cylindrical items) or onto flat surfaces for applications like wall wraps or displays."

Those trends aren't going anywhere either. Maggie Grande, senior marketing and communications manager for Konica Minolta, notes that "embellishment of varnishing and foiling," along with "textured printing, which gives dimension to the printed piece" are the top trends she sees driving the space forward. She sees adoption rates increasing, as "printers want to offer more value-add to their customers, and print buyers are looking to differentiate product packaging. Customers like the tactile feel of dimensional printing."

"As far as the biggest trends are concerned, I see continued growth for UV printing in the area of product decoration. Demand for customized/branded promotional items and personalized products is at an all-time high," Chu says. "And we expect this growth and popularity to continue, especially with the increase in online stores. Previously, it was much harder to get customized items, as the equipment was very expensive. Those creating such goods had to deal with minimum quantities to make up for that, which is why most of the orders were for larger groups, like company retreats. Creating customized items for smaller gatherings, such as wedding parties, was more expensive. The introduction of more affordable high-quality UV printers has allowed print professionals to provide on-demand product customization more cost-effectively."

Lytle points out many of the same trends, noting, "Over the next 12 to 18 months, we anticipate this trend will mature further. As digital embellishment technology becomes more

accessible and integrated into workflows, brands will explore more advanced forms of tactility. This will include a greater focus on functional tactility — where texture serves a purpose beyond aesthetics — and seamless integration with other technologies to create more immersive and interactive brand experiences."

Putting Tactile into Practice
It's all well and good to note that dimensional graphics are a fast-growing segment, but what types of applications is it really best for? After all, while it would be nice if every single printed project had an element of tactile interaction, that's probably an unreasonable expectation.

Luxury applications are the first that come to mind, as they are the ones that have been using dimensional elements the longest.

Printers can use modern dimensional print technologies to create regulation-approved ADA signage. | Credit: Konica Minolta

"Most often, you'll find dimensional printing used for applications where a premium look and feel is essential — luxury packaging, book covers, and high-end invitations," Lytle notes. "These are all about making a strong first impression. For a long time, foil was the primary way to add a tactile element, largely because it was one of the few options available through traditional, or analog, printing methods. The use of tactile varnishes is a more recent development."

But dimensional printing has applications that go beyond the traditional brands. Kitt Jones, segment manager of Interior Design and Surface Decoration — Roland DGA, says, "Dimensional printing is most used for applications that benefit from added texture and tactile appeal, such as product decoration, packaging, promotional items, POP/POS displays, custom, and décor elements. UV printing excels in this space by allowing direct printing onto objects, giving brands the ability to transform plain, blank surfaces into visually striking, high-value products that feel premium to touch, enhancing perception and driving sales."

Direct-to-object technologies allow printers to not just create vibrant graphics directly on nearly any object that will fit in the machine, but also add elements designed to make people want to

pick them up, feel them, and pass them around. Promo products are great candidates for adding dimensional elements across the board. Sure, you can have a ball, or bottle, or other promo item with vibrant, eye-catching graphics, but when you add that extra tactile element, now people will want to pick that item up and keep it, not just admire it from afar. This means that brand's name and message is going further, increasing the ROI of every single piece.

Plus, Chu points out that dimensional printing isn't just for decorative purposes. Today's technologies, he notes, can be used to print Braille that is ADA-compliant, opening entirely new avenues and applications many printers didn't have the resources for in the past.

Lytle also points out that when thinking about dimensional effects, it encompasses more than just adding a rough texture to a piece. She lists:
- Tactile and EU-Compliant Glitter: Today's technologies can produce a "glitter" effect that looks and feels just like traditional glitter but is completely compliant with EU environmental standards and doesn't use actual glitter particles. This is a game-changer for brands that want to create an exciting, sparkling product without the associated environmental concerns.
- Holographic Varnish and Light Effects: We can use raised varnish patterns to create stunning optical illusions with holographic foil. The light bends as it hits the raised surface, producing a beautiful, highly visual effect that captures consumer attention.
- "Cast & Cure": This technique allows for semi-transparent holographic effects in hundreds of patterns. It's an excellent way to add a layer of sophistication and security to a product without overpowering the design.
- Uncoated Substrates: A common misconception is that you can't get high-quality dimensional effects on uncoated paper. However, current technology allows for extremely high varnish builds on these materials, resulting in new possibilities for everything from unique packaging to high-end print.

