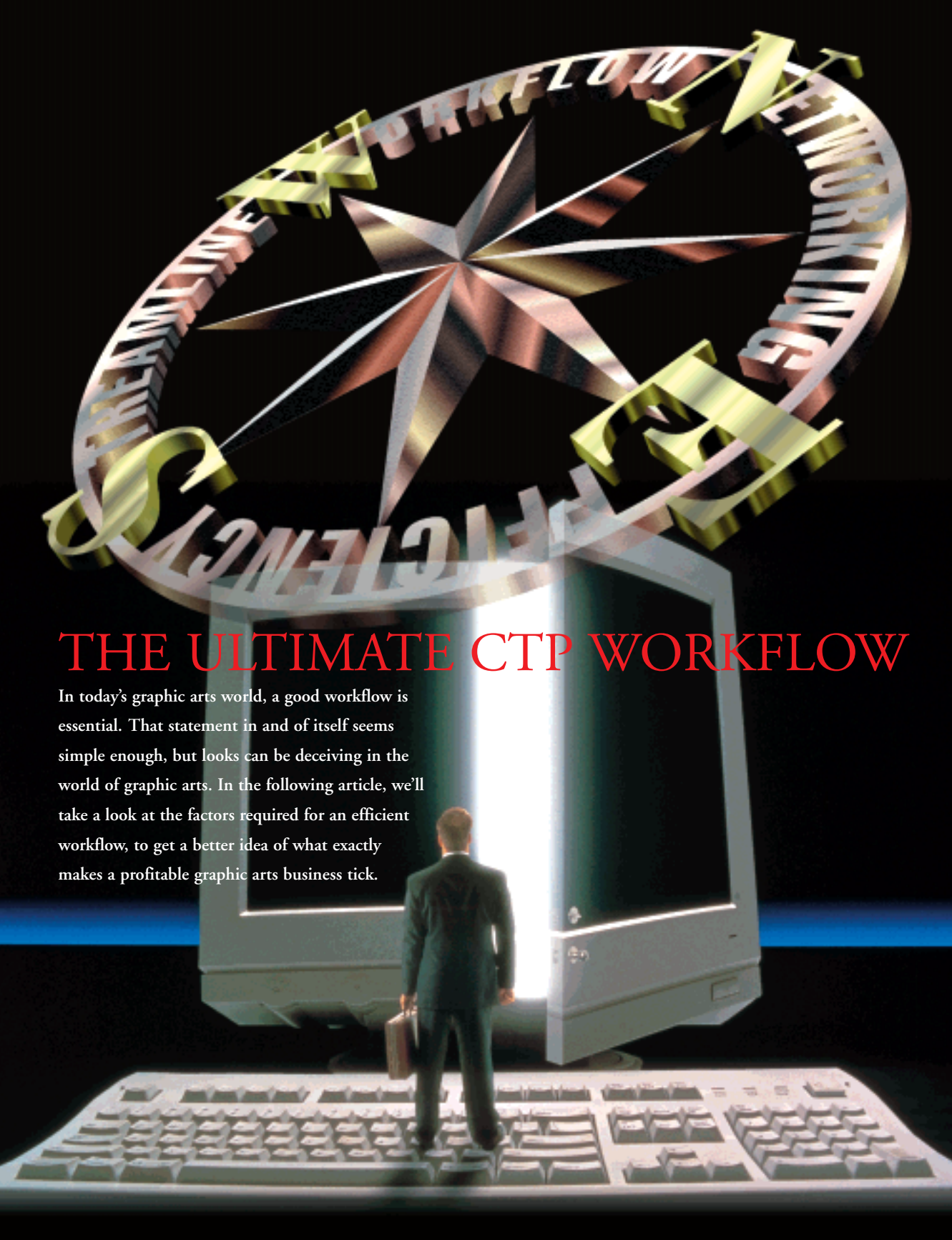


THE ULTIMATE CTP WORKFLOW

In today's graphic arts world, a good workflow is essential. That statement in and of itself seems simple enough, but looks can be deceiving in the world of graphic arts. In the following article, we'll take a look at the factors required for an efficient workflow, to get a better idea of what exactly makes a profitable graphic arts business tick.

