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Top 10 Mistakes in Selling Web-to-Print

Having a web-to-print solution is one thing; having a successful one is entirely different. *Print Solutions* investigates the disconnect between web-to-print's promise and reality.

BY HEIDI TOLLIVER-WALKER

WHEN IT COMES TO WEB-TO-PRINT, THE AXIOM “BUILD IT AND THEY WILL COME” DOES NOT APPLY. MANUFACTURERS AND DISTRIBUTORS ALIKE OFTEN BUY INTO THE TECHNOLOGY ON THE PROMISE OF HIGHER SALES VOLUMES AND GREATER PROFITABILITY, BUT THEN BECOME FRUSTRATED WHEN THESE PROMISES DON'T MATERIALIZE. WHERE IS THE DISCONNECT?

Print Solutions asked three of the industry's top web-to-print (W2P) experts and got a fascinating range of answers. We asked Jim Lahner, vice president of customer support and implementation services for Four51; Slava Apel, founder and chief executive officer of Amazing Print; and Barb Pellow, group director for the research firm InfoTrends.

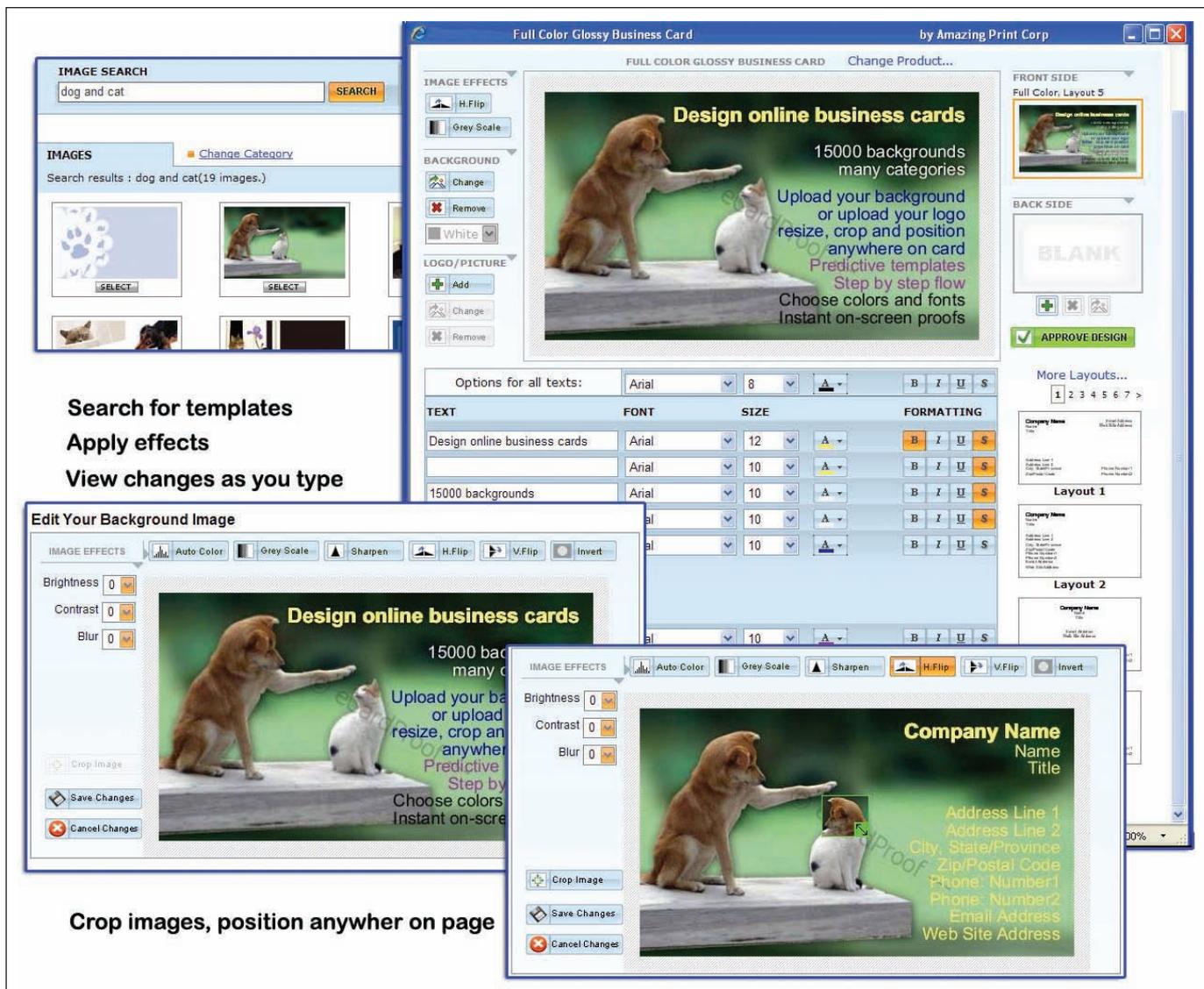
Listening to their perspectives was a bit like listening to three blind men describe an elephant. The first lays his hand on the elephant's side and says, “The elephant is like a wall.” The second lays his hand on the elephant's leg and says, “No, you are mistaken, my friend. The elephant is like a tree.” The third wraps his hand around the elephant's tail and says, “I'm sorry, but you are both mistaken. The elephant is like a rope.”

