

Metrix will win plenty of fans in the UK as it is an automated layout program that does its job quickly and does it accurately **By Tom Hawkins**

Why buy... Metrix

In theory, ganging up jobs on the press sounds simple enough. Fit as many jobs onto the plate as possible to reduce makereadies, plates and paper, saving time and money in the process. In practice, however, that simplicity flies out the window, as many production planners will know.

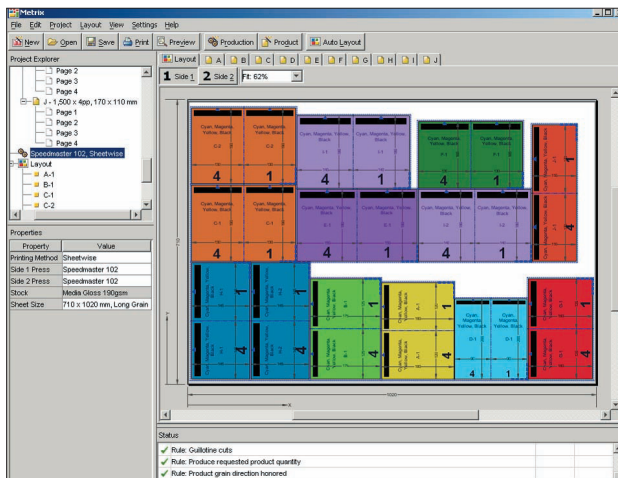
Number of variables

The fact is that the number of variables that have to be simultaneously taken into account make multiple job layouts more the domain of Mensa than the prepress department. Press capabilities, stock weight, run length, ink, bleed areas, cutting lines, grain direction, folding instructions and stitching requirements must all be taken into account to deliver the plate's maximum output potential.

Label and carton printers have been adept at ganging up work and because of this can afford to invest in expensive applications to meet this need.

For jobbing commercial printers there has been no easy solution to this situation so far. Jobs are either run separately, with the associated wastage, or they are subject to time-consuming manipulation, which encroaches on the very savings the operator is trying to achieve. The introduction of a new application could, however, change all that.

Metrix is an automated layout program from Australian company LithoTechnics that relieves a planner of the laborious task of trying to comprehend, manage, coordinate and accurately compute the various possible layout combinations. It enables you to take a mental coffee break while it effortlessly decides the optimum layout of up to ten



Metrix automates time consuming tasks and provides real savings

jobs on a single sheet at a fraction of the time that it would using manual methods.

LithoTechnics is an Australian company headed up by Rohan Holt. Mr Holt knows a thing or two about layout software, having developed SuperImpose with the company he founded, Holt Software. In 1999, Holt Software was sold to Seattle's ScenicSoft and SuperImpose became, after a couple of adaptations, UpFront. In 2002, Mr Holt left the company shortly before it and UpFront were taken into the Creo fold and returned to his native Australia to form LithoTechnics.

On the surface

On the surface, Metrix appears similar to what is now Synapse UpFront, but it differs in that it caters for the more awkward and unusual jobs that a general commercial printer is more likely to come across. What UpFront does well is to build a library of typical layouts for standardised job types, such as books and magazines. Metrix, on the other hand, can dynamically create the layout to cater

for jobs with varied demands, such as direct mail and greetings cards.

Via a patent pending algorithm, Metrix intelligently organises the sheet. For example, jobs are rotated to enable single cut gutters between non-bleeding product edges – a feature that LithoTechnics claims can save up to 30% on stock alone. For folded work, it has access to over 80 schemes and custom templates can be added using a wizard.

The sheet layout options that the system throws up can be manually altered if Metrix's suggestions are not to your liking. The user interface allows for simple step and repeat, centre across sheet, butting, add/delete and alignment editing to provide a more bespoke solution.

Manual intervention

Any manual intervention is referred back to the system's guide rules for approval and if your iterations do not comply, Metrix will automatically indicate where the problem lies and suggest a solution. And this is

where the application will win many fans because doing the job quickly is one thing; doing it accurately is another.

As an application, Metrix is very aware of its position in the production chain and provides communication both upstream and down. JDF intent data can be imported from an MIS, such as Prism, Tharstern or Optimus for example, and exported as templates for JDF compliant imposition applications such as Creo's Preps imposition software. It will also handle the JDF file to preset ink keys on press. It will also export a JDF file comprising post-press information for the benefit of compatible folding and cutting operations.

Level of automation

This level of automation will appeal to printers that are looking seriously at JDF-enabled workflows but may seem daunting to many who simply like the sound of Metrix as a tool in itself. LithoTechnics has pre-empted this by releasing two versions of the software: Standard, which outputs scaled diagrams and detailed report information; and Production, which offers deeper integration with prepress and bindery.

If the uptake of Metrix is as

successful as Mr Holt hopes, then it is possible it will be included as an integral part of proprietary workflows through Oems in the future in the same way that Preps is included as an imposition tool.

Welcomed with open arms

In any case, what is certain about Metrix is that while it automates time consuming tasks and provides real savings to a printer's bottom line then it will be welcomed with open arms.

The program will be available in the UK from the end of June through distributor Positive Focus.

The Standard version is £3,500 and the Production edition is £5,500. A 60-day evaluation copy of the software is also available and the price can be redeemed against a purchase of a complete version.

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Summary

● Metrix is an automated layout program that saves a planner the laborious task of computing the possible layout combinations

● It caters for the more awkward and unusual jobs a commercial printer deals with

● It will be available in the UK from Positive Focus from the end of June

The competition

In terms of a JDF centric production planning application, the chief competition is from Creo's Upfront application, now at V3.0.

Heidelberg's Signastation, part of its PrintReady suite of JDF enabled tools, will also

manage layout creation and the generation of JDF files for later processing while also communicating with an MIS. Both, however, are intended for relatively straightforward section work comprising few jobs on a plate and jobs of similar format.