

Can the Recovery be Shortened?

If you are involved in any way in pre-press as I was for 30 odd (sometimes VERY odd) years, the recovery that seems to be taking hold in the economy in general has not likely touched you. And, to be perfectly honest, it probably won't. Companies are looking for productivity increases and pre-press departments have already become the most productive part of most printing plants.

If your company is like the one I worked for for the past quarter century, it no doubt presided over an incredible slashing of personnel over that time period. The entire process has been nearly completely automated, and pre-press departments that once had 25 operators are now functioning quite well with two or three. The department I ran went from eight to two over the last decade. Three of the last four employees to retire were simply never replaced.

So what do you do? The short road to recovery for a pre-press technician out of work might well be to look outside the printing industry. You probably have significant computer skills, and if you have some workflow, color management and asset management expertise, those skill sets might very well get picked up by the corporate players outside the print industry. Large companies have increasingly taken over the management of their print and marketing assets, and they need well-trained folks to do that kind of work.

The problem is, they may not know exactly what they are looking for. The department heads running the show seldom, if ever, have print management experience and often have only the vaguest idea as to what knowledge and skill sets are needed. They are clueless as to how to make a print-ready pdf or manage color. You may need to educate them as to what those needs are, and that's not an easy task. You may have a lot to offer, but how do you get that across?

Perhaps it's time for some of the print industry education resource providers like the PIA to think outside the box a bit and realize that many of the folks currently working in the print industry or recently displaced from that industry can migrate their skills to other industries. It doesn't seem like a conflict of interest to help educate corporate data management professionals as to the positive potential of placing experts in print production into corporate positions that can utilize those skills. An extraordinary number of highly skilled professionals are currently out looking for jobs knowing their skills have value but finding themselves unable to find HR folks who recognize their value to companies outside the printing industry.

Meanwhile, it might be a great idea for someone to recognize this disconnect and form a placement firm that can place these folks where they are sorely needed.