DIGITAL OR NON-DIGITAL

No matter what level of production a graphic arts company is aiming for, a digital production line may well help them achieve that goal. Today's increasingly digital production workflows provide a variety of benefits, including, at least theoretically, a link to the future. And for better or for worse, the trend in the graphic arts world is definitely towards increasingly digital production, whether output goes from imagesetters to film, from platesetters to plate, or directly to paper with a digital press.

One of the more popular digital production workflows in use today is the Computer-To-Plate workflow. Unfortunately, due to improperly coordinated production, not all CTP users are getting all they might out of this technology. In the next few pages, we'll examine the various costs and pitfalls associated with the printing production workflow, and then take a closer look at how a really good CTP production workflow can improve a company's profitability.

CTP PROFITABLE

COSTLY ELEMENTS OF THE PRINTING WORKFLOW

There are a wide variety of costs associated with the printing workflow. For example, labor is expensive, and trained operators rare, so companies often have to spend time and money training inexperienced personnel. Materials are also a great expense, especially when frequent mistakes require doubled or trebled use of valuable film and plates. Business costs also include phone and fax charges, money spent correcting jobs that were understood only imperfectly at the beginning, and transport costs. Materials also need to be monitored, stored safely, and transported to the right place at the right time.

Another problem facing many companies is costs incurred due to errors in production. Input data might be flawed, or require a font that is unavailable. The sales department and prepress department might have their signals crossed so that the prepress department applied trapping to a document the client wanted printed without trapping. PostScript errors sometimes come out of nowhere and require a laborious and time-consuming repair process. Operators might even misunderstand instructions and change a document the wrong way when making corrections to a first draft. Or the operator might fail to notice that a certain correction wasn't made properly in the new plates. Every stage of the workflow has its potential pitfalls, and it's difficult for a disjointed set of departments to keep on top of the overall progress of a job.

