Production Digital Printing Trends 2027:

The technologies, market shifts, and business priorities shaping print production in the year ahead.

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This white paper was sponsored by Canon U.S.A., Inc., which provided financial compensation to NAPCO Research / Alliance Insights for its research and preparation.

Production Digital Printing Trends 2027:

The technologies, market shifts, and business priorities shaping print production in the year ahead.

In 2027, production digital printing will continue to expand what print providers can produce and how efficiently they can operate. Advances in inkjet technology, automation, software, and artificial intelligence are creating new opportunities, while rising costs, changing customer expectations, and pressure to improve profitability are influencing investment decisions.

The year ahead will be about more than adding digital printing capacity or entering new markets. Print providers will increasingly focus on making better use of their equipment, connecting production processes, removing bottlenecks, and delivering greater value to customers. At the same time, digital printing will play an expanding role in commercial printing, publishing, and more personalized, data-driven customer communications.

Drawing on research from Alliance Insights and broader industry developments, this report examines 10 trends expected to shape production digital printing in 2027. Together, they highlight where opportunities are emerging, how production requirements are changing, and the business priorities that will influence investment and growth.

TOP TRENDS 2027

1. AI Moves Deeper Into Print Operations
2. Buyers Raise the Bar for Print Value
3. Convergence Moves from Expansion to Execution
4. B2+ Inkjet Expands Digital Production Opportunities
5. Software Shifts to Production Intelligence
6. Finishing Becomes the Next Productivity Frontier
7. Direct Mail Becomes More Responsive
8. Transactional Print Gets Smarter
9. Book Production Shifts to Smarter Manufacturing
10. In-Plants Build Greater Production Flexibility

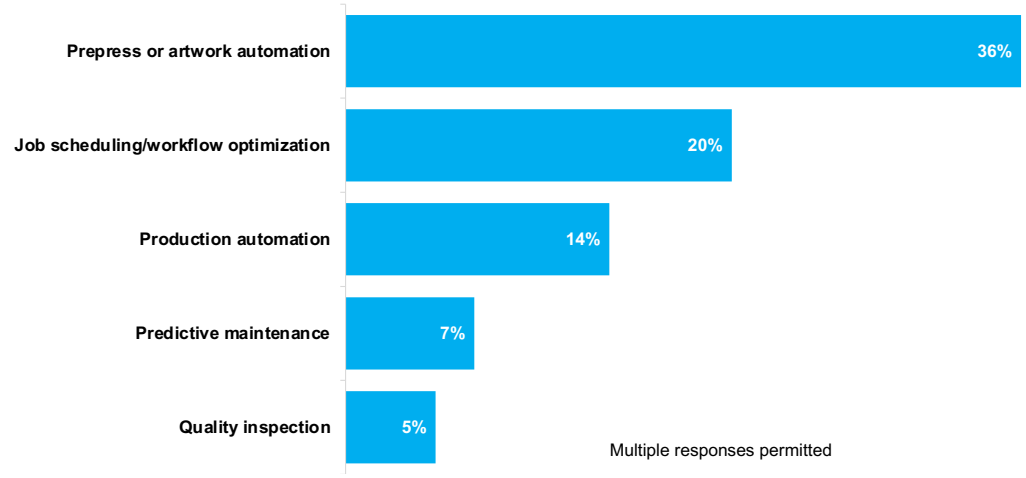
1. AI MOVES DEEPER INTO PRINT OPERATIONS

Artificial intelligence is entering a new phase in production printing. After gaining traction primarily through writing, research, marketing, and other general-purpose applications, AI is beginning to move into the processes that determine how efficiently print jobs are estimated, prepared, scheduled, produced, and delivered. In 2027, attention will increasingly turn to applications that can improve production performance and deliver measurable business results.

Alliance Insights' new study, AI in Print: Data Readiness, Technology Alignment, and Unlocking High-Value Use Cases, finds that this transition is underway, although AI adoption in production operations remains at an early stage. As shown in Figure 1, among the 294 survey participants, 36% report using AI in prepress or artwork automation, 20% in job scheduling and workflow optimization, and 14% in production automation.

Figure 1: **AI Use in Print Production**

Q. In which areas of your organization is AI currently used as part of business operations or workflows? Select all that apply

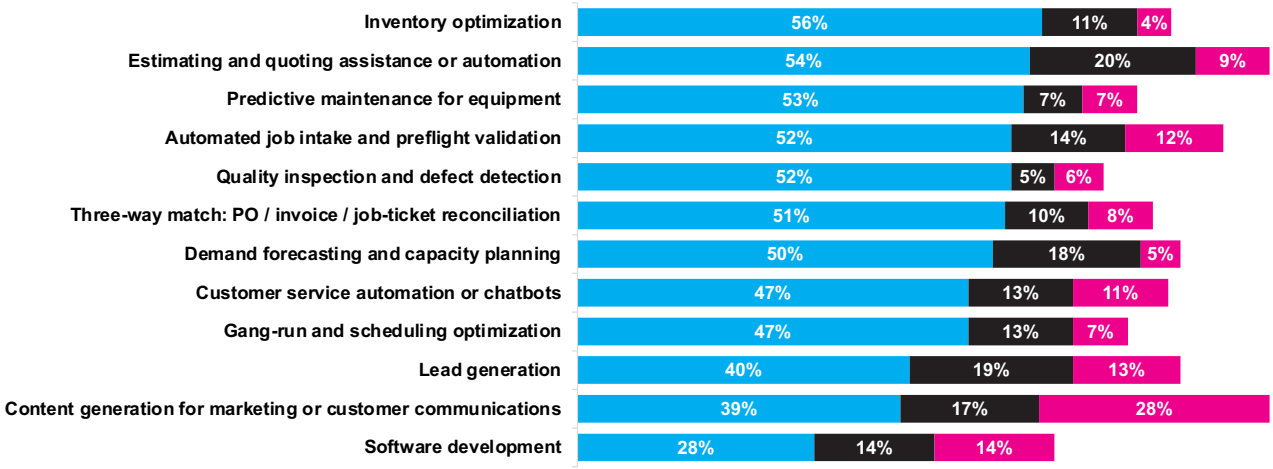


n = 294 Print Providers
Source: AI in Print: Data Readiness, Technology Alignment, and Unlocking High-Value Use Cases, Alliance Insights 2026

