Formtastic: Paper Company Cuts Own Paper Consumption

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Based in Stamford, CT, Fraser Papers is one of the largest producers of printing and publishing paper products, with facilities in Maine, Ohio, Wisconsin, Quebec, and New Brunswick. Fraser manages more than 2 million acres of forest, operates a nursery, sawmills, and multiple pulping facilities. Their involvement in manufacturing, forest management, and pulping also results in a demanding IT environment where streamlining workflow is a top priority.

Patrick Dufour, Systems Administrator at Fraser Papers' Maine facility, was no stranger to the cost and productivity benefits associated with automated forms and had been using Advanced Function Printing (AFP) on the System i (iSeries 400) to create electronic documents. In the autumn of 2000, Dufour started shopping for a forms and checks software package. His selection criteria included simplicity, functionality, and a high level of integration with his environment.

Fraser Papers' facility in Maine includes 400 users on two System i. This facility produces thousands of mission-critical documents including checks, purchase orders, invoices, accounts payable documentation, and inventory control documentation. Fraser manages invoicing with Infinium Software, while its accounts payable and purchasing is handled through WonderWare.

"We got tired of using AFP," says Dufour. "We needed a solution that could print on multiple printers and create professional looking forms at the same time." According to Dufour, AFP would not print on their Hewlett-Packard printers and its limited design capabilities kept their forms from looking truly professional.

By December, Fraser had settled on Quadrant Software's Formtastic software. "Formtastic supported our Hewlett-Packard printers and made all of our forms look more professional." In addition expanding their print options and creating professional forms, Formtastic resides and functions entirely on the System i (iSeries 400) and requires no additional hardware.

Another problem Dufour had with the AFP was the need to design the same form twice for different production processes. "Forms we designed for faxing wouldn't look right when we sent them to a printer," relates Dufour, "and forms designed for a printer wouldn't look right when we tested them with fax. We had to make two different designs to accommodate fax and print. With Formtastic, we can make one design for both fax and print in one shot."

Another factor in the buying decision was that Fraser had been using Quadrant Software's FastFax solution for several years to implement automated fax delivery. "It was important that our forms solution integrate easily with FastFax," says Dufour. "It made sense to purchase our forms solution from the same vendor."

For document design, Formtastic uses Forms Designer, a Microsoft Windows, PC-based

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>
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graphical user interface (GUI) used to design document overlays using System i data displayed on the PC screen.

Forms Designer allows administrators to easily map spooled data and intricate graphics (such as logos and signatures) to specific locations in form overlays. The tool also allows the administrator work with data using different font types, sizes, special characters, and styles including bold, italics, and underlining — all without modifying the application.

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Dufour encountered zero bugs with either Infinium or WonderWare. "Formtastic lets you take data from the spooled files and not mess with the application code," says Dufour. "The product doesn't require a lot of attention or maintenance. Once you put it in place, away it goes."

In the production stage, form designs are uploaded to the System i (iSeries 400) through the File Transfer Utility, an easy-to-use to/from transfer program. Formtastic takes the values in the spooled files created by applications and database files stored on the System i, enhances the data appearance, moves the data to the designed location, and merges the data with the overlays to generate professional forms.

"Basically, you get into the GUI and design what you want the form to look like," says Dufour. "Take the data from the spooled file and overlay it onto the form. I was able to map and design our purchase order form in 2 to 3 hours. It's a simple product to use."

When Fraser installed Formtastic, Dufour opted to take advantage of Quadrant Software's on-site training services. "We had Quadrant Software up here to develop checks and to give us some general training on Formtastic. After three days, we felt we knew the product inside and out."

To produce checks, Fraser Papers used Quadrant Software's companion Checks Module for Formtastic. "Setup is very simple," says Dufour. "All you do is enter the size of the check, where you want to put the MICR, the scanned signature and logo, and that's it. From there, the module lets you take the spool file from the accounts payable application and maps each piece of data to the form. In checks or forms, you don't even have to use the entire spool file. You just take the data you want."

The Checks Module centrally and securely manages check printing and allows users to create accounts payable checks, payroll checks, and direct deposit receipts without extra programming. The module also allows for the secure printing of paychecks to remote locations to eliminate mailing costs and delays. Another attractive feature for Fraser Papers was the capability to operate in a multi-currency environment involving two different banks and AP checks in both Canadian and U.S. dollars.

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To monitor check-printing activity, the Checks Module provides an audit log that accounts for every check printed by the software. It lists who printed the checks, when they were printed, amount, check numbers, and other detailed information. The capability to generate Positive Pay reports for your bank is provided too.

Currently Fraser Paper has moved checks, purchase orders, and accounts payable into production on Formtastic. "We plan to have forms for invoicing and inventory control in place within three months," says Dufour. "So, we have five form types in production now, but our goal is to convert all of our forms to Formtastic."

In the course of the integration process, Dufour has contacted Quadrant Software with questions regarding Formtastic and the Checks Module. "When I call their tech support department, I'm usually able to talk to someone right away. If there's nobody available, I'm contacted within an hour. Most of my issues were resolved during the first call, and if I didn't notify Quadrant Software that the problem was resolved, they continued to contact me until they confirmed that I was satisfied. Most other tech support departments would rather not hear back from the customer."

Fraser Papers' success with Formtastic and the Checks Module is linked directly to the decision to purchase a product that integrated seamlessly with their Infinium and WonderWare applications in addition to a fax solution from the same vendor.

Because Fraser Papers was careful about purchasing a product that could integrate and grow with the company, they have implemented the solution quickly and with minimal headaches. "I really can't talk about weaknesses with Formtastic because I haven't been burned by this product," says Dufour. "So far, I haven't really found anything I can't do with it."

Quadrant Software has over a decade of experience providing Electronic Document Distribution solutions for System i (iSeries 400) and Windows enterprises. Our products create a paperless workplace by allowing you to create, capture, distribute and archive documents electronically, while managing them through their lifecycle.