STREAMLINING THE PRODUCTION WORKFLOW

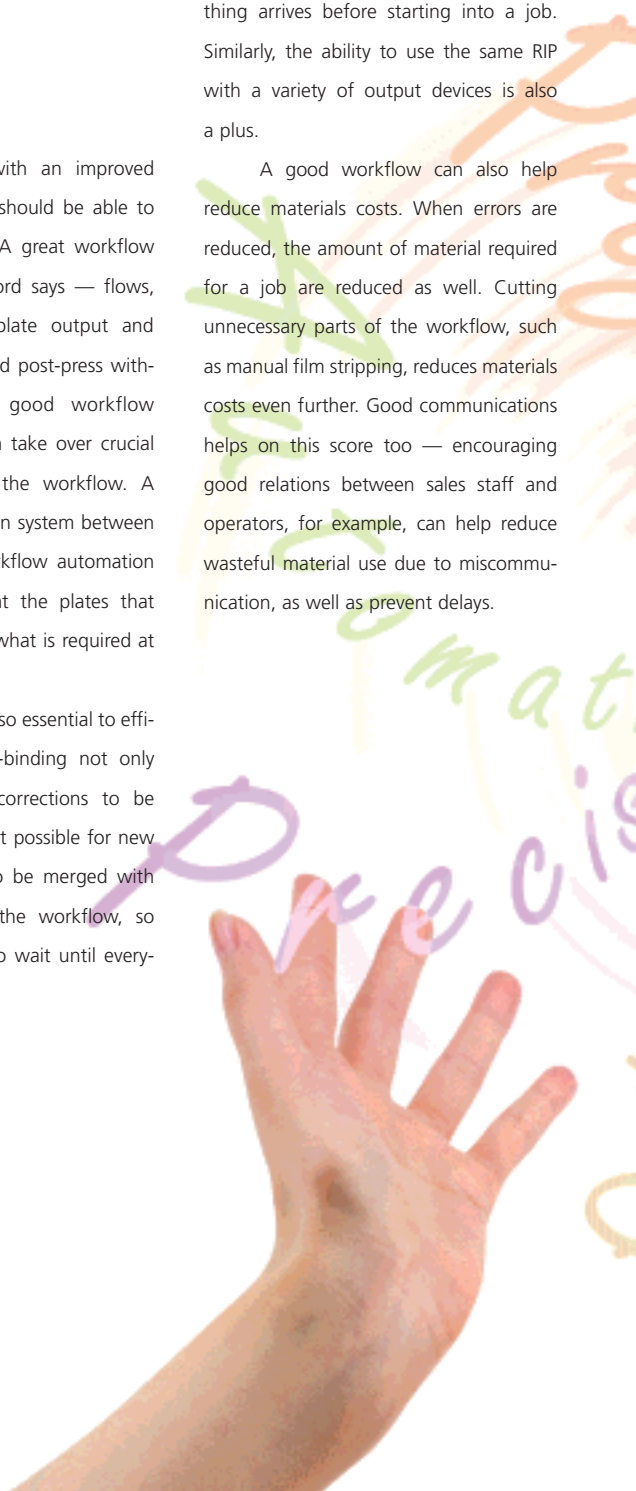
To increase profitability, a company needs to streamline its production workflow. One way to do this is to combine tasks so that fewer operators are required, cutting labor costs. Advanced workflow automation such as that offered by top manufacturers today can help reduce the portions of the workflow that are manually driven and increase the percentage of "skill-less" operations. This translates into reduced training costs as well as more consistent quality.

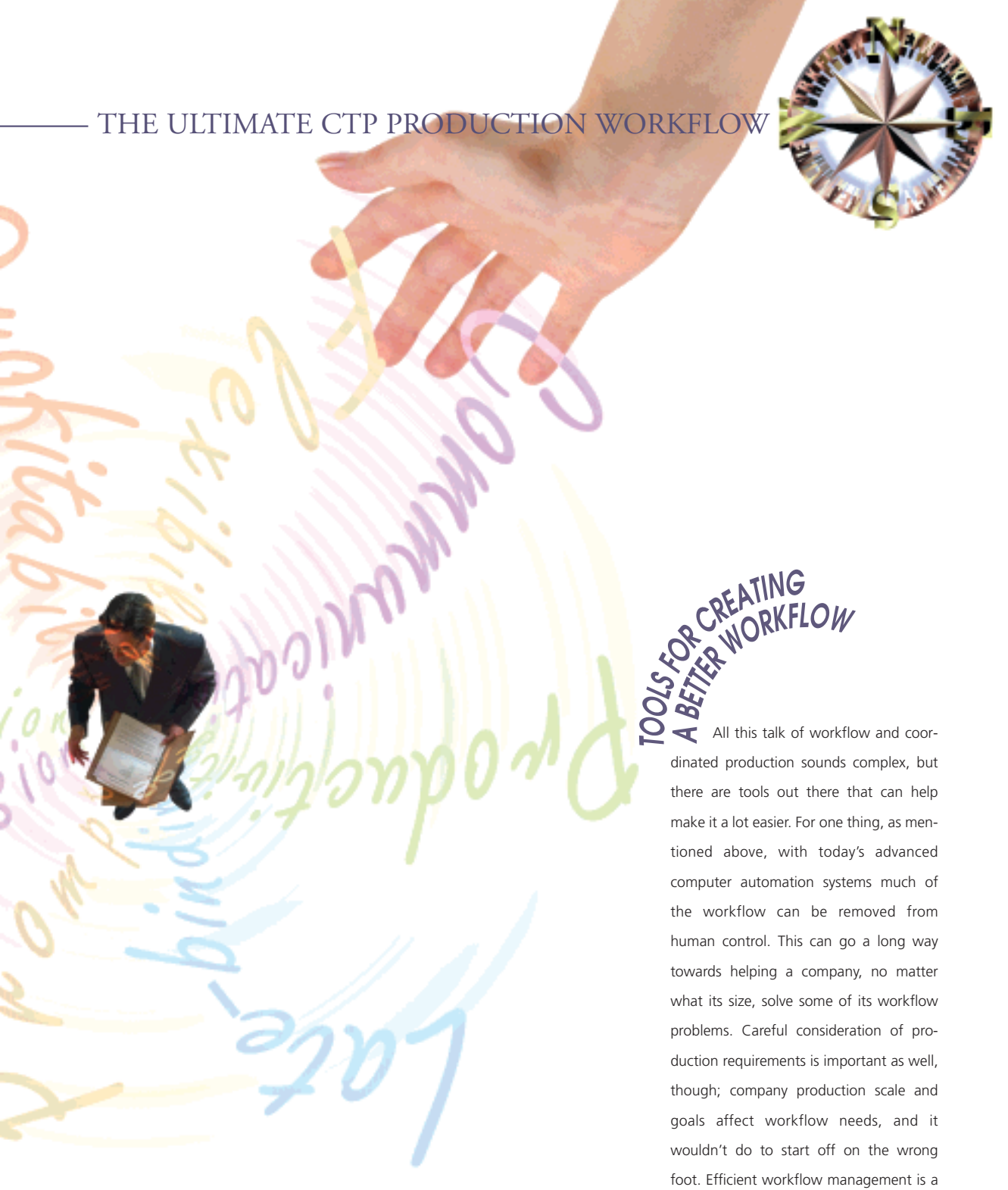
Another benefit of a streamlined production workflow is increased operative press time. To prevent presses from sitting idle, staff must assure that plates are output, without any errors, when they are needed. One way to make this possible is to reduce the amount of time required to prepare plates for the press. Decreasing the time required for registration checks and automating ink control are just two of the many ways to reduce make-ready times on the press floor.