The next wave of adoption is likely to focus on activities where AI can reduce manual work, identify problems earlier, and support better operational decisions. More than half of surveyed print providers express interest in AI for inventory optimization (56%), estimating and quoting (54%), predictive maintenance (53%), automated job intake and preflight (52%), and quality inspection (52%). These applications could help printers respond faster to customers, improve scheduling and equipment utilization, reduce errors and waste, and make better use of existing production capacity.

Figure 2: **AI Adoption and Interest in Production Applications**

Q. Which of the following AI use cases are you currently using, piloting, or interested in pursuing?



n = 272 Print Providers
Source: AI in Print: Data Readiness, Technology Alignment, and Unlocking High-Value Use Cases, Alliance Insights 2026

Another development to watch in 2027 is the growing role of AI and intelligent automation embedded directly in production equipment and supporting systems. Rather than relying solely on stand-alone AI tools, printers will increasingly encounter intelligent capabilities within press controls, workflow software, and equipment service platforms. These technologies can automate color management and registration adjustments, monitor equipment performance, and support more proactive maintenance. As these capabilities advance, they could help printers maintain more consistent output, reduce manual intervention, improve equipment uptime, and make better use of production capacity.

In 2027, progress will be measured less by how many AI tools a printer uses and more by how effectively AI improves production performance.

The challenge for 2027 will be moving from isolated applications to reliable operational use. Disconnected systems, inconsistent data, and manual processes can limit the effectiveness of AI applications that depend on accurate job, equipment, inventory, and financial information. As a result, investments in workflow integration, data management, and automation will become increasingly important to realizing AI's potential.

For production print providers, the emphasis will shift from experimenting with AI tools to identifying specific production problems AI can help solve. The greatest near-term value may come from faster job processing, improved throughput, fewer errors, and better use of employees and equipment. In 2027, progress will be measured less by how many AI tools a printer uses and more by how effectively AI improves production performance.

2. BUYERS RAISE THE BAR FOR PRINT VALUE

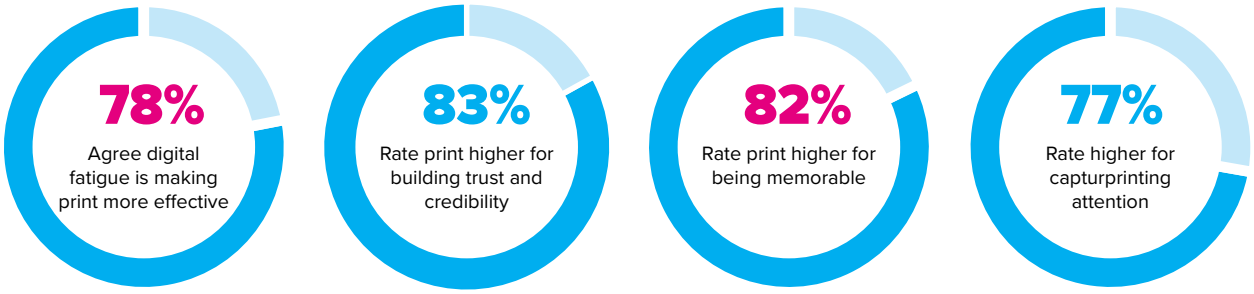
In 2027, print buyers will increasingly expect providers to deliver more than high-quality output at a competitive price. They will look for print that produces measurable results, reaches audiences with relevant messages, and is easier to order and manage. These expectations will create opportunities for providers that combine digital production capabilities with personalization, connected workflows, and services that help customers improve the effectiveness of their communications.

Print's ability to stand out in an increasingly crowded communications environment will remain an important advantage. According to a 2026 Alliance Insights survey of 207 communication buyers that purchase or influence print decisions, 78% agree that digital fatigue is making print more effective. Respondents also rate print higher than digital communications for building trust and credibility (83%), being memorable (82%), and capturing attention (77%). These perceptions suggest that print will continue to play an important role in communications strategies as organizations look for ways to engage audiences beyond digital channels.

AT A GLANCE

Why Print Stands Out in a Crowded Channel Mix

Share of communication buyers who rate print higher than digital, or agree with the statement

