

SHUTTLEWORTH: Showing innovation

SHUTTLEWORTH WAS THE ONLY PRINT MIS vendor at MediaPro last month, not because it had booked into an event aimed at marketing professionals in error, but because it was demonstrating its close links to ROI and all the online campaign management, web based design tools and web to print purchasing that ROI can offer.

"We were there also because we have to be aware of what is going on in the wider market. The companies at a show like MediaPro are the innovative ones, driving new means of marketing and there are implications from an MIS point of view. We need to ensure that we have back end support for new services, for cross media, for manufacturing and for sourcing manufacturing," says joint managing director Paul Deane.

Supply chain management has become a strength of the Shuttleworth MIS for these reasons. More and more printers are taking on print management tasks and supply chain management is needed to control the sourcing of external services. Nobody else is offering this application in this way. Deane knows this because Shuttleworth managed to secure tax concessions as part of government support for industry innovation "if nobody has done anything like it before," he explains.

The core idea is that Shuttleworth manages the communication between the printer putting together the project and suppliers able to provide the services, the functions that a print management company has normally carried out. It manages the requests for quotes, the response process and the job assignment and then tracks the elements as they come together for the end customer.

It will allow a print company to offer the kind of service that print management companies have been delivering. "We have looked hard at the requirements of the supply chain, this is why we have developed this module and we will develop it further in response to demands that are placed upon it and the feedback we receive," he explains.

Supply chain management operates through a hosted server, making this the first SaaS application that Shuttleworth has introduced. Because this is an application focused on communication and managing the flow of requests and job specifications, it suits the internet far better than a standard MIS.

But this might just be the beginning. Deane muses about the potential of cloud computing where additional server capacity is available like turning on a tap. "There are many things from a

technology perspective that are going to have a major impact on the industry," he says. "It will become an issue on how we develop and deliver systems in the future."

Shuttleworth's people have been involved with conferences, tracking white papers on the developing area of cloud computing. "It really is mind boggling in the way that this can be used to deliver solutions," Deane says. "One company in the US was offering video services. It was launched on two servers, and in two weeks it had taken off to the extent it needed 500 servers and they could manage that rate of growth through the cloud. That sort of thing is going to become a question for us all."

Equally Shuttleworth is looking at the way that MIS is used, moving away from a linear progression of phone call to estimate to job raised and into what in computing circles is described as 'event driven' operation. This is where the software prompts the user to consider what else is needed beyond the price, to understand what starts the process in the customer's mind before reaching the point of requesting a quote.

If that's some way ahead, the near term has Shuttleworth introducing a new user interface and functionality through it next year.

This year the company has introduced an estimating wizard to guide operators through the quote generation process. "Our customers have told us that they envisaged that the new estimating wizard would reduce general commercial estimating time by 75%," says Deane. It automatically pulls in the text for the letter to be sent to the client and raises the work order. "It's about ensuring that the estimate is accurate as possible," he adds.

Market conditions have helped. Companies that would normally have replaced a press without a second thought are finding it

impossible to fund that kind of investment. MIS is more affordable and can introduce more efficiency, so help improve margins, and through better scheduling and information, can increase productivity. With print runs falling and jobs scarcer, speed of estimating becomes more important, as does accuracy. "Everybody has a vested interest in trying to improve their business," he continues.

Shuttleworth is providing an increasing number of webinar sessions to help companies do this. It's part of a progression, of using all aspects of modern communications technology that are available. When MIS first appeared on the scene, it exploited the then new-fangled computing technology. Shuttleworth has retained that drive, continuing to harness the latest technology to the improvement of its customers' business.



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