What's more, with an improved workflow, a company should be able to produce plates faster. A great workflow does just what the word says — flows, from data input to plate output and onwards to printing and post-press without any hitches. A good workflow automation system can take over crucial but routine steps in the workflow. A seamless communication system between workers using the workflow automation system can assure that the plates that are output are exactly what is required at the press.

Late-binding is also essential to efficient production. Late-binding not only allows later-breaking corrections to be made, but also makes it possible for new elements and pages to be merged with existing data late in the workflow, so operators don't have to wait until everything arrives before starting into a job. Similarly, the ability to use the same RIP with a variety of output devices is also a plus.

A good workflow can also help reduce materials costs. When errors are reduced, the amount of material required for a job are reduced as well. Cutting unnecessary parts of the workflow, such as manual film stripping, reduces materials costs even further. Good communications helps on this score too — encouraging good relations between sales staff and operators, for example, can help reduce wasteful material use due to miscommunication, as well as prevent delays.





TOOLS FOR CREATING A BETTER WORKFLOW

All this talk of workflow and coordinated production sounds complex, but there are tools out there that can help make it a lot easier. For one thing, as mentioned above, with today's advanced computer automation systems much of the workflow can be removed from human control. This can go a long way towards helping a company, no matter what its size, solve some of its workflow problems. Careful consideration of production requirements is important as well, though; company production scale and goals affect workflow needs, and it wouldn't do to start off on the wrong foot. Efficient workflow management is a difficult task that calls for knowledge and experience in the graphic arts field.

DEAL WITH THE EXPERTS

Dainippon Screen has applied its years of experience in the graphic arts field to the creation of a unique CTP workflow that can help any company overcome the many problems discussed above. The Screen CTP workflow combines improved production efficiency and productivity in an easy to handle, flexible package that can be tailored to suit any business's unique needs.