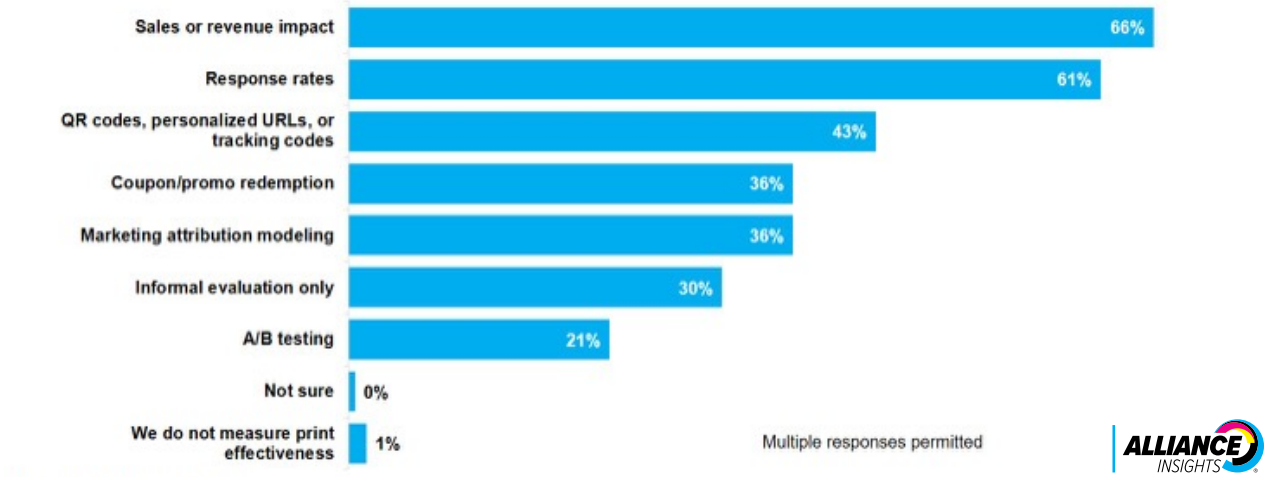


n = 207 Communication Buyers
Source: Alliance Insights 2026

The growing emphasis on measurable results will influence how buyers evaluate print and select providers. The Alliance Insights print buyer survey found (Figure 3) that 66% of communication buyers measure print effectiveness through sales or revenue impact, 61% track response rates, and 43% use QR codes, personalized URLs, or tracking codes. In the year ahead, providers that help customers connect print to campaign objectives, track responses, and demonstrate results will be better positioned to compete on value rather than price alone.

Figure 3: Print Effectiveness Measures

Q. How does your organization measure the effectiveness of printed communications? Select all that apply



n = 207 Communication Buyers
Source: Alliance Insights 2026

Personalization and targeting will also remain important priorities. Alliance Insights' survey of communication buyers found that 80% consider personalization and variable data printing extremely or very important when selecting a print provider.

These priorities will support opportunities for production digital printing in 2027. The ability to produce personalized communications, targeted versions, and smaller quantities will help customers make more efficient use of their print budgets. Providers that combine digital printing with data services, mailing capabilities, and

campaign support can help buyers improve relevance while controlling costs.

Ease of doing business will become an increasingly important competitive differentiator. In Alliance Insights' survey of communication buyers, 89% rated ease of doing business extremely or very important when selecting a print provider, equal to the percentage citing competitive pricing. Responsive customer service was also highly valued, at 88%.

Print providers must make print more effective, easier to purchase, and simpler to manage.

Digital purchasing tools will play an important role in meeting these expectations. Seventy-eight percent of respondents reported that their organizations use customized online ordering portals supplied by print providers. Among portal users, 66% cited faster ordering and reordering as a benefit, 57% reported better cost control and budget visibility, and 55% cited improved brand consistency across locations.

In 2027, these capabilities will create opportunities for providers to strengthen customer relationships through web-to-print systems that simplify ordering, support repeat purchases, manage spending, and maintain brand standards. Connecting these tools with estimating, production scheduling, and fulfillment systems can also help providers reduce manual work and respond more efficiently to customer requirements.

For print providers, the opportunity in 2027 will be to compete on the total value they deliver to customers. Investments in production digital printing, personalization, workflow integration, and online ordering will help providers respond to evolving buyer expectations. Those that make print more effective, easier to purchase, and simpler to manage will be better positioned to strengthen customer relationships and capture higher-value work.

3. CONVERGENCE MOVES FROM EXPANSION TO EXECUTION

As print providers expand into adjacent markets, the challenge is increasingly moving beyond adding new capabilities to managing them efficiently and profitably. Commercial printers, sign and graphics providers, apparel decorators, and packaging printers are broadening their offerings to capture more customer business and diversify revenue. In 2027, greater attention will turn to the operational investments and coordination needed to support a wider range of applications.

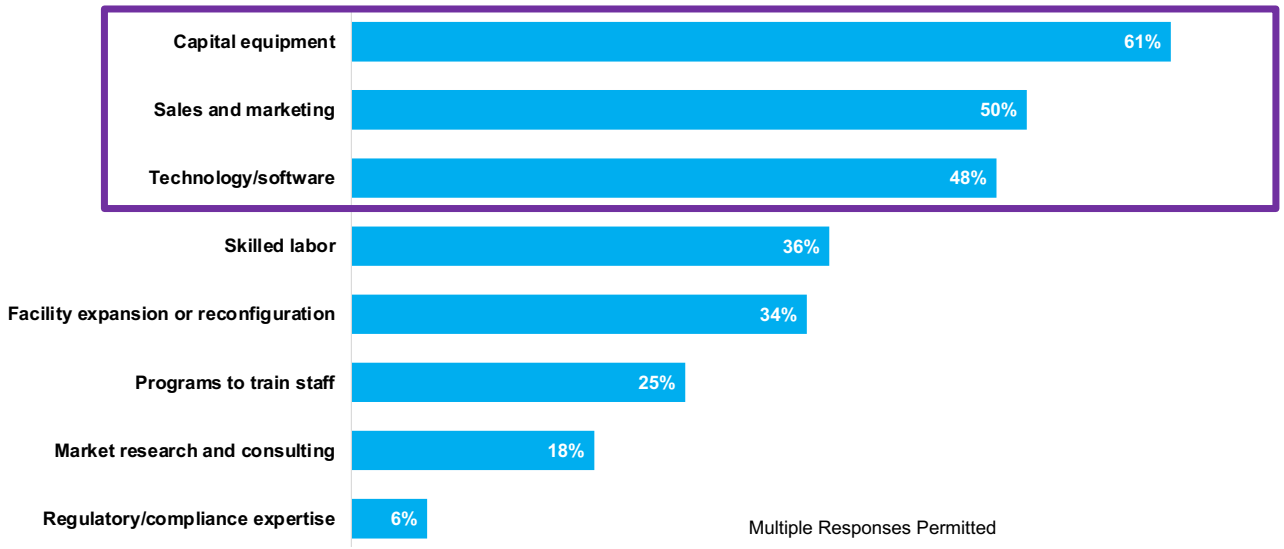
Expanding into new markets creates opportunity. Managing those capabilities efficiently determines profitability.