Where to Start?
If you're already thinking of all the ways you can add texture and dimension to your customer's next projects, the next question you might be asking is, "Where do I start?" Of course, each manufacturer calls out their own technologies, but they offer tips on where to look beyond just the equipment, as well.

Dimensional printing can be used for more than just flat printed pieces. Creating eye-catching book covers is another way to use the same tech. | Credit: Scodix

"For print providers looking to add dimensional capabilities, the first step should be to evaluate their goals, consider their existing client base, and determine the types of applications they want to pursue — whether that's high-end signage, displays, interior décor, or added value markets," says Jones. "In terms of technology, UV printing and DIMENSE offer complementary solutions."

Chu also highlights DIMENSE technologies, but points out, "Direct-to-object for personalized items and interior signage are two very common uses of textured/dimensional printing. Roland DG's VersaOBJECT family of UV printers makes these types of applications easy, both for experienced users and those who are new to item decoration and personalization."

Grande notes that printers should consider the "Konica Minolta/MGI embellishing and Konica Minolta AccurioWide UV-LED wide-format equipment," along with "business development programs and tools" designed to help build the files correctly — and sell it all to customers.

"If a printer wants to add dimensional elements to their capabilities, the best way to start is with digital foil. It's an economical and efficient option for low-to mid-run jobs and prototyping," Lytle says. "Choosing the right technology is super important too. Not all digital embellishment technologies are the same, so it's crucial to carefully evaluate quality. A key step is to review the recommended media lists from suppliers. This tells you which inks, processes, foils, and substrates have been thoroughly tested and proven to work best."

She continues, "You also need to consider sheet size. Different technologies support different sizes, such as B1 or B2. You should choose a technology that matches your current or planned production needs. Look for a solution with software that integrates seamlessly with your existing web-to-print or other automation systems."

But it's not just about the equipment, it's about learning how to get the best effects, and how to bring those ideas to customers.

"Third-party organizations like Nielsen and Clemson University have conducted numerous studies on the power of touch in consumerism," Lytle notes. "The Foil & Specialty Effects Association (FSEA) is another great resource, who are actively leading research into the impact of tactility. These sources provide valuable, data-backed insights that can be used to demonstrate the tangible (or …tactile) benefits of dimensional printing to clients. Companies like Taktiful offer extensive market reports specifically focused on selling digital embellishment. Their resources include research on tactile finishing and current marketing trends, which can help sales teams position these products effectively."

Jones stresses that printers have more to gain by embracing dimensional offerings in whatever form they ultimately choose.

"Many print providers are underutilizing dimensional printing in areas like interior décor, architectural wall coverings, custom furniture wraps, object decoration, custom signs, and displays," Jones says. "These applications are often overlooked because printers are used to flat graphics workflows and may perceive textured or sculpted printing as complex, time-consuming, or requiring specialized equipment.

Additionally, many shops focus on volume over value, missing the opportunity to differentiate their offerings and command premium pricing. In reality, dimensional printing in these spaces adds tangible value, allowing businesses to transform ordinary surfaces into immersive, tactile experiences that clients are willing to pay more for, especially when delivered on-demand."

Setting Up Files for Success
Learning how to make effective use of white ink layers is another critical component of getting the most out of dimensional prints, Grande says. "You will need a white file to build up the texture (dimension) and a color file. Learn Adobe Illustrator and learn how to correctly tag those white files. Start out with basic layering, then move to more complex layering. Spend the time experimenting and testing the market. Understand value-add selling, and price accordingly."

"File setup can be handled very easily in Adobe Illustrator, Corel Draw, or any vector-based drawing program," Chu agrees. "You need to use layers if you're looking for a spot color treatment (i.e., highlighting a specific area in gloss)."