TAIGA AND CTP

Screen's CTP system is based on one of the most respected and advanced digital workflow automation systems on the market: TaigaSPACE. The TaigaSPACE workflow automation system, headed by Taiga Server, makes it easy to create jobs in a digital environment and then move them through the CTP workflow efficiently and safely. Based on powerful Sun workstations, TaigaServer has the computing power required for today's heavy digital tasks. What's more, the variety and flexibility of TaigaSPACE modules enable users to add on functionality tailored to their specific needs.

The Taiga workflow automation system features an automated workflow architecture and easy operation that requires little operator training. For example, starting Taiga's automated job processing involves nothing more that dragging and dropping the job onto the appropriate icon. Taiga offers automated trapping, overprint processing, OPI image handling, imposition processing, and RIPping, allowing the operator to focus on more important matters. This level of automation translates into great productivity as well.

Taiga also makes job management easy. One module that is particularly recommended is the Taiga JobWatcher module. Running with Internet browser software, this module enables management and operators to check and modify the current status of jobs instantly at any networked Mac or PC. Taiga JobWatcher increases the efficiency of scheduling and process control while preventing errors by acting as a seamless communication system for the entire production workflow. By helping operators coordinate all the steps involved in CTP plate production, Taiga JobWatcher makes it easier to get a steady, timely supply of plates to the presses.

Screen's CTP workflow also features extremely flexible input capabilities thanks to Taiga. Taiga can input a wide variety of digital data formats and can even accept non-digital data, such as separation films input by a dot to dot scanner. Taiga can also output the same RIPped data to a wide variety of output devices. Output options include imagesetters, Screen's renowned PlateRite platesetters, and Screen's various proofing systems, including the TrueRite digital proofing system and a variety of other full color and imposition proofing devices. The Taiga Cardes package design module makes it easy to create packaging with Taiga as well.