Alliance Insights' 2025 study, *Profiting Through Convergence*, found that customer demand is the leading motivation for entering additional print segments, cited by 74% of surveyed providers that had expanded. Potential for higher margins (52%) and competitive differentiation (46%) were also important drivers. While digital printing technology has made expansion into adjacent segments more accessible, entering a new market often requires additional equipment, processes, and expertise.

The research highlights how these investments extend beyond the press. Among providers that expanded into new segments, 61% invested in capital equipment, 48% in technology and software, 36% in skilled labor, and 34% in facility expansion or reconfiguration.

Figure 4: **Convergence Investments**

Q. Which resources did your company invest in to support the expansion?



n = 177 Print Providers that expanded into a new segment
Source: Profiting Through Convergence, Alliance Insights 2025

These investments reflect the operational challenges of managing a broader production mix. Different applications can require distinct materials, equipment configurations, finishing processes, quality standards, and production schedules. In the Alliance Insights convergence study, 45% of providers that entered new segments identified learning new processes as a challenge, 31% cited a lack of staff skills, and 22% reported difficulties integrating new workflows with existing operations. The findings illustrate why adding production capabilities does not automatically translate into efficient production.

In 2027, workflow connectivity and operational coordination will become increasingly important as providers seek to make better use of their expanded capabilities. Integrating estimating, job preparation, scheduling, production, and finishing can help reduce manual handoffs, improve visibility across different types of work, and support more consistent production performance. Training employees to work across processes and understanding the cost structures of different applications will also be important to realizing the financial benefits of expansion.

Convergence will continue to create opportunities for growth, but the ability to execute efficiently across multiple segments will play a greater role in determining its success. For print providers, the next priority will be ensuring that investments in equipment, software, people, and processes work together to support profitable growth.

4. B2+ INKJET EXPANDS DIGITAL PRODUCTION OPPORTUNITIES

The expansion of production inkjet into B2+ sheet sizes will give commercial printers more options for producing work traditionally handled by offset and smaller-format digital presses. By combining a larger sheet with inkjet's digital production capabilities, these systems will expand the range of applications suitable for digital production and create new opportunities to manage shorter runs, versioned work, and personalized printing.

Not all B2-class presses accommodate the same sheet dimensions, and that distinction matters. The larger sheet

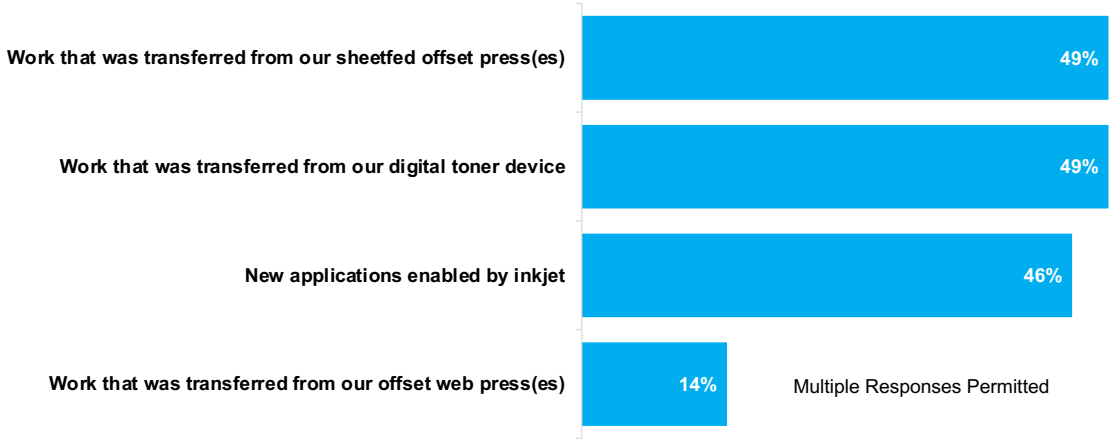
sizes supported by B2+ systems can allow printers to impose more pages or finished pieces per sheet, accommodate larger formats, and potentially improve production efficiency. Depending on the application and imposition, these advantages may reduce the number of sheets required and make additional work suitable for digital production.

A larger digital sheet creates opportunity. Application mix, production volume, and finishing determine its value.

The opportunity will include both shifting suitable work to inkjet and developing new applications. According to the 2025 *Next Generation Inkjet Investment* study conducted by NAPCO Research, now Alliance Insights, 49% of surveyed production inkjet users identified work transferred from sheetfed offset as a source of inkjet volume (Figure 5), while an equal percentage cited work transferred from toner presses. Another 46% identified new applications enabled by inkjet. Although these findings reflect production inkjet broadly rather than B2+ specifically, they illustrate the potential sources of volume for larger-format inkjet equipment.

