



Pursuing Productivity:

Commercial Printers Investing in Tools to Reduce Costs, Improve Throughput, and Gain a Competitive Edge

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INTRODUCTION

Productivity is a key ingredient to the success of any commercial printing company, as it can help yield operational efficiency, reduces costs, and improves throughput. While commercial printers' pursuit of productivity is not new, it is intensifying in response to market forces driving increased competition. This report combines commercial printer survey research reported in the PRINTING United Alliance's Fall 2024 Commercial Printing Print Business Outlook Report with articles, blogs, and videos featuring Canon U.S.A. customers to identify key tactics and strategies for leveraging productivity to help improve profitability and operational success.

PRODUCTIVITY: ALWAYS IMPORTANT, NOW INDISPENSABLE

Productivity has always been important to commercial printers, but its role in operational success has been elevated as a result of increases in operating costs, challenges in finding workers, and heightened market competition. According to the [PRINTING United Alliance's Print Business Outlook Series Commercial Printing Report Fall 2024 \(sponsored by Canon U.S.A.\)](#), 73% of commercial printers surveyed for the report indicated that productivity is their top priority for 2025. As shown in **Figure 1**, productivity was commercial printers' top priority by a wide margin.

Figure 1: Commercial Printers' 2025 Business Priorities

Q. What are your top priorities for 2025?



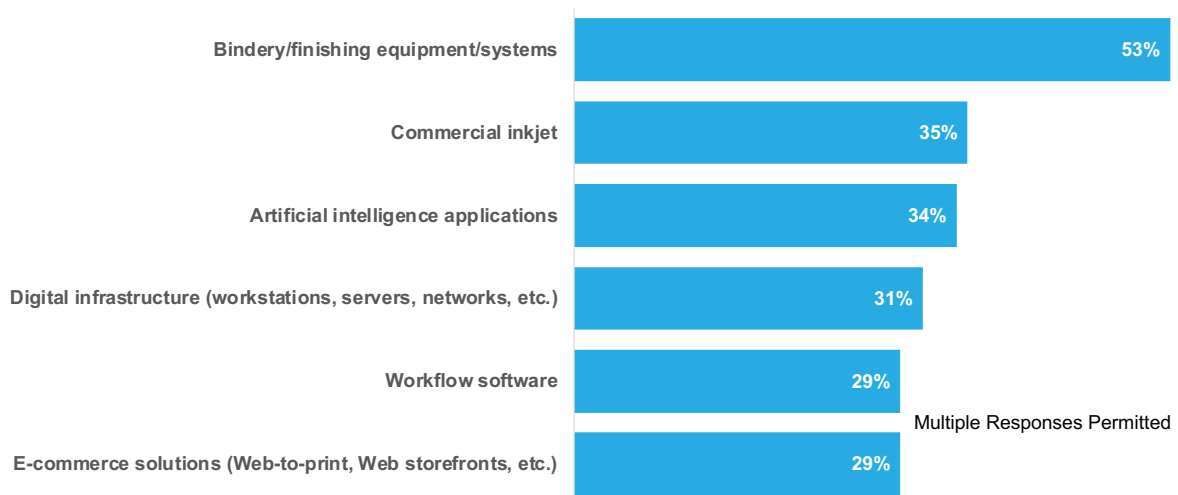
n=119 Commercial Printers
Source: PRINTING United Alliance's Print Business Outlook Series Commercial Printing Report Fall 2024 (Sponsored by Canon U.S.A.)



PRINTING United Alliance's Commercial Printing Print Business Outlook Series (sponsored by Canon U.S.A.) features data provided by commercial printers participating in the association's quarterly State of the Industry Surveys¹. Commercial printers participating in the research also revealed that capital investment will be an essential part of their plans to boost productivity, as 70% plan to invest in hardware and software over the next year. Respondents' top five investment priorities, as shown in **Figure 2**, encompass a variety of tools for enhancing productivity. Investments in bindery and finishing systems support productivity gains achieved earlier in production, while investments in workflow software, digital infrastructure, and e-commerce can automate processes and increase production speeds.