Describing the challenges associated with web-to-print is much the same. Each perspective depends on where the person is holding the elephant, but put all of those perspectives together and a clear and comprehensive picture emerges.

So where is the disconnect between the web-to-print promise and reality? To answer this challenging question, *Print Solutions* allowed each expert to speak about the issue from his or her perspective.

This month, we welcome the perspectives of the two software vendors: Four51 and Amazing Print. Four51, a PSDA member, has been supplying web-to-print technology to the industry for the past 12 years. It has more than 32,000 buyer companies and more than 14 million users. Amazing Print has been offering software covering B2B storefronts, retail print sales technologies and marketing services to thousands of print shops and print distributors for more than 14 years. When asked about the top W2P selling mistakes, Lahner and Apel offered some strong opinions.

Next month, in the December issue of *Print Solutions*, we will consider the perspectives of Pellow from InfoTrends. Her thoughts differ in some respects, but also are highly complementary.



An easy-to-use web-to-print site will facilitate sales and use, as well as the ability to upsell customers.

**MISTAKE NO. 1
Hamstringing Yourself
Based on a Single
Client Need.**

“[Success with web-to-print] is not a one-night stand,” Lahner said. “You’re getting married. So don’t evaluate systems based on one client’s desire for a specific feature. If you buy a technology solution to solve someone’s niche problem, it’s going to be difficult to sell it to a broader audience.”

Lahner gave the example of one client that decided cross-media functionality was all that mattered. “Their salespeople were beating them up saying they needed full pURL and email integration

or couldn’t sell anything. They left us for another system, but that system’s infrastructure was weak and it couldn’t handle the order volume. In the end, it failed miserably. The company focused on a single feature and alienated a lot of customers.”

**MISTAKE NO. 2
Not Hiring the Right
People.**

Like selling any other product, if you’re going to sell e-commerce (which is what web-to-print really is), you need to get the right reps in place, train them and hold them accountable. Tossing a

traditional salesperson at e-commerce isn’t going to work.

“By all means, get access to excellent technology and design skills,” Lahner said. “It doesn’t matter whether you hire those skills internally or subcontract them, but you’ve got to have them.”

Apel echoed the “right team” concept. “Web-to-print sales cannot be pushed down on salespeople, as they will fear it,” he said. “Educate the benefits to your salespeople, have them fall in love with the experience of not being bill chasers, and they will come around. If you can’t wait for them to embrace the web, team them up with a ‘geekier’ associate and



Web-to-Print: Decisions to Make Before You Demo

Looking to invest in a web-to-print solution? Here are some suggestions from Jennifer Matt, president at Web2Print Experts Inc., and Slava Apel, CEO of Amazing Print, from a joint webinar, “Web-to-Print: Decisions to Make Before You Demo,” hosted by The Seybold Report.

There were four overarching pieces of advice:

- Document and get clear on your online strategy before you start looking for enabling technologies. “If you don’t have a strategy,” said Matt, “one will be created for you.”
- Communicate your requirements clearly upfront. Lead the sales process rather than being led.
- Be clear with the vendor about what you’re interested in seeing and what you are *not*.
- Do a 360-degree evaluation: people, expertise, technology, reputation and references from customers who are like you.

360-Degree Evaluation

What should go into your 360-degree evaluation?