Figure 5: **Sources of Inkjet Volume**

Q. What are the primary sources of volume for your work printed on inkjet presses?



n = 59 Print Providers with Production Inkjet Press(es)
Source: Next Generation Inkjet Investment, NAPCO Research 2025

As B2+ capabilities expand, commercial printers will have opportunities to reevaluate their production mix. Shorter offset runs, jobs requiring frequent version changes, and repeat orders with variable quantities may become candidates for inkjet. At the same time, a larger digital sheet may enable printers to produce applications that previously exceeded the format limitations of their digital equipment. Offset will remain important for longer runs and applications where its economics and capabilities are advantageous, while smaller-format digital presses will continue to serve work suited to their production characteristics.

New equipment introductions will help bring these opportunities into sharper focus in 2027. Canon's varioPRESS iV7, which made its U.S. debut in 2026 with anticipated availability in the first half of 2027, illustrates the expansion of sheetfed production inkjet into B2+ formats. Its introduction will give commercial printers another option to

consider as they evaluate future capacity and the types of work they can produce digitally.

Capturing the opportunity will require more than investing in a larger press. Printers will also need to evaluate whether their workflows, material handling, and existing cutting, folding, binding, and other finishing equipment can efficiently support the applications they plan to produce. Alliance Insights' 2026 study, *Finishing: Production Inkjet's Next Frontier*, underscores this challenge: only 18% of surveyed production inkjet users reported that their finishing workflows fully met operational needs.

For commercial printers, B2+ inkjet will expand the range of work that can be considered for digital production in 2027. Larger sheet sizes, more flexible imposition, and the ability to produce shorter runs and versioned work will create additional options for applications traditionally produced on offset and toner equipment. The value of B2+ will depend on each printer's application mix, production requirements, and ability to generate sufficient volume to support the investment.

In 2027, B2+ inkjet will give commercial printers new options for balancing work across offset, toner, and inkjet equipment. The opportunity will not simply be to produce more applications digitally, but to determine which work can be produced more efficiently and profitably on a larger digital sheet. The strongest investment cases will be built around a well-defined application mix, sufficient production volume, and the workflows and finishing capabilities needed to support it.

5. SOFTWARE SHIFTS TO PRODUCTION INTELLIGENCE

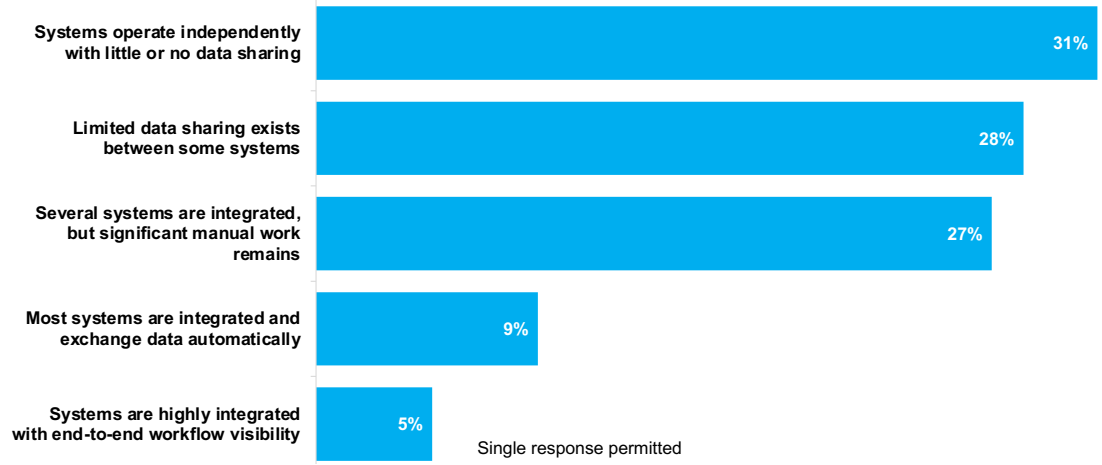
In 2027, production software will play an increasingly important role in helping print providers understand and improve how their operations perform. Beyond preparing files, routing jobs, and automating individual tasks, software is evolving to connect information across estimating, scheduling, production, finishing, and business management. The opportunity is to turn production data into useful intelligence that helps providers identify bottlenecks, manage capacity, control costs, and make better operating decisions.

The next step in production automation is turning operational data into better decisions.

Alliance Insights' 2026 study, *AI in Print: Data Readiness, Technology Alignment*, and Unlocking High-Value Use Cases, highlights how much work remains to connect the systems supporting print production. As shown in ***Figure 6,*** only 14% of surveyed print providers describe their core business and production systems as mostly or highly integrated. Thirty-one percent say their systems operate independently with little or no data sharing, another 28% report limited data sharing, and 27% have integrated several systems but still require significant manual work. These gaps can make it difficult to obtain a complete picture of production performance, even when individual systems capture valuable information.

Figure 6: **Integration Level Between Core Systems**

Q. How would you describe the level of integration between your organization's core systems (e.g., MIS, ERP, CRM, workflow automation, production equipment, and business intelligence tools)? Select one



n = 237 Print Providers
Source: AI in Print: Data Readiness, Technology Alignment, and Unlocking High-Value Use Cases, Alliance Insights 2026

The challenge is particularly evident in the movement of work between production processes. Alliance Insights' 2026 study, Finishing: Production Inkjet's Next Frontier, found that among print providers operating production inkjet equipment, 53% lack fully automated job tracking, metrics, or reporting between printing and finishing. Only 13% report fully automated feedback from finishing equipment into workflow systems. Without consistent information about job status and production progress, identifying delays, evaluating performance, and making timely adjustments become more difficult.

As providers seek to improve productivity, greater attention will turn to software that connects production equipment, workflow systems, and business information. More integrated production environments can provide better visibility into job status, equipment utilization, production capacity, material requirements, and operating costs. Software that connects job data with press operations and finishing processes can also support more automated job routing, setup, and production adjustments. These capabilities can help providers identify constraints earlier, reduce manual intervention, and make better use of available equipment and resources.