Jones concurs, pointing out, "Setting up files for dimensional graphics is straightforward once you understand the workflow. Designers typically use a spot channel or spot color in popular design software to define which areas of the graphic will be raised or remain flat, giving precise control over texture and relief."

In the end, Jones notes, it's more about getting started than knowing where you want to end up. "The best advice I can give someone just starting with dimensional graphics is to think big but start small. Understand the technologies and focus on understanding how texture and relief can enhance the perception of value for different applications, whether it's décor, product decoration, or signage.
Investigate your market and talk with your current clients to see what resonates with them but also investigate other markets and customers you could potentially reach.

"It's also important to understand how each application can drive ROI, to differentiate your offerings from your competitors, and to always keep the end user and their experience in mind. Lastly, I'd say look into the evolving technology of dimensional printing and understand the opportunity it presents, as this is an amazing tool to help move you and your business into a profitable and unique future."

**Lytle tells PSPs just starting out in dimensional graphics to experiment.**

"Don't be afraid to try multiple different designs at once; the digital process makes it easy to produce various proofs, often on the same sheet. As you experiment, remember that your substrate (material) is just as important as the design itself. The print process and the specific settings you use, like dyne level, are critical to achieving a high-quality result. To ensure the best outcome, always follow a recommended material list and consult with experts who understand the science behind these processes. By keeping these factors in mind, you'll be well on your way to creating stunning dimensional graphics."

The Future of Profitability in Print: Where We Go from Here

In the third installment of this new series, Nick Gawreluk continues to document his experiences starting up a new print software venture: Print Profit. In this episode: where the industry goes from here, and how a new generation of leaders are redefining how profitability is understood and achieved.

By [Nick Gawreluk](#)
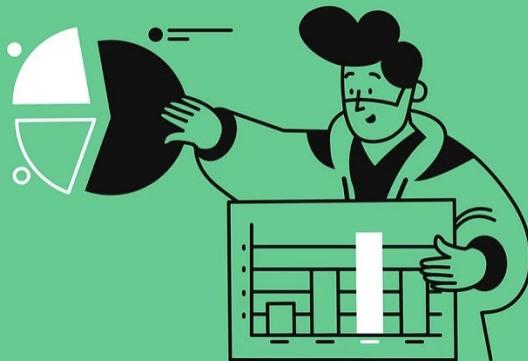
When I started Print Profit, it was an idea built on a belief that print shops deserved better visibility into their numbers and a clear path towards a brighter financial future. Two years later, after partnering with dozens of companies across the country, that belief has evolved into something much bigger: a movement toward clarity, control, and confidence in how print businesses are run.

This final article in our three-part series isn't about looking back on the journey of building the industry first profitability software. It's about what's next, where the industry goes from here, and how a new generation of leaders are redefining how profitability is understood and achieved.

From Information to Action

The first lesson we've learned is that data alone doesn't drive change, decisions do.

Across a sea of dashboards and millions of analyzed jobs, one pattern stood out: the most successful shops turn numbers into dialogue. They review profitability daily, challenge assumptions in real time, and use insights to collectively guide action.

One owner put it best: "We used to manage by sales and gross margin. Now we solely manage by contribution margin." That single business metric focus shift has reshaped how they price, sell, and lead. The goal isn't perfection, it's progress. To make one more informed decision today than yesterday.

When leaders move from reacting to results to proactively steering performance with a newfound set of metrics, profit stops being a hopeful outcome and starts becoming a daily habit of supporting action.

A New Language of Profit
The most exciting shift we've seen isn't just technological, it's cultural. A new vocabulary is taking root in print shops: *breakeven countdowns*, *contribution margin alerts*, *customer profit profiles*.
Instead of asking, "Did we make money last month?" owners are asking:

- Which customers are truly driving profit?
- Which jobs are holding us back?
- What levers can we pull today to close the gap?

This language shift matters. It moves the conversation from static reporting to active navigation, from staring at history to steering the future. When teams begin thinking in these terms, profitability becomes less about accounting and more about leadership.