Level of competency

- How many installations?
- How long in business?
- What does the best demo look like?
- What kind of support is offered?
- What is the roadmap for future developments?
- What backup procedures exist?

Caliber of service and support

- Support hours
- Type of training
- Documentation
- Support groups
- Video archive
- Webinar training
- Marketing support

Compatibility with Existing Infrastructure

- JDF, XML, EDI, PDF, XLS handshakes?
- MIS interfaces
- Accounting packages interfaces (QuickBooks, etc.)
- Pre-press interfaces
- Inventory interfaces
- Communication interfaces
- Shipping interfaces
- Coupon interfaces
- Migration of old customers into the new system
- Quality of thinking
- Price competitiveness

Quality of Thinking

- How often is the software updated?
- Who drives the updates?
- What does the vendor read (industry and non-industry publications)?
- Industry participation
- Industry awards
- Knowledge of industry
- Knowledge of competitors

Price Competitiveness

- Pricing choices
- Yearly maintenance
- Monthly fees or transactional (or both)
- Customization fees
- Upgrades
- Length of term
- Who does templates?

Communications Quality, Frequency and Consistency

- Support levels
- Online chat, email, Skype, forum, SMS, Twitter, Facebook
- Newsletters
- Self-help section
- Documentation updates
- Conferences
- Tradeshows
- Blog

Relevant Experience

- How long has the company been around?
- How many installations?
- Company history
- Awards
- OEM arrangements
- Attends/exhibits at tradeshows

Reputation and References

- User groups
- Do complaints show up in online searches?
- Can it provide three references?
- How long has the longest customer has been on?
- Who is the largest user/site?

Product Innovation

- Patents
- Technology platform (.net, .php)
- Up to date with the buzz (QR codes, VDP, etc.)
- Design options (Flash, Ajax, HTML5, etc.)
- Niche product development
- What other industry can it cover?

have one speak 'geek' while the old dog speaks relationships."

MISTAKE NO. 3 **Not Focusing on Broader Operational Issues and Cost Savings.**

Too many distributors fail to focus on solving operational problems rather than selling print (even if they end up selling a lot of print in the process). "Focusing on operations is how you get meetings at the C-level and stay in accounts for a long time," Lahner said. "You don't want to be the distributor (easy to replace). You want to be the trusted ops/tech adviser (hard to replace)."

That means asking for a seat at the development table and offering creative solutions to hard problems. Lahner gave the example of a telecom that works through a Four51 print distributor customer.

"There's a logistics issue, not an ink-on-paper issue," he said. "They have kiosks in malls, freestanding stores and hybrid stores, all of which are geographically dispersed. Those point-of-sale areas have a wide variety of signage and fixtures, and supplying all that in a timely manner was a huge logistical nightmare. They were spending a ton of money on manpower and FedEx. You can imagine what it's like trying to feed a beast like that. Our customer went in with an order management and fulfillment solution that, by the way, included print materials. They sold a lot of print, but that was secondary to the overall solution."

Focusing on operations is on Amazing Print's Top 10 list, too. "Figure out how many points of interactions there are (implicit or explicit) in the ordering process," Apel said. "This includes things like billing, inventory and managing

credit limits. How many touch points there are by telephone, by email, by fax, by credit cards — and track it based on a year's time. If you say, 'I'll save you three phone calls a week,' most companies won't pay attention. But if you say, 'Over the course of the year, you'll save an average of 30 hours in communication and speed up delivery time by 20 percent,' you can put a big price tag on that."

The savings can add up quickly, especially if you are paying attention. Apel told of one of Amazing Print's clients who worked with one of the largest big-box stores. Previously, the retailer had 10 percent in redos based on poor typesetting, lack of approvals, errors in consumers filling out their credit card numbers incorrectly and things like that. "Since they installed web-to-print, they have gone to 0.1 percent," Apel said. "They are saving a lot of time and money. Their productivity went up fourfold."

26 JETS UNDER ONE ROOF!

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MISTAKE NO. 4 **Killing Profits by Not Focusing on Your Own Bottom-line Needs.**

Automation is both a customer benefit and a distributor benefit. Distributors need to remove their own dead costs by using technology to eliminate human

touch points. Otherwise, both Lahner and Apel said, they can kill their margins on otherwise profitable business.