AI and advanced analytics may extend these capabilities by helping providers recognize patterns, anticipate production constraints, and evaluate alternative scheduling or resource decisions. However, the effectiveness of these tools depends on reliable information and connected systems. For many print providers, improving data quality and system integration will be necessary before more advanced production intelligence can deliver its full potential.

The opportunity in 2027 will be to move beyond automating individual production steps toward gaining a more complete understanding of how work flows through the operation. For print providers, the value of production software will increasingly be measured not only by the tasks it automates, but also by how effectively it supports decisions that improve productivity, capacity utilization, turnaround times, and profitability.

6. FINISHING BECOMES THE NEXT PRODUCTIVITY FRONTIER

In 2027, print providers will increasingly look beyond press speed to improve production productivity. Finishing, job setup, material handling, and disconnected workflows can limit how efficiently printed work becomes completed orders. As digital printing supports shorter runs, more frequent job changes, and a broader range of applications, improving these processes will become an important consideration for technology and workflow investments.

Faster presses deliver limited value if finishing cannot keep pace.

Alliance Insights' *Finishing: Production Inkjet's Next Frontier* surveyed 182 print providers, including those with and without production inkjet equipment. Results from the full print provider respondent base, including those without production inkjet capability, reveal significant opportunities for improvement. Only 21% report that their finishing workflows fully meet operational needs, while 57% say their workflows meet most needs but have limitations. Another 22% require workarounds or have workflows that do not adequately meet their needs.

Finishing is also a more common source of significant production constraints than printing itself. Across all print provider respondents, 33% identify postpress and finishing as a moderate or significant bottleneck, compared with 15% who report similar constraints in printing. When production bottlenecks occur, providers frequently respond by reprioritizing jobs (57%), adding labor or extending shifts (52%), or outsourcing work (41%). Only 20% report investing in automation, software, or AI to improve workflow efficiency.

Production inkjet is intensifying the need to address these limitations. Among respondents operating production inkjet presses, 90% say finishing capabilities are critical to realizing the technology's full productivity benefits, and 88% believe future finishing investments will deliver greater returns than faster presses. Yet only 18% say their finishing workflows fully meet operational needs. As presses become faster and application requirements more varied, downstream operations must be able to accommodate the resulting volume and job complexity.

AT A GLANCE

Inkjet Users See Finishing As The Next Productivity Lever

Print Providers Operating Production Inkjet Presses



Source: Finishing: Production Inkjet's Next Frontier, Alliance Insights 2026

Greater finishing automation and workflow integration will be important areas of investment. Opportunities include reducing manual setup, transferring job data directly to finishing equipment, automating material handling, and improving visibility into job status and production performance. Among surveyed production inkjet users, software and workflow integration is the leading finishing investment priority, cited by 50%.

Investment decisions will nevertheless require careful evaluation. Across all surveyed print providers, 40% identify high capital requirements as a barrier to finishing workflow upgrades, while 38% say their existing workflows are good enough for now. The challenge will be determining which improvements offer sufficient benefits in throughput, labor utilization, turnaround time, and operating costs to justify the investment.

For print providers in 2027, the opportunity will be to improve productivity across the entire production process. Whether operating toner, offset, or inkjet equipment, identifying and reducing bottlenecks between printing and finished output can help providers make better use of existing capacity, reduce manual work, and respond more efficiently to changing customer requirements.

7. DIRECT MAIL BECOMES MORE RESPONSIVE

In 2027, direct mail will continue evolving from primarily scheduled campaigns toward more automated programs that respond to customer behaviors and events. While triggered direct mail is not new, advances in digital printing, marketing automation, and data integration are creating more opportunities to incorporate physical mail into ongoing customer engagement strategies.

Direct mail is becoming part of ongoing customer engagement, not just scheduled campaigns.

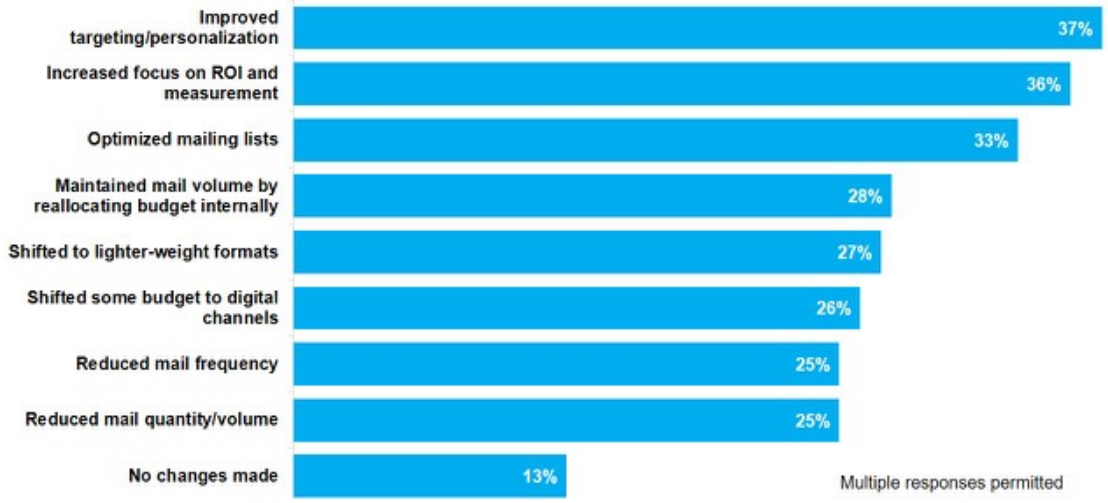
Triggered mailings can respond to events such as abandoned shopping carts, customer inquiries, approaching renewals, or periods of inactivity. By connecting customer relationship management (CRM) systems and marketing platforms with print production, organizations can initiate targeted mailings as part of broader communications programs that also include email, text messaging, and digital advertising.