Figure 2: Top 5 Capital Investment Priorities

Q. Which capital investments would you most like to make over the next 12 months? Which would most help your company?



n=119 Commercial Printers

Source: PRINTING United Alliance's Print Business Outlook Series Commercial Printing Report Fall 2024 (Sponsored by Canon U.S.A.)

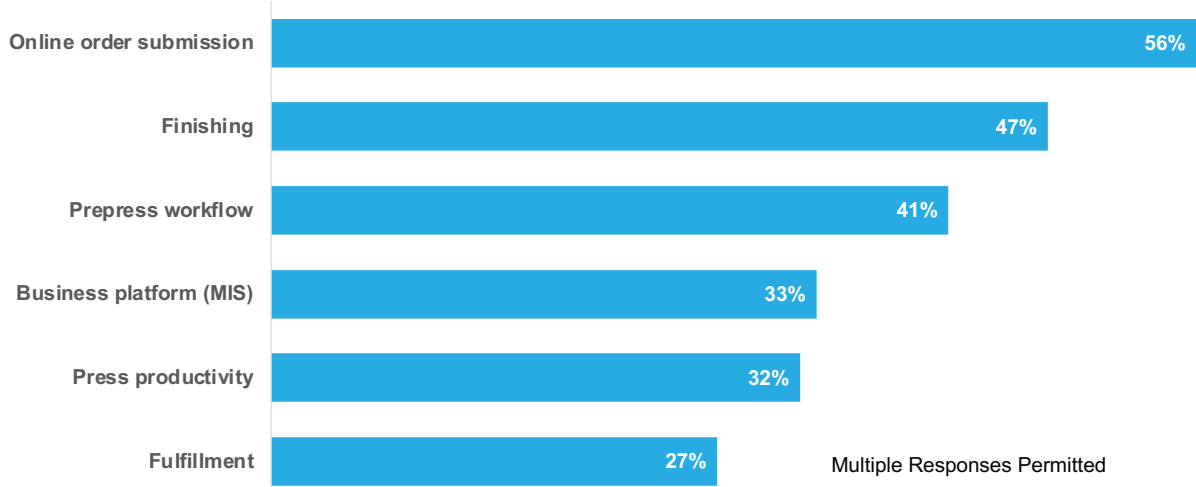


¹ The PRINTING United State of the Industry research is sponsored by Canon U.S.A.

The top investments identified by commercial printers in **Figure 2**, align with what commercial printers identified in **Figure 3** as the top areas in which they would like to improve productivity. Commercial printers want to improve productivity of their online ordering systems, finishing equipment, prepress workflow, business management systems, and printing presses.

Figure 3: Productivity Targets

Q. Which capital investments would you most like to make over the next 12 months? Which would most help your company?



n=119 Commercial Printers
Source: *PRINTING United Alliance's Print Business Outlook Series Commercial Printing Report Fall 2024*
(Sponsored by Canon U.S.A.)

EXPLORING PRODUCTIVITY TARGETS

The productivity priorities identified by survey respondents point to essential areas commercial printers can target to better their operational efficiency. A closer look at the ways commercial printers are focusing on online ordering, workflow automation, and press productivity to enhance productivity offers valuable perspective on how these efforts can deliver benefits. Here are ways that commercial printers are pursuing each of these areas to advance their organization’s productivity.

Productivity Target: Online Ordering

Survey respondents identified online ordering as a top priority for improving productivity, but it also can result in strengthening customer loyalty and growing revenue. *Printing Impressions'* article [“Web-to-Print Paves a New Path to Efficiency and Growth”](#) reports that online ordering allows print providers to strengthen customer relationships, automate production, grow revenue, automate, and expand services. Profiled in the article is the efforts of [Boingo Graphics](#) in Charlotte, North Carolina, an early adopter of online ordering. According to the company’s president, Scott Nowokunski, “Customers expect online ordering options and all of our top clients use it to varying degrees — sometimes it is 100% of their transactions, other times it’s 5%.”