Technology Is the Tool, Not the Answer
Software can clarify the picture, but people still steer the ship. At Print Profit, our goal has always been to provide leaders a GPS-like view of their business: *where you are, where you want to go, and the smartest path to get there.* But even the best map is only useful if someone drives.

The shops seeing the greatest results aren't just using data to measure performance, they're using it to lead. Profit reviews become standing agenda items. Managers use insights to align teams. Sales reps use contribution data to price strategically.

Software can't replace leadership. But it can amplify it. When paired with discipline and curiosity, clarity becomes a competitive advantage.

What Comes Next
As we look ahead, the next evolution of profitability isn't about more dashboards, it's about *actionable intelligence*.

We're building a platform that help owners anticipate, not just analyze. That means:
- Predictive insights that forecast profits months in advance.
- Smart alerts that notify you before margins slip.
- Integrated playbooks that connect data to proven actions.

- Industry benchmarks that show how your shop stacks up.

The goal is to build a bridge between analytics and execution. To move from "knowing your numbers" to *leading with them*.

A Collective Effort

What began as a thesis in an MBA program has turned into a nationwide collaboration. Every shop we've worked with has helped shape our software platform, challenge assumptions, and push the boundaries of what's possible.

This progress isn't driven by software developers or spreadsheets, it's driven by the curiosity and courage of print leaders who refuse to settle for "that's how we've always done it."

One of the most rewarding parts of this journey has been seeing owners rediscover confidence. Confidence in their pricing. Confidence in their decisions. Confidence in their direction. When clarity replaces confusion, results get stronger.

The movement toward profit clarity isn't exclusive to large commercial operations. It's happening in small apparel decorators, regional label facilities, and family-run offset shops alike. The common thread isn't size, it's mindset. A willingness to see the truth in the numbers and use it to build a stronger future.

The Path Forward

The printing industry has always been built on transformation from ink to paper, idea to product. The next transformation isn't physical. It's financial.

We're entering an era where financial visibility will be as essential as production visibility. Where shops know their break-even point as confidently as they know their press speed. And where profit planning becomes as routine as scheduling the next job.

The future of profitability is transparent, measurable, and proactive. It's powered by clarity and led by conviction. At Print Profit, our mission remains simple: move the industry forward by giving leaders the tools and insight to see clearly, decide confidently, and lead profitably. Because when you can see the road ahead, you drive differently.

Final Thoughts

Two years ago, Print Profit started as a leap of faith. Today, it's proof that the industry is ready for something new, a future where profitability isn't an afterthought but a built-in advantage. The journey isn't over, it's accelerating. Here's to the next chapter of print:

Clarity. Confidence. Control.

Legislative and Regulatory Update: What You Need to Know

By Dan Marx

The following article was originally published by Wide-format Impressions. To read more of their content, subscribe to their newsletter, Wide-Format Impressions.

Although the current administration has brought – and may continue to bring – changes to regulations that have an impact on the printing industry, that in no way means print service providers (PSPs) should stop paying attention. To gain a better understanding of where we are now and where we're headed, *Wide-format Impressions* reached out to Stephanie Buka, Adriane Harrison, Gary Jones, and Sara Osorio, all subject matter experts from PRINTING United Alliance, to answer three key questions below.

From top left: Adriane Harrison; Stephanie Buka; Sara Osorio; and Gary Jones

What is the most important thing that happened in your area of interest since the beginning of this year?

Buka: "Two things come to mind. The first was the passage of the Freedom to Invest in Tomorrow's Workforce Act. It allows 529 plans, those accounts that were designed to fund college tuition, to also be used for job training and technical education. PRINTING United Alliance was part of a coalition working on that and we've been advocating for it. It was signed into law July 4th. The other, within the budget reconciliation bill that was passed, has several tax provisions that make conditions more friendly for businesses. Particularly, a 20% tax deduction for small businesses was made permanent. I think Alliance members and the industry will be pleased."

Jones: "On the federal level, the focus has been to implement a deregulatory agenda, but there hasn't been much activity directly impacting the printing industry. However, there has been more activity at the state level, particularly with the expansion and continuation of EPR (extended producer responsibility).