Industry research suggests there is room for wider adoption. Lob's *2025 State of Direct Mail* found that 86% of surveyed marketing executives believe direct mail performs best when integrated with other channels, while 46% reported using retargeting or trigger-based campaigns. These findings highlight the importance marketers place on integration and the opportunity to expand the use of more automated mail programs.

Rising postal costs are also increasing pressure to make mail more targeted and measurable. In Alliance Insights' 2026 survey of communication buyers, 37% reported improving targeting and personalization in response to postal rate increases, 36% increased their focus on ROI and measurement, and 33% optimized mailing lists (***Figure 7***). These priorities reinforce the importance of reaching the right customers with relevant communications and demonstrating campaign value.

Figure 7: **Actions in Response to Postal Rate Increases**

Q. Which actions has your organization taken in response to postal rate increases? Select all that apply



n = 207 Communication Buyers
Source: Alliance Insights 2026

For print providers, supporting these programs requires more than variable-data printing. Automated workflows must connect incoming customer data with document composition, job processing, production scheduling, printing, and postal preparation. High-speed production inkjet can support the efficient production of smaller, targeted mailings, while integrated software can reduce manual handling and help providers manage more frequent orders.

The U.S. Postal Service is also encouraging closer connections between physical mail and digital engagement through its mailing promotions and incentives. Programs supporting integrated technology and Informed Delivery provide additional opportunities for marketers to connect printed communications with online interactions.

As direct mail becomes more closely connected to ongoing marketing programs, print providers will have opportunities to expand their role beyond campaign production. Those that can integrate customer data, automate production, manage postal requirements, and support campaign reporting will be better positioned to serve marketers seeking more timely, relevant, and measurable communications.

8. TRANSACTIONAL PRINT GETS SMARTER

In 2027, transactional print providers will face growing pressure to deliver more value from essential customer communications while managing the costs and complexity of production. As organizations expand electronic delivery and seek to control mailing expenses, printed bills, statements, and notices must remain accurate, secure, and cost-effective while supporting broader customer communication strategies.

The opportunity extends beyond adding promotional messages to transactional documents. Organizations can use customer data, personalization, and full-color printing to make essential communications clearer, more relevant, and more actionable. Financial statements can include customized account information and educational content, utility bills can provide usage comparisons and energy-saving recommendations, and insurance

and healthcare communications can combine required information with personalized service messages.

These capabilities are already well established. Alliance Insights' research study, *The Production Inkjet Application Revolution*, found that 91% of surveyed buyers of transactional materials included targeted marketing or customer service messages in their communications. The findings illustrate how transactional printing has evolved beyond simply delivering account information, creating a foundation for more sophisticated communication programs.

Transactional print providers must deliver more value from essential customer communications while controlling production costs.

Customer communication management (CCM) technology is helping organizations coordinate messaging across print, email, customer portals, and mobile channels. As customers receive information through multiple channels, organizations need to maintain consistent content, accurate data, and reliable delivery. Printed communications remain part of that broader process, whether providing required notices, communicating account information, or directing recipients to online services.

For print providers, these requirements place greater emphasis on production integration and document integrity. Highly variable documents must be composed, printed, tracked, and delivered accurately, often within demanding service-level requirements. High-speed production inkjet supports personalized, full-color output at the volumes required for many transactional applications, while automated workflows for document composition, production tracking, integrity verification, inserting, and postal preparation help manage complexity and maintain reliability.

The next priority will be connecting these capabilities more effectively. Better integration between customer data, document composition, print production, and delivery processes can reduce manual intervention, improve visibility, and help providers manage increasingly complex communication requirements without adding unnecessary costs.

As transactional communications continue to evolve, providers will need to demonstrate value beyond producing and mailing documents. Those that combine reliable, efficient production with secure data management, automated workflows, and coordinated customer communications will be better positioned to support clients' changing requirements.

9. BOOK PRODUCTION SHIFTS TO SMARTER MANUFACTURING

In 2027, the next stage of digital book production will be about making shorter, more frequent print runs more efficient. Publishers' efforts to reduce inventory risk, manage costs, and maintain title availability will continue to support demand-responsive manufacturing. For book manufacturers, the challenge will increasingly be managing a more complex mix of jobs without allowing production costs and turnaround times to rise.

The shift reflects a broader reconsideration of book production economics. *The Book Manufacturers' Institute (BMI), State of the Book Industry 2026 report*, produced by Alliance Insights with the support of Canon U.S.A., highlights how publishers are increasingly evaluating the total cost of producing and holding books rather than focusing solely on the manufacturing cost per copy. This approach creates opportunities for digital printing to support smaller initial orders, more frequent replenishment, and continued availability of backlist titles.

As publishers adjust their purchasing strategies, book manufacturers will need to handle more titles, smaller quantities, and frequent production changes. The economics of this work will depend not only on press

productivity but also on how efficiently orders move through prepress, printing, binding, and fulfillment. Automation and better integration across these processes will become increasingly important.

Standardization will also play a greater role. *During a PRINTING United Alliance webinar on book production trends*, Matt Baehr, executive director of BMI, emphasized the benefits of standardizing paper grades, trim sizes, and binding specifications to reduce changeovers and increase capacity. These practices will become increasingly valuable as manufacturers seek to handle more frequent, smaller orders without adding unnecessary production complexity.