“Intellectually, distributors get that. But that means hiring that go-to person, that techie to set up XML and other integration tools,” Lahner said. “Otherwise, they are still stuck touching

orders and managing them manually the way they always have. This becomes like a sieve, draining off your margin. If what goes on behind the scenes is unorganized and full of manual processes, your sales success is being undermined by margin-killing activities in the back.”

Apel adds that it also allows distributors to take orders at all hours, including those that would normally be unprofitable. He recalled one W2P customer who came up to him at a tradeshow and thanked him. Why? “He said, ‘I received an order at 3 a.m.’ I didn’t think that was a big deal; it’s normal for people to shop in their pajamas,” Apel said. “But after 25 years in business, it was the first time he took an order after 6 p.m., so his costs for electricity, equipment leases and employees were finally not flatlined. They were substituted with off-hour orders.”

Once these fully automated solutions are set up, it may mean reorganizing your staff (even if they have been with your for a while) to put them into positions in which they are more effective. Perhaps they might get moved out of the back into customer service or even a revenue-generating role.

“It doesn’t mean they are bad employees,” Lahner said. “You just don’t need them in the roles they used to play. You’ve used them to plug holes in the back; you don’t need to use them that way anymore because you’ve fixed the holes.”

MISTAKE NO. 5 **Not Upselling Through the Process.**

You’ve got a great sales tool — get the most out of it. Apel told the story of a customer working with a large legal firm. The distributor’s contact had moved on, so he was afraid to call on the account in case the new marketing contact tried to negotiate a lower-priced deal.

“Then he had an idea,” Apel said. “His company created branded greeting cards for the legal firm and made the templates available on its own initiative. When the lawyers went in to order forms, they saw these greeting cards. That was a huge firm with more than 500 lawyers. Every

Web-to-Print Solutions Improve Marketing Results

In a recent blog entry, Bill Prettyman, chief executive officer at Wise and president of PSDA, shared his thoughts on how web-to-print solutions can boost a company’s marketing results. Here’s an excerpt of his post:

Businesses with many locations often find it challenging to execute marketing and sales print materials that simultaneously embrace local relevance, central brand integrity, rapid design and change processes, and cost efficiency. Print distributors already selling customized print products online need to ensure those customers can easily visualize their personalized results prior to ordering.

When we talk about the value of marketing asset management, also known as web-to-print solutions, there’s a tendency to focus on how they can reduce costs and improve the efficiency of the marketing supply chain. It’s just as important, however, for potential buyers to understand these solutions can also improve marketing results in three major ways. They include:

- reducing the use of obsolete marketing materials (in addition to reducing pure obsolescence waste;
- enabling and supporting the use of more customized (and therefore more relevant) marketing materials; and
- making it easy to create and execute effective marketing campaigns and programs.

As well, web-to-print solutions provide another way to sustain and scale a print distribution business in a down economy.

Think about this: We can either let our industry die because print is becoming nonexistent or we can find ways to innovate and move forward. We cannot change whether or not we’re going into a double-dip recession or what will happen to the economy going forward. We certainly cannot even begin to control it. But we can provide products and services that give us the opportunity to control business and industry growth.

If you’re not already offering web-to-print solutions, consider how they creatively add value to your customers and your business. Then take action and make it happen. Now, more than ever before, we have to hustle and work hard to make changes happen internally so the economy isn’t a factor in how we grow.

Read more “Thoughts on Print Industry Leadership” from Bill Prettyman’s blog at <http://billprettyman.com>.

lawyer had 30 to 50 customers. It turned out to be an incredibly large order without the distributor ever having to pick up the phone.”

This type of upsell can make a huge difference in your bottom line. W2P is really e-commerce, so you can also expand beyond print, offering email, mailing, fulfillment, storage and other solutions. In one analysis, Amazing Print determined that the customer could have sold the end user 60 other services over and above the final printed job.

“Think about it,” Apel said. “You can offer web hosting or even graphic design. You’re already paying for these services, and, most likely, you have excess capacity. You can charge them \$20 per month to host their website. It costs you, what, two? That’s a great ROI. Every distributor and print manufacturer can offer hosting. We are already white labeling this for our customers. One client sold a service that gave them \$600 per month residually for the life of the customer. It all started with a business card.”

