

Merrill Corporation, founded in 1968, brings proven tools, experience and knowledge to the document composition, print and fulfillment cycle. Its proven strategies deliver fast, accurate communications. The company employs more than 5,000 people in 67 locations worldwide.

The company serves the mutual fund, insurance, healthcare, banking and brokerage services industries. Integrated order management, inventory monitoring and activity reporting solutions coupled with pick-and-pack, kitting and shipping capabilities are key to the company's market leadership.

Case Study Merrill Corp.

**True Partnership...True Closed-Loop
Production...True Cost Saving**



“We work with a variety of partners, the majority of whom act like vendors. Ironsides embodies the concept of partnership.”

Challenge

Merrill had secured a large client in the healthcare industry for the production of transactional documents at its plant in Columbus, OH. “We had already been servicing large clients from this facility,” said the General Manager of Digital Print & Fulfillment for Merrill. “But we recognized that this new client would have even more stringent track/trace and reporting requirements. We needed to up our game in that area.”

Solution

In order to integrate a multi-vendor environment from a track/trace and reporting perspective, Merrill chose Ironsides APT™ (Automated Production Tracking) from Ironsides Technology. Ironsides APT allows older and proprietary tracking methodologies and information management systems to be integrated into a truly accessible, enterprise-wide job tracking and workflow strategy. The end result is lower operating costs, improved delivery performance and reduced risk of compliance penalties and late delivery fees.

Results

“By implementing Ironsides APT as the umbrella control system for our entire Columbus operation, we have easily saved \$200,000 annually by virtue of not needing to hire additional staff. We have been able to increase while at the same time removing much of the potential for human error. This is an absolute requirement for the types of clients we serve.”

“Ensuring continuity in a multi-vendor environment can be difficult. Each vendor has its own tracking and reporting processes, but they rarely play well with each other. Vendor-agnostic Ironsides APT has been a boon to our business.”

The Platform

Merrill Corporation’s operation in Columbus, OH uses printers and finishing equipment as well as a variety of other technologies from multiple vendors to deliver against customer requirements. “We had a good process in place,” the General Manager explains. “But it was not closed-loop. We knew we had to close those gaps and provide real-time tracking data so our clients can better address their own compliance reporting requirements.”

According to the General Manager, Ironsides APT’s equipment agnostic stance was the first thing that caught his attention. “We needed something that was open architecture,” he says. “Otherwise we would have been building and maintaining customized code to obtain a single, consolidated view of the operation.”

The Current State

With Ironsides APT in place, Merrill is able to completely track all print jobs from the time the print-ready file is received, through print, inserting and mailing, regardless of the type of equipment being employed. “APT provides an instant snapshot of everything happening in the plant, by client, by job, and even down to the page level, and I’m even including our hand scan area in this system,” the General Manager says. “This includes automation of the reprint process. If pages are damaged, there is a jam or even if there is a last-minute change from the client, we can quickly and easily pull those pages out of the production line and automatically queue up reprints without manual intervention.”

This has translated to significantly improved productivity, better client reporting, and a plethora of cost savings. “The easiest to quantify,” the General Manager says, “is an estimated savings of \$200,000 per year by not having to add staff as we increase our workload.”

Also adding to the cost savings, according to the General Manager, is Ironsides’ willingness to respond immediately. “It’s all real dollars to us if we can’t get a problem resolved quickly,” he says. “It’s a complex operation, and Ironsides understands it all. I don’t think I have ever worked with such an accommodating partner. If there is something their solution does not address, they are immediately on it. It doesn’t just get put on a wish list that waits for the next update.”

100 Percent Assured

Based on the success that has been demonstrated in Columbus, Merrill is in the process of adding Ironsides APT to its Sartell, MN operation. “We expect to be able to achieve similar process improvements and savings in Sartell as we have in Columbus,” he says. “But our work doesn’t end there. We know there are many more benefits of Ironsides APT that we can take advantage of, and we are working with Ironsides to discover how we can best continue to move the business forward.” Merrill’s current implementation begins with a print-ready file. “We want to move that control further upstream, with validation of file receipt and tagging of the file.”

The General Manager points out that one mistake people often make in assessing Ironsides APT is considering it as a camera system. “APT is so much more than that, and the staff not only understand and care about our business but go out of their way to proactively ensure that we are getting the most out of our production platform. I don’t know how you put that on a sell sheet, but it has been huge for us.”