Shorter runs demand smarter manufacturing.

As publishers seek to reduce inventory and replenish titles more frequently, manufacturers must manage more jobs and changeovers without driving up production costs.

Advances in production inkjet will continue to expand the range of books that can be produced digitally. Improvements in color quality, substrate compatibility, and production efficiency are making digital printing a more viable option for applications that previously depended heavily on offset. During the same webinar, Brian O'Leary, executive director of the Book Industry Study Group (BISG), pointed to growing publisher acceptance of digital color for applications such as educational workbooks and certain children's books, particularly as production quantities decline.

Closer collaboration between publishers and manufacturers will be another important part of this transition. Publishers will need to share better demand forecasts and production requirements, while manufacturers will have opportunities to advise customers on run lengths, technology selection, inventory strategies, and replenishment schedules.

As O'Leary observed during the webinar: "It's just not a business environment where you just throw something one job over the wall and see what you get for a bid on it."

The competitive advantage in 2027 will come from making demand-responsive book production more efficient and scalable. Manufacturers that combine production inkjet with automated workflows, standardized specifications, integrated finishing, and connected fulfillment systems will be better positioned to handle changing publisher requirements while maintaining productivity and controlling costs.

10. IN-PLANTS BUILD GREATER PRODUCTION FLEXIBILITY

In 2027, in-plant printing operations will continue to invest in digital production technologies and workflow improvements to handle more work internally, improve productivity, and respond more quickly to the needs of their parent organizations. As job requirements change and operating costs remain a concern, in-plants are looking for ways to expand capacity and capabilities while making better use of equipment, staff, and available space.

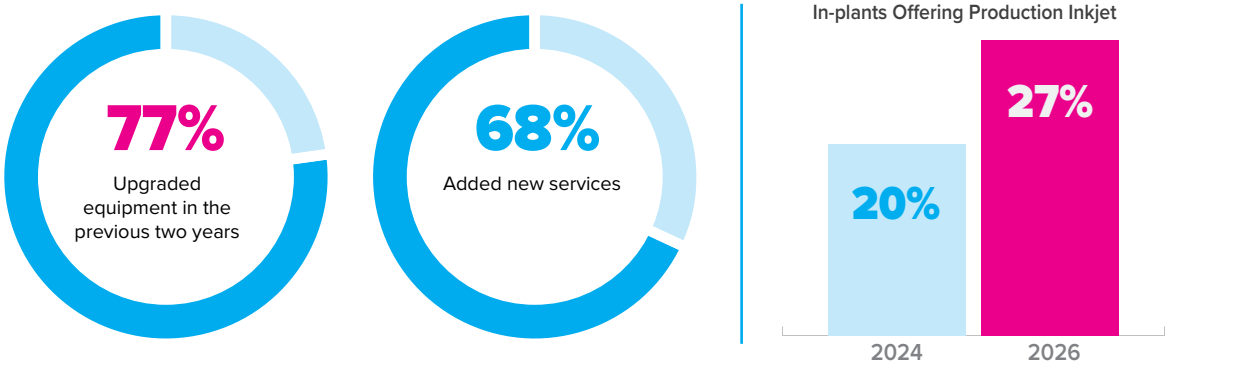
Research from In-plant Impressions and Alliance Insights indicates that equipment investment and capability expansion are already underway. In the 2026 *In-plant Capabilities, Performance, and Expansion* study, 77% of surveyed in-plants reported upgrading equipment over the previous two years, while 68% added new services. Respondents identified bringing previously outsourced work in-house, investing in more productive equipment, and simplifying job ordering among the factors contributing to business growth.

Production inkjet is supporting this evolution by offering higher-volume digital production capabilities alongside the flexibility to handle shorter runs and changing job requirements. The share of surveyed in-plants offering production inkjet increased from 20% in 2024 to 27% in 2026. A separate 2026 Alliance Insights survey found that participating in-plants expect a greater share of their print work to move to production inkjet over the following two years, while toner remains their primary production technology. For operations with sufficient volume, inkjet may offer opportunities to shift work from multiple toner devices to a higher-capacity production platform and improve production economics.

AT A GLANCE

In-plants Are Upgrading And Adding Capabilities

Print Providers Operating Production Inkjet Presses



Source: In-plant Capabilities, Performance, and Expansion, In-plant Impressions / Alliance Insights 2026

For in-plants, the priority in 2027 will be building the right combination of equipment, workflows, and services to meet their organizations' changing requirements. Greater production flexibility can help them retain appropriate work internally, improve responsiveness, and demonstrate their value to the organizations they serve.

CONCLUSION

The trends shaping production digital printing in 2027 point to an industry with expanding technological capabilities and increasingly complex business requirements. Inkjet technology is opening new application opportunities, while automation, software, and AI are creating additional ways to improve production performance. At the same time, changing customer expectations are increasing the importance of flexibility, personalization, reliability, and service.

For print providers, the challenge will be determining which opportunities and investments offer the greatest value for their operations. Adding production capacity or new capabilities is only part of the equation. Greater returns will depend on how effectively providers integrate equipment, workflows, data, and people to improve efficiency, control costs, and meet customer requirements.

The opportunities in 2027 will not be the same for every provider. But across commercial printing, publishing, direct mail, transactional communications, and in-plant operations, one priority is becoming increasingly important: turning advances in digital printing technology into measurable improvements in production performance, customer value, and profitability.

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* Product specifications and anticipated availability dates for the varioPRESS iV7 are based on current estimates and are subject to change without notice. Survey data and market findings cited in this report reflect independent research conducted by Alliance Insights / NAPCO Research and other cited third parties. All referenced company names, brand names, and trademarks are the property of their respective owners.

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