Three new states have jumped into EPR this year, which makes for seven states that are using it to address printed paper and packaging waste. So, there's a big movement in that direction. Also, in the states, we've had a significant breakthrough in cleaning solvents in Southern California giving printers more options for cost-effective solutions that work, and we were able to keep a ban on carbon black in inks off the books. We are also continuing our work to keep Washington State from banning chlorinated pigments, which could be devastating to the industry."

Osorio: "The one thing that stands out the most is heat illness. So far, six states have some sort of regulation in place to address it. There's also the federal proposed rule from OHSA, and

though we're uncertain where that is going, we expect it to change. But temperatures are going up, heat illness is going up, and there's a lot of demand in the states to do something."

Harrison: "There are a few things. The EEOC (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) issued a guidance document that has removed gender identity protections. Is it the most important thing to focus on? I'm not sure, but it is a big thing. Particularly for employers, this means companies don't have to provide bathrooms for trans employees and the employees cannot necessarily use the bathroom of their choice. Also interesting is that there is still not a quorum at either the EEOC or the NRLB (National Labor Relations Board), and neither can perform significant business without a quorum. Finally, companies that have a significant population of immigrant employees need to be ready in the event of an ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) raid, which means that they should be prepared to show accurate I-9 forms related to their employees. It also is important for employers to be aware of the laws and protocols."

What is the most important development in your area of interest that you expect to see for the year ahead?

Buka: "We will still have the same administration in place in the year ahead, so I expect we'll continue to see rollbacks in regulations. In terms of trade and tariffs, I don't expect to see much change moving ahead – the administration will continue to aggressively explore tariffs, really as a tool to get other countries to comply. The problem with that is tariffs are harmful to the printing industry. For instance, lithographic printing plates and structures for SEG framing systems require aluminum, which is currently subject to a 50% tariff, and there is not an adequate supply of aluminum here in the U.S. In general, the Alliance is against broad tariffs. Beyond trade policy, we can expect certainty from a legislative standpoint, but it will all hinge on the ability of Congress to pass a budget."

Jones: "Looking forward, I think we're going to see more state-level action on banning chemicals found in printed products and packaging including components used in inks. We expect to see an expansion of EPR for printed paper and packaging as well as textiles. California passed an EPR bill on textiles in 2025, and several other states are considering the same type of legislation. With the growing number of states passing EPR bills, we expect to see a push at the federal level for one national bill to eliminate all the inconsistencies at the state level. We are also tracking a possible ban by the City of Los Angeles on single-use printer cartridges unless there is a takeback program. While it currently covers home and small offices, there is pressure by environmental groups to expand it to cover commercial printing applications. So, we're seeking clarification and monitoring it."

Osorio: "From the OSHA perspective, I see two things. The first is enforcement trends under the new administration. It will be interesting to see what changes will be added to the proposed heat illness rule, particularly given the current regulatory freeze. There is activity federally on deregulation. Also with OSHA, we're seeking to modernize the current lockout/tagout standard, so it makes more sense with current technology."

Harrison: "I expect that we will see more state laws and regulations being proposed and enacted in response to what is not happening in the federal government. The states will likely address paid time off and medical leave. Regarding compensation, I expect to see more changes to minimum wage laws and a movement toward pay transparency, which seeks to close the pay gap for women and people of color, who are historically paid less than white men in similar jobs."

How can print businesses best prepare themselves to perform well in your area of interest, either in the presence or absence of regulatory guidance?

Buka: "I think PSPs will need to be agile, try to be aware of what's happening, and consider their business processes – how they will respond to changes. This may lead to changing their pricing strategies and seeking diversification among their industry suppliers. To do so, they will need to be nimble and flexible. There is always the cost and burden of compliance, though it seems this Congress has been receptive to regulatory reform. In terms of legislative action, however, we may see more movement from states. In Ohio, for instance, we recently worked to urge the governor to veto a sales and use tax provision."