MISTAKE NO. 6 **Not Charging the Customer for Changes.**

Another of Apel’s “web-to-print sins” is not charging for changes. Just like all of the other production and workflow inefficiencies, that comes right off your bottom line. “That might be changes in templates, offers, workflow or shipping methods,” he said. “It costs you money to employ your IT personnel to do that. Yet too many of our customers throw those changes in for free. This actually trains the customer to ask for more.”

Distributors have the tendency to say, “Yes, but I don’t want to lose the customer.” But in many cases, Apel said, that customer has a contract. “They aren’t going anywhere else,” he said. “There is nothing wrong with saying, ‘It would take us in man hours \$5,000 to \$10,000 to execute this task. We have to charge you for it. You don’t want to nickel-and-dime them to death (it’s one thing if it’s a single change; it’s another if it’s an ongoing issue), and you don’t do it with a first-time customer, but if you have a contract with the customer, utilize it.”

On this issue, Apel ate his own cooking. “Even today, I had lunch with someone who asked me to develop a new module because they will be using it more. In the long run, I could potentially earn more money, too, but it will also cost me \$80,000 to develop the module. What if I don’t get my investment back? As a software provider, I have to take my own advice.”

MISTAKE NO. 7 **Not Making the Solution “Sing.”**

The better the solution “sings,” the stickier it will be. That’s Lahner’s message about keeping your system away from being vanilla.

“Every W2P system can be implemented in a real vanilla way,” he said. “But customers have gotten used to it in the B2C world, so the distributor needs to help the customer provide a great buyer experience. Most systems these days provide advanced theming capabilities — use them. It supports your value-add and it makes the system harder to replace, especially when it comes to the functionality that the buyer actually sees and interacts with. It makes it harder to tear the thing out.”

But making it sing doesn’t mean chasing the latest flavor of technology. In fact, Apel added, one of the biggest design “sins” is using Flash-based systems. “There is a trend right now to go to Flash-based modules because they look pretty,” he said. “But Flash isn’t viewable by huge percentages of your audience. Banks, for example, don’t allow them. You cannot be a bank and order from a Flash-based system. There are 200 million i-devices like iPads that cannot see Flash.”

Another reason? Google hates Flash. “In terms of SEO, Google will actually penalize you because your website is not crawlable and slower,” Apel said. “I recently viewed a chart of online shoppers that indicates that iOS users (specifically iPad users) are the most aggressive. Do you really want to have the most aggressive online shopper not buying from you? To me, a Flash-based system is the biggest no-no, yet the most celebrated thing in the W2P community.”

MISTAKE NO. 8 **Tolerating Inefficiency in the Ordering Processes.**

When you help your customers become more efficient with their ordering, you become more efficient, too.

“Customers don’t have a high enough view of what they are spending, who orders what, where they could be saving, how they could bundle orders, and where the price breaks are,” Apel said.

He gave the example of a school board that allowed its teachers to order willy-nilly. “Teachers could spend their photocopy dollars at any copy shop, and there was no accountability,” he said. “If all of the teachers ordered business cards, say, at the end of the month, the school benefits from the price breaks, and the distributor and the print manufacturer save money through improved efficiency. Meanwhile, the school gets better quality in terms of color density and batch-to-batch color matches. It all comes down to proper reporting.”

For larger end user organizations, the savings can add up. “Calculating their internal costs, from every department, understanding who is spending how much at what time, gets into hundreds of thousands of dollars,” Apel said. “But distributors can provide the same thing for \$200 of their time. Instead of working with multiple printers, they can consolidate to one print manufacturer who can provide reports. Instead of you being the jobber, you become the service provider. School boards and other organizations truly appreciate that.”

Lahner often hears his customers complaining that they built their customers an online store but they won’t use it. Customers still prefer to call distributors directly. Lahner was very matter of fact about it: Charge them a premium for orders placed offline.

“Many distributors think they are going to lose clients if they do this, but you have to go to them face to face and say ‘Look, this is a better way for you to place an order. It’s a better way for me to take an order. It will save both of us time and money down the road.’ Will

that always succeed? No, it won't. But I've seen that work is with one department, or one product, and once you make that a success, you can go from there."

MISTAKE NO. 9 **Not Setting up Multiple Storefronts for Multiple Products.**

At its core, success with W2P is about understanding online marketing psychology. Too many distributors say, "This is my website. This is my identity. I sell everything through it." But marketers often find online storefronts through Google. They'll scour the web looking for an exact match for what they want.

