



End of the paper trail

Software systems can help smooth the supply chain from start to finish. **Tom Holman** finds out why and looks at the offerings from some leading suppliers

In an intricate supply chain, software systems can help make the difference between an efficient company and a wasteful one. A good system eases a user through the entire publishing process, from the moment an editor has an idea for a book to the day the final returns come back. For editorial departments, software can help make workflows quicker and more efficient, cutting out duplication of tasks and giving greater transparency, making a book's progress clear for all to see. If a system is working well, it should enable publishers to spend fewer hours tied up in spreadsheets and more time producing and selling their books.

IBS Publishing vice-president, Mike Irving, whose Bookmaster system has been heavily promoted in the industry over the past few years,

says software systems increase visibility in the publishing process. "It makes it much easier for management to see what's happening up and down the supply chain. It keeps them alert to things like budgets running over and can tighten up on costs."

Publishers installing new systems sometimes report temporary difficulties as staff get used to working differently, but then find that they reap benefits in the long run. A good system can pay for itself within a couple of years by tightening costs and reducing headcounts, but a bad one can be an expensive mistake, leaving staff confused and resentful that their bosses are trying to automate their work.

Robin Tobin, business development manager at software provider Anko, says that this can be a com-

mon problem, especially for smaller publishers. "It's important to remember that many publishers are under-resourced and so just getting books out of the door is a problem for many of them. [But] publishers do understand if you show them the benefits of having all their publishing information in one place."

Irving agrees. "There may well be some resistance from people who have particular ways of doing things. But we try to work very systematically through that, and because we all have experience in publishing we understand what it is that people are going through."

Catriona Murray, head of sales and marketing at Edinburgh University Press (EUP), has been leading the implementation of a new system from Anko. She acknowledges that

the process of switching to a new way of doing things has caused frustrations among staff and increased the burden on some. “However big your company and however fancy your system, there’s always going to be a lot of change and pain.” But while it has taken EUP a while to get to grips with the new system, it has also made life easier by creating a single repository of information instead of a myriad of spreadsheets. Data feeds are now richer, more accurate and timely, and installation has prompted the company to look afresh at its workflows and processes. “It’s forced us to review the way we do every last thing, and that’s brought the company together—we understand better how we work and how all our departments fit together,” Murray adds.

One of IBS’ clients, Australia-based Cengage Learning, experienced similar short-term pain and long-term gain after installing Bookmaster. “Moving away from paper-based systems and old ways of doing things was a steep learning curve,” says Maggie Reeves, media production services manager. But having everything in one place has brought huge benefits. “We don’t now have to walk up two flights of stairs to hunt on someone’s desk for missing cost files—everything is there on screen.”

Being able to access the system remotely has brought the company’s diversely stationed staff closer together, too. “It’s integrated the work of editors, designers, marketing people and so on, and our publishing is now a truly collaborative process.”

The ups and downs

Publishers who have had their fingers burned advise taking time to talk to several suppliers before settling on a system, getting to know the people as well as their product. It’s important to get the contract right too, since add-on costs can escalate unexpectedly after purchase. Most crucial of all, perhaps, is to ensure sufficient follow-up support and training to get staff up to speed with the new system and to set aside plenty of time to help sceptical editors and others understand the reasons for the change.

Suppliers say they do everything they can to help publishers make the most of their purchase, and whether a supplier can provide after-sales support should be a key consideration. The introduction of a new system should be a long-term partnership rather than a one-off purchase, says Fawzia Nazir, project manager at Vista, which sells the software Product Information Manager. “It’s not a them-and-us situation, and not just about rolling out a system. We pride

ourselves on understanding publishers, and asking them the right questions means we can help them learn to do things in a better way.”

Carl Mann, Europe sales director at Germany-based software solutions company Klopotek, says every system installation begins with an in-depth analysis of how a business works before creating a system that is tailored to its needs. “We try to help publishers optimise their workflows as well as install their software.”

Choosing a system

When it comes to choosing a software system, there are plenty of high-quality products to pick from, and sometimes the choice of products on the market can seem bewildering. Leading suppliers include IBS, Vista and Klopotek, while a range of smaller players also continues to challenge the market.

IBS Bookmaster offers help with publishing from concept to print, with a menu of modules to pick and choose from along the way. At the start of the journey, for example, the Editorial and Book Production module offers estimating tools designed to help publishers forecast costs, print runs and sales and decide whether a title is viable in the first place. After this, the system helps publishers to monitor costs and keep projects on schedule. Irving points out the importance to small firms in particular of controlling costs and accurately estimating a book’s print run and sales. He says the system is also flexible enough to handle different fields of publishing, series of books as well as individual titles, and non-book items such as CDs, e-books and websites.

Another heavyweight systems player is Publishing Technology, which formed from the merger of Vista and Ingenta last year. Vista’s Product Information Manager (PIM) replaces scattered databases with a single system that cuts down on duplication and reduces man hours, with controls in place to help keep the project plan on a timeline. Like most systems, it can be accessed remotely, enabling staff in different offices around the country or the world to share information. Security controls are built in so that it is possible to limit access to the system for different users.

Crucially, PIM and other systems help ensure accurate bibliographic data feeds, which enable retailers or readers to get sufficient information about a book, helping to avoid lost sales. Nazir, says: “You can’t just buy a system off the shelf and configure it to the publishing industry. It has

CHOOSING THE RIGHT SOFTWARE

- Do your research: Spend some time looking at the different products on the market.
- Carry out a beauty parade: Talk to a range of suppliers about what they can offer.
- Check the contract: Ask what is included and what add-on costs there might be.
- Ask about after-sales support: Can the supplier offer staff training?
- Review case studies: Check whether the supplier has implemented their software for similar companies. Ask to speak to satisfied customers.

to understand publishers and be flexible enough to adapt to their processes.”

Klopotek, meanwhile, offers Publishing Solution, an integrated system for all stages of the publishing process, which includes a Product Planning & Management module for editorial and other departments. It helps editors with managing acquisitions, negotiating rights and estimating costs, before automatically creating a contract from a template once the deal is sealed. From then on, everyone involved in a book’s production adds their tasks or information to the system, which synchronises with any existing content management systems. Mann says that the transparency in the process irons out any potential contract or royalty disagreements and makes communications with external suppliers, such as printers and translators, much easier.

Wide choice

The list of available systems goes on—there are products from Schilling, Focus, Avatar, Trilogy, Sweetens and Pepper Publishing Management, among others. A popular system among small and medium-sized publishers in particular is Anko. Business development manager Robin Tobin says the product offers a start-to-finish systems package at an all-in price that helps publishers pull together their disparate processes. “What our system does is put all the information related to the publishing process in one place with common sense links between that information.” Tobin claims Anko is also strong at helping publishers conform with Onix bibliographic standards.

Leading systems providers are also increasingly challenged by Virtusales, a Brighton-based firm that has supplied its Biblio3 concept-to-publication system to many of the leading trade publishers since launching eight years ago. Virtusales is currently building a system to integrate the processes of Penguin and Dorling Kindersley, as well as a portal for the bibliographic data of members of the Independent Alliance of publishers. Virtusales m.d. Phil Turner says Biblio3 copes well with the very different and often chaotic processes of publishing and says it is also user-friendly, with a bright design and “wizards” to guide staff through it. “A lot of the systems on the market are very grey, data-heavy and unfriendly.” With the amount of choice on the market, all publishers should certainly be able to find a product which satisfies their needs.