Jones: "It's important to remember that there is still a bevy of regulations on the books that companies need to meet. While there is a move to deregulate, air permitting and other regulations still need to be met. We're working to get EPA to withdraw and reconsider a proposed stormwater permit as it imposes unacceptable testing and monitoring conditions on printing companies. Even though we are working hard at the federal and state level for improved regulation, compliance is not going away. 'Today's customers and the broader public increasingly expect companies to uphold a moral responsibility to protect the environment.' Fortunately for printing, we have met this challenge, and technology has helped us to reduce our environmental footprint. However, we need to keep moving in the right direction."

Osorio: "When it comes to OSHA and workplace safety, some smaller companies think they don't have to meet the requirements, but a lot of the regulations have requirements for things like periodic inspections, training, and paperwork. In an inspection, OSHA would want to see that. Though there are current questions about what will happen with enforcement, OSHA is not going away – that's been established. Regardless of regulation, there's a moral factor: you're working to protect your employees."

Harrison: "I would say if companies don't have a local employment attorney, they should establish a relationship with one, so they have somewhere to go. I would also urge them to check back regularly with their trusted sources on employment law and compliance and understand the laws in their state or area. While there is often time, as much as six months, to respond to new regulations, it's important they know what will affect their businesses. Business owners should not put their heads in the sand and hope they're compliant."

What They Think – December 1

Artificial Intelligence in Today's Workplaces

It wasn't that long ago that AI in the workplace felt like science fiction—a distant promise of what work might someday become. Now, AI is revolutionizing how businesses create, collaborate, and deliver value to their customers. This article explores how AI is accelerating the shift from simple automation to intelligent, human-centric ecosystems that enhance productivity and collaboration.

By [Keypoint Intelligence](#)
Thursday, November 20, 2025

- What sets today's AI revolution apart from earlier generations of automation is its unprecedented adaptability.
- The most successful AI adopters are developing integrated ecosystems where document management, e-signatures, workflow automation, and collaboration platforms work together.
- Once businesses experience the tangible benefits of AI (e.g., faster processing, higher accuracy, improved customer engagement), adoption not only continues but accelerates rapidly.

By Anne Valaitis

Introduction

A few short years ago, the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in the workplace felt like science fiction. It was a distant promise of what work might someday become. Today, AI is the operational backbone of how leading organizations create, collaborate, and deliver value to their customers. What we're seeing is not incremental change; it's a fundamental shift in what can be possible when human intelligence and artificial intelligence intersect. This article explores how AI is transforming workplace document workflows and accelerating the shift from simple automation to intelligent, human-centered ecosystems that enhance productivity and collaboration.

A New Generation of Automation

What sets today's AI revolution apart from earlier generations of automation is its unprecedented adaptability. Because traditional workflow systems were bound by fixed rules, they could handle only structured and predictable data. By contrast, modern AI systems are dynamic and responsive. They can learn, operate, and adapt effectively even with unstructured or incomplete information. Intelligent document processing can now extract meaning from messy, unstructured information that would have overwhelmed traditional systems. Predictive analytics anticipates needs before they arise, while machine learning algorithms continuously improve performance without the need for human intervention. This flexibility makes AI invaluable in our ever-changing business environment, where the ability to respond quickly often determines competitive success.

Although efficiency gains remain a key benefit, something more significant is driving widespread AI adoption. In today's industry, internal productivity only matters if it translates into superior customer outcomes. Savvy organizations are recognizing that AI isn't just a back-office tool that is designed to cut costs; it's a customer experience enhancer that helps businesses compete on the quality of every interaction. With faster response times, personalized communications, and more reliable service delivery, AI is helping companies compete on experience as much as on cost or convenience. With AI, businesses can differentiate themselves in the ways that will matter most to their customers.

The most successful AI adopters aren't simply layering AI onto existing processes. Instead, they're developing integrated ecosystems where document management, e-signatures, workflow automation, and collaboration platforms work in perfect harmony. This integration creates a multiplier effect because every component amplifies the value of the next. This makes it possible to produce seamless, intuitive experiences for employees and customers alike.