Nowokunski explained in the article that print customers want to streamline and automate the ordering process to help reduce the number of steps required to place an order, while his organization looks to automate mundane tasks to spend time on the complex ones. The company is also the first company in North Carolina to install a Canon varioPRINT iX3200 sheetfed inkjet press.

Productivity Target: Workflow

Workflow is the heart of productivity and an area where investment in automation tools is essential. The *Printing Impressions* article [“Navigating Modern Print Shop Challenges: The Smart Print Room”](#) notes that print shops today can still face productivity challenges from semi-automated or manual production processes and advises taking action to help streamline operations, enhance productivity, provide enhanced reporting and dashboards, and support remote work. The article’s mention of dashboards surfaces their importance as a productivity tool.

Dashboards play a vital role in managing productivity and profitability. In the commercial printing industry, where margins for error are slim, dashboards are an essential source for providing access to timely, accurate, and comprehensive data on production process performance. Two-thirds of PRINTING United Alliance’s Commercial Printing State of the Industry survey respondents report using dashboards for order management, while 46% use them to monitor press performance, and 37% for digital printed job reporting.

These tools provide timely, accurate data essential for optimizing production processes and making informed decisions. A primary component of improving productivity is process measurement, which dashboards enable. For example, Canon’s PRISMAlytics Dashboard provides business-critical information on the press utilization and consumption-related data and provides shop floor supervisors and operators with a single view of connected printing equipment. It provides insights and comparisons on the activities of supported and connected Canon print technologies such as sheet-fed toner/inkjet engines, web fed inkjet presses, and imagePROGRAF large format printers.

The PRISMAlytics Dashboard is a part of Canon’s PRISMA portfolio of workflow applications, printer tools, and print servers. The PRISMA Production solution is in place and enabling productivity at the [PCI Group](#), a Fort Mill, South Carolina-based provider of mission critical print and mail communications.

Commenting on the benefits of the PRISMA workflow, Eric Weinbrenner, print manager of the PCI Group said [in a Canon customer video](#), “PRISMA workflow is the key to our whole operation.” He further explained, “If it isn’t on PRISMA, it is kind of out of sight and we are not aware of it. It [PRISMA Production] gives you a complete history, tells you everything about the file, tells you if you have an issue with the file, tells you who printed it, and tells you when it printed.”

The combination of the PRISMA workflow and Canon presses are supporting PCI’s efforts to grow profitability, as Jeff Moder, chief marketing officer, PCI group, [noted in the video](#), “We are growing at a 10% clip every year. We need speed and accuracy and efficiency.”

Another print provider experiencing productivity benefits from the PRISMA Production solution is [DMM Inc.](#) in Scarborough, Maine. In the *Printing Impressions* article [“Canon U.S.A. Enables DMM to Reach New Growth Opportunities with Digital Production Print”](#), DMM President and CEO John V. Cloutier, said, “Our biggest differentiator would be our use of technology, particularly our Canon inkjet technology and PRISMA workflow, as well as our integrity verification and user portal platforms for our customers. We work with very tight SLAs [service level agreements], and output needs to get into the customer’s hands in a certain amount of time requiring a high degree of accuracy. For this reason, we’ve customized workflow and technology platforms that can meet our customers’ SLAs on time — providing outstanding compliance for our customers, thanks to our Canon inkjet presses and workflow.”

Another testament on the positive effect of workflow on productivity comes from [a thINK Forum blog on OneTouchPoint, a Hartland, Wisconsin-based provider of marketing and printing services](#). While the main focus of the blog is on how the company boosted efficiency and customer satisfaction with its investment in seven Canon varioPRINT 6000 TITAN Series production presses, it also notes how “the seamless transition to Canon’s workflow software, PRISMAprepare solution, helped streamline their operations. The software’s enhanced capabilities simplified file management, which in turn can reduce the complexity of repeat jobs and improve efficiency.”