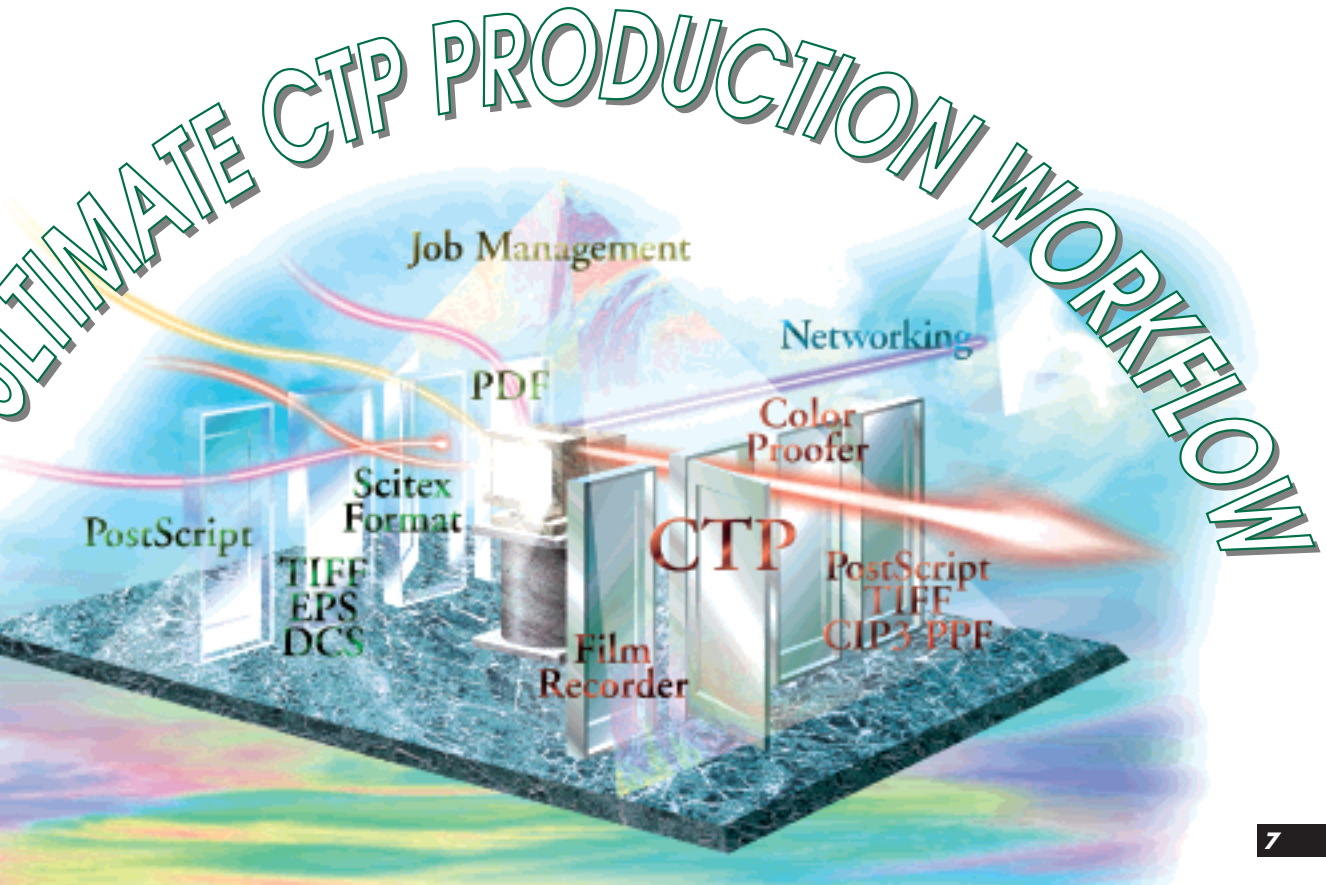
Color proofing in Screen's CTP workflow takes advantage of Screen's superior color matching technology, as embodied in Renafit. Screen's color management system has the final printed product as its target, so users don't have to worry about final output falling short of expectations. Taiga also offers soft proofing on Barco monitors, and the ProofEye digital proof inspection system, which compares original and modified plate data before actual plate output. What's more, with the appropriate equipment and

setup, Taiga offers remote proofing, so the client can confirm that work is proceeding as desired.

The benefits don't end at prepress, though. TaigaSPACE also helps connect the various stages of the printing workflow together more tightly. With Taiga, press operators can send instructions to the prepress department on which plate size is required before plate output. Coordinated dot gain control is also available. What's more, Taiga can now output image preview data for use in the creation of CIP3 PPF data, which is used to make ink density and other press settings automatically.

Most importantly, Taiga is a flexible system. It can run on an intranet or extranet. Modules such as RemoteTaiga enable remote job operation for companies with more than one production site. Taiga can also be connected to the CrossVision database server. CrossVision is designed specifically for the graphic arts world and features such advanced functions as OPI handling for images in the database and secure multi-user data access from an Internet browser. CrossVision allows clients to get more involved in the production of their printed materials using the Internet, and encourages clients to stay with the same printing company year after year.

Offering superior automation, seamless communications, and a late-binding workflow for everything from paper to cards and packages, Taiga may well be the ultimate workflow automation tool. Paired with Screen's reliable and highly-productive equipment, Taiga can help you create the superior CTP system you've always wanted.



THE BOTTOM LINE

CTP means more than just buying an platesetter. Cutting film out of your production workflow isn't enough to bring your business to its full potential. Without overall workflow automation tools that provide reliable, timely production at every stage of the graphic arts workflow, your company won't see all the benefits promised by digitalization. On the other hand, full digitalization may not be the perfect arrangement for your company.

Screen knows each company is different. That's why Screen offers all the equipment and software you need to create the ideal workflow for your business. With its years of experience and advanced know-how, Screen can help you find your company's unique optimal workflow here and now. The workflow of tomorrow, starting today: Dainippon Screen.