What the Research Tells Us

Earlier this year, Keypoint Intelligence released a new research study entitled *Automation Adoption in Document Workflows*, which surveyed nearly 300 IT decision-makers across the United States. The results of this survey illustrate the speed and scale of the AI evolution. As shown in the Figure below, over three-quarters of business respondents expect their investment in AI capabilities to increase over the next 12 months.

Figure 1: Anticipated Investment in AI Capabilities

Over the next 12 months, how do you expect your investment in AI capabilities for document workflow to change?
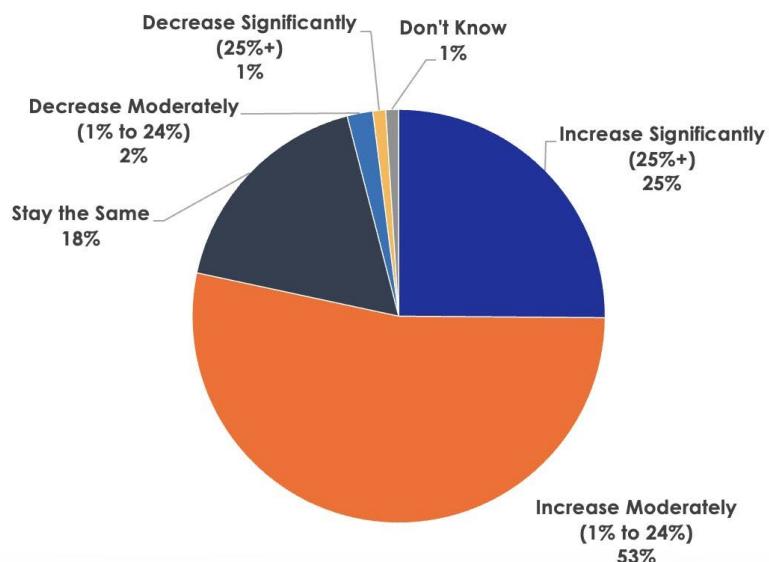
N = 298 Respondents in the United States
Source: IT Decision-Maker Study of Digital Experience Buyers; Keypoint Intelligence 2025

This same survey reveals that a majority of organizations have already begun embedding AI capabilities into their core document workflow processes, while only a small minority (11%) remain at the earliest stage of AI exploration. This highlights the rapid pace of change within the AI space. The study also shows that, once businesses experience the tangible benefits of AI (e.g., faster processing, higher accuracy, improved customer engagement), adoption not only continues but accelerates rapidly.

The Future

Looking forward, the next evolution is emerging in the form of agentic AI. The systems of the future will be able to plan, adapt, and execute complex tasks with minimal human intervention. They won't just be sophisticated tools that respond to commands; they will be "digital colleagues" that are capable of managing entire workflows that previously required a significant amount of human coordination. This evolution suggests that we're moving toward a future where AI doesn't just support routine processes, but orchestrates them from start to finish.

Despite AI's remarkable capabilities, a crucial truth is often overlooked: Companies that prioritize the human side of AI adoption are the ones that can extract the most value. They will invest heavily in comprehensive training programs that build confidence as well as competence. They will implement strategic change management to address concerns before they become obstacles. These successful organizations favor gradual rollouts that enable teams to adapt and provide meaningful feedback, and they establish clear success metrics that align AI initiatives with broader business goals. Most importantly, they involve employees early in the process, helping to transform potential skeptics into passionate champions. These leading firms will treat AI implementation not as a one-time technology deployment, but as an ongoing transformation that puts people at the center of every decision. Ultimately, even the most sophisticated AI system in the world is only as effective as the people who work alongside it.

The Bottom Line

The defining insight of this transformation is clear: AI isn't replacing human intelligence at work; it's amplifying what people can achieve. When implemented thoughtfully, AI expands human potential in ways that we're only just beginning to understand. The result is workplaces that are simultaneously more efficient, more adaptive, and more human-centered than ever before.

The future of work will not be a contest that forces us to choose between human and artificial intelligence. It will be a partnership that blends analytical precision with human judgment to achieve outcomes neither could accomplish alone. Firms that embrace this synergy today are positioning themselves to lead the next era of the digital transformation. They will also help define AI automation for years to come.