



Didier Gombert

Didier Gombert, CEO - Objectif Lune Inc.

Recently, Objectif Lune, a leader in solutions for the efficient design and high-volume printing of transactional and variable content documents, announced that it acquired Atlas Software BV, developer and marketer of PrintShop Mail Software, an easy-to-use, entry-level tool for variable document design and printing. As a result of the acquisition, the expanded organization says it is now firmly established as a dominant player in the rapidly developing variable content marketplace. OutputLinks recently took the opportunity to speak with CEO of Objectif Lune, Didier Gombert.

Question:

Objectif Lune recently acquired Atlas Software BV. What does this mean for Objectif Lune and for the industry?

Answer:

As a result of the acquisition, the expanded organization is now firmly established as a dominant player in the rapidly developing variable content marketplace. The acquisition also gives Objectif Lune a better strategic position to support a broader range of applications. Industry partners and customers gain a deeper bench to help them drive more successful and profitable solutions. Consolidation within a market often results in fewer, stronger players, and our acquisition brings a stronger organization onto the field of vendors offering solutions for variable content output. This acquisition enables Objectif Lune to offer a complete range of variable data design and output management for both the transactional and quickly emerging promotional markets. This outcome should become even more apparent in the long run. In the short run, our partners are able to achieve more profitable working relationships fueled by greater resources.

Question:

Give us a little background on Objectif Lune.

Answer:

Objectif Lune provides businesses with state-of-the-art software tools for the efficient design and distribution of variable content documents. We were founded in 1993, and contrary to what others were doing at the time, we programmed directly in PostScript. Since all our applications were in the printer's native language, they had the advantage of being both host and application independent. The same data that had always been sent to the printer could still be used unchanged, since processing was handled at the printer level. Another benefit was the ability to maintain optimum speed of the printer. This software eventually became PlanetPress, the anchor of our product line.

Our team brings a lot of experience from a wide range of businesses, all with the common ingredient of high-volume transactional or promotional printing. With headquarters in Montreal, Canada, we have a strong global presence through other offices in Asia, Australia, Canada, Europe and South America. In 2003 for the second year in a row, Deloitte named Objectif Lune one of the fastest growing companies in North America with its the annual Technology Fast 500 rankings. We've won numerous other awards, including The Mercuriades award, which recognizes technological innovation and entrepreneurship, and National Bank of Canada's SME award for businesses.

Question:

Tell us about your vision for the expanded company?**Answer:**

This is a great opportunity to create an organization that is stronger than both of the two companies separately, but it's important to analyze and understand as we go forward. In the short-term, change must be gradual to avoid any disruption or confusion for customers and partners. PrintShop Mail absolutely will stay a vital part of the product strategy. It's a very good and easy-to-use entry-level software focused on delivering solutions for promotional printing, and these attributes will remain as we build on it for the future and add yet another market to our portfolio.

For the mid-term, we see some level of integration is desirable to build on the value of both organizations to achieve even better results. In this case, one plus one equals three. In the long term, which I'm defining as 18 months, we see much more impact, specifically as we pursue our analysis of the requirements for products on both sides. We are cautious and realistic, but our approach is well balanced and protects the assets of both sides.

Question:**What are your thoughts on the state of the industry today?****Answer:**

The printing industry is growing well, but I frequently hear there are a lot of the same variable content offerings from many players. That may be true, but we don't have saturation yet. A lot of prospects out there are still going through pain in printing their documents, and yet they are not acting on it. Many people in corporate America are eating the costs of preprinted forms and legacy printers and struggling with that, even when solutions are available. Even very large corporations still have old implementations of document production. For example, I know of a large brokerage firm whose "personalization" is a printed label on a report. And this is big company with money. I have seen also laser printer manufacturers doing invoices on impact printers.

A lot of people are aware of how to do variable content output, and print-for-pay providers have the most education about it, but many others have not jumped in yet. There is a lot of opportunity in corporations to do the same thing, but on a smaller scale than what a service bureau would do. Large insurers, credit card providers and others like that have internal print shops, but they are smaller companies in the sense of what they need from a variable data printing solution. Companies of 200-300 people need packing slips, labels and mail merge, so again, there is big opportunity. My view on market is that in some places, variable data applications have reached commodity levels, but others are still way behind.

Five years ago, I thought the window of opportunity for variable content printing was five years. Now I think it is still another five years out. Communication is a big part of the future, whether it is going to paper, email or screen and it needs to be formatted in one way or another. There is lot of opportunity and room for improvement, and the message is starting to get around.

Question:**How can Objectif Lune help organizations with their customer communications?****Answer:**

Our PlanetPress software is the flagship of our solutions for transactional and variable content document creation. Companies use PlanetPress to improve customer communications ranging from simple mail merge to very complex statements. The PlanetPress Suite is based on a modular approach and includes solutions for output management, imaging, indexing, faxing and services to create a comprehensive document platform for their communications strategy. Using existing data, users can print quickly and efficiently with the added benefits of electronic delivery options and integrated archiving. In addition, with the acquisition of Atlas Software, PrintShop

Mail now gives us an even stronger presence for the many organizations that need reliable, basic variable data or mail merge solutions.

Another product that is quickly emerging as a powerful member of our suite is PlanetPress Watch. With PlanetPress Watch, the collection, processing and distribution of data and documents for customer communications can be highly automated, thereby increasing efficiency, reliability and ROI, which is key in today's business. By automating their entire variable printing processes with the creation of rules and processes, thereby significantly reducing human intervention, PlanetPress Watch strongly decreases operation costs while increasing bottom-line revenue by better targeting of customers.

Question:

What mistakes do you see companies making with their transactional and variable content documents?

Answer:

A lot of people are still not taking advantage of the fact that software is able to make documents more legible to readers. There is a lot of flexibility in using fonts, yet we still see people using courier. There is much untapped potential. It may be lack of time or other reasons that more people aren't making use of the solutions out there, but they should also look at ways software can give them economies of process. People tend to make more mistakes with old systems. They stick with business as usual, when there could be economies by mingling multiple print streams together. The real ROI analysis will probably come up in the second wave. Our job will be to educate those companies to demonstrate the benefits of moving from legacy printers to more flexible laser printers by continuing to deliver quick ROI solutions that enable better customer targeting.

Question:

What's the most important trend in the industry today and why?

Answer:

Color is something that needs to be looked at it. Many people do not believe it will be that big, but plot the cost per page of printing color, and the point of return is not that far away. In the beginning, people said to print in color because invoices would get paid faster, but that was mostly hype. Now that the hype is over, users have to realize that color has other potential. It brings depth to documents and makes them easier to understand. When people call customer service, their colorful account number will jump off the page, streamlining the resolution of the call. Will color win? I think so. People are beginning to jump on this, as we see with all the new printers coming out. Right now, the color issue is the only thing that makes preprinted forms seem more profitable.

Question:

What's your best advice for today's document professional?

Answer:

In the past, it was important to understand design and how to make good-looking documents. Now the need is to understand data: how to get to it, how to modify it, and the business processes behind it. Document professionals should look for new opportunities from the same data or by combining data in new forms. They have to understand more about the data because everyone has a solution now for creating professional documents. It's not a challenge anymore, but the document has to take raw data and combine it and query a database for information. The job is not for a designer. This industry is now more data driven, not design driven.

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