If the same distributor has multiple websites, multiple storefronts and multiple instances of similar products for different niches, Apel said, they can often get more business, including from their own customers.

"A hotel wants to go to a portal that deals with hotels. A travel agency wants to go to a portal that deals with travel," he said. "Instead of cramming everything into one website, distributors should allow multiple instances of their brand."

Apel gave the example of Vistaprint. "They have 16 localized websites. Every one deals with different demographic in different country. Why not put everyone on one site, with the option to customized base on language? The offer, the landing page, the buying experience are all different from country to country. In Australia, for example, the top payment method is PayPal. In the United States, it's credit cards. In Australia, if you focus on credit card payments, it will scare people off. Multiple storefronts allow you to specifically target your customer."

Apel noted that distributors are also losing sales because they are not multiplying their efforts by going after verticals. Instead, they are focusing only on existing customers. "They could be serving the car dealership extremely well, but they aren't replicating that experience to other vertical markets like banks," he said. "They could be taking their experience to other great markets and duplicating or triplicating

their revenue sources. They need to think, "That's a great client. Now how can I replicate what I learned from that client over and over again?"

MISTAKE NO. 10 **Underestimating Marketing Requirements.**

One of the biggest W2P sins, in the view of most W2P software suppliers, is underestimating the marketing efforts necessary to market their W2P systems. Just because you build it doesn't mean they will come.

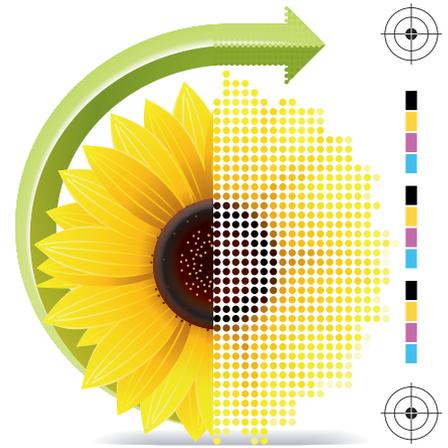
"Just because you have a demo site, for example, doesn't tell your customers and prospects that you can build a customized, branded portal just for them," Apel said. "They don't know what to do with the system. You have to do a demo and sell them on the benefits."

Also don't underestimate the build-out effort. "You can buy a website in a box; a website presence — just storefront — does not perform," Apel said. "There is a lot to make sure it works for your market, in multiple markets, marketing and advertising the solution, creating plug-in for unique needs in your market, creating your own templates, building out the workflow, training support personnel, and integrating it into MIS and shipping. There is a lot of work to be done, but too many people think they will buy the package and everything will just happen. It doesn't."

Don't Get Complacent with Technology

Although not part of the top 10, Lahner added that distributors shouldn't be afraid to tell their clients with whom they are working. They don't have to claim the technology is theirs.

"As a buyer, I want you focused on logistics, spend management and print management, not technology, not technology design, development and infrastructure," he said. "If you think your customer will go direct if they discover the secret, then you need to be more sure about the value proposition you are really offering."



Apel encourages distributors and print manufacturers not to be complacent about their technology. Just because you invested in a W2P solution several years ago doesn't mean it's right for you today. Here are some major changes to W2P systems:

- XML export to software like QuickBooks (the old systems were self-contained)
- Integrating with UPS and FedEx shipping
- Ability to pull images from Getty Images, social media and Flickr
- Instant refresh and renew (no more hitting preview each time)
- Ability to use third-party checkout systems

"These things didn't exist even just a few years ago, yet I know companies still on the same W2P package they bought 10 years ago," Apel said. "It's like being stuck on Quark 3.1. There are some W2P companies started in the '90s, and their interfaces are still in the '90s, too. W2P has changed faces, usability, functionality, and many distributors don't look how can they get the better experience and make more money by switching over suppliers."

Editor's Note: Next month, we'll take a look at the perspective of Barb Pellow of InfoTrends, who, along with Standard Register and its customer Sprint, looks at web-to-print from a very customer-focused perspective. **Ps**

Heidi Tolliver-Walker has been a commercial and digital printing industry analyst, feature writer, columnist, editor and author for nearly 20 years. She is a frequent contributor to Print Solutions.