Productivity Target: Press Productivity

Advancements in digital press technology are continually opening new avenues for commercial printers to enhance productivity, expand their market reach, meet evolving customer demands, and optimize labor efficiency. Production inkjet presses in particular, offer commercial printers the ability to boost productivity, reduce costs, and increase revenue growth. [According to NAPCO Research’s 2024 The Production Inkjet Application Revolution](#) (Canon was a co-sponsor of the research), on average, print providers reported their investment in production inkjet yielded a:

- 3.9% decrease in paper costs/consumption
- 4.9% decrease in production waste
- 1 person decrease in press staff
- 11.8% increase in profits

Here are examples of benefits gained from print providers that invested in production inkjet presses:

- [A *Printing Impressions* video interview with Phil Kotula](#), president the [MPX Group](#), Golden Valley, Minnesota, highlighted the productivity of production inkjet. Kotula reported the uptime of the company’s Canon varioPRINT iX3200 sheetfed inkjet press is higher than 95%. The press is equipped with an optional in-line booklet maker and Kotula says the company produces booklets “with one operator, probably saving us two-thirds of the time, and that is huge.” When asked about the inkjet press investment, Kotula said “It is the best piece of equipment we purchased and has made that much of a difference in our production.”

- [In a different *Printing Impressions* video](#), Derek Pease, director of warehousing, inventory, and sourcing at [Reynolds and Reynolds](#), Celina, Ohio, describes how the installation of a pair of Canon ProStream 1800 webfed inkjet presses and two varioPRINT i300 sheetfed inkjet presses have increased productivity. Pease said the company invested in inkjet to increase efficiency, speed, and service levels. He reported in the video that the investment has reduced waste, noting, “In 2019 we were averaging just over 13% waste, and we have seen a clear reduction of waste in 2023, and expect waste to be well below 9% this year. A lot of that is due to lack of makeready and color consistency—we are not inspecting and stopping the press.”
- [In a th!NK Forum blog post reporting on Digital Express’s](#) investment in a varioPRINT iX3200 sheetfed inkjet press, company owner Sean Graveline reported, “The speed of the varioPRINT iX is phenomenal. Our employees have really felt a positive impact from this addition. They can get a lot more output done in a shorter period of time, which has reduced stress levels and allowed us to do more from a quality check standpoint.” [The La Vista, Nebraska-based company](#) specializes in rapid turnaround, providing wholesale printing at competitive prices.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Investing in productivity is a top priority for commercial printers as competitive markets leave little room for inefficiencies. To that end, commercial printers report investing in tools to automate processes, reduce production bottlenecks, better use resources, and help improve efficiency.

To improve productivity and drive profitability, commercial printers surveyed for the PRINTING United Alliance’s Print Business Outlook Series Commercial Printing Report Fall 2024 identified following three areas as key targets for improving productivity:

1. **Online Ordering:** Streamlining the ordering process through online platforms to help improve productivity, strengthen customer loyalty, and grow revenue.
2. **Workflow Automation:** Implementing automated workflows can minimize manual interventions, reduce errors, and increase overall efficiency. Dashboards play a vital role in managing productivity and profitability by providing access to timely, accurate, and comprehensive data on production process performance.
3. **Production Inkjet:** Adopting production inkjet technology can help boost print speeds, improve print quality, reduce labor requirements, and lower operational costs for customers that have the appropriate print volumes and applications.

Commercial printing companies that embrace these strategies are finding that, in addition to enhancing operational efficiency, they can also secure a competitive edge in the market. The pursuit of productivity remains a cornerstone of success for commercial printing companies. As market competition intensifies, leveraging productivity-enhancing strategies will become increasingly important.

WHO WE ARE

NAPCORESEARCH

NAPCO Research crafts custom data-centric solutions that leverage our highly engaged audiences across the markets in which we operate, our industry subject matter experts and in-house research expertise. We partner with our clients to identify their unique business problem and create solutions that enable deeply informed decision-making.

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Canon

Canon U.S.A., Inc. is a leader in digital imaging and printing solutions with one of the broadest portfolios in the industry, offering solutions such as digital presses, production inkjet presses, wide-format printers, work solutions and professional services. With approximately \$28.5 billion in global revenue, its parent company, Canon Inc., as of 2024 has ranked in the top-10 for U.S. patents granted for 41 consecutive years. Canon U.S.A. is dedicated to its Kyosei philosophy of social and environmental responsibility.

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