

## Crimsonwing PrintVis

[Barney Cox](#), [PrintWeek](#), 12 June 2009

This ERP has a unified system and is based on widely recognised Microsoft technology, discovers Barney Cox

If you wanted a tool to support the management and administration of your print business, you'd probably go on the hunt for a Management Information System (MIS) wouldn't you? Not necessarily. Although MIS has become the catch-all term in the industry to define these business tools, things are different in other industries. Beyond print, the term Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) is more commonly applied to the systems employed by firms to run their back-office functions. Examples of ERP vendors include SAP, Oracle, Sage, Elpicor and Microsoft.

Another company offering an ERP is Crimsonwing, an IT firm with roots in the UK, but listed on the Maltese stock exchange. The product that it sells for the print market is PrintVis, which is based on Microsoft Dynamics NAV. Dynamics NAV is an ERP platform designed for firms involved in distribution and manufacturing, making it an ideal core to build a system to manage a print company on.

Crimsonwing's relationship with the UK print industry started with the development of an e-commerce platform for Williams Lea. Since then, it has expanded its operation to include printers, as well as print managers.

"We've made a very large investment in bringing in people from the print industry," says Crimsonwing business development manager Leigh Banks.

Worldwide, there are 400 firms using PrintVis. In the UK the roll call includes Adare, Dsicmm and Stephens & George.

### More than an MIS?

"In an ERP, financials are at the core of the system," says Banks. "Beyond a £2m-£3m turnover, you need more than ledgers, you need a management accounts system."

He claims that the benefit of ERP over MIS is that it's a single unified system, rather than buying an MIS and a separate accounts package. This simplifies training and enables unified company-wide reporting.

For firms that don't want integrated accounting, PrintVis can be sold without it, making it an MIS. However, Banks says the distinction between ERP and MIS is not that simple. "The dividing line is not simplistic. Irrespective of industry, the move towards Kaizen, just-in-time and lean has gone hand in hand with the adoption of ERP. The argument has been 'Yes, ERP is a great idea, but my industry is different to others'. The Microsoft-based technology caters for that. The core functions are the same irrespective of industry and then there is a customisation layer to tailor the product for different sectors and firms."

### Recognisable product

One of the arguments in favour of a Microsoft-based ERP platform is the widespread availability of people who can customise the system.

PrintVis consultant Gavin Tye explains: "There are lots of Microsoft-skilled people out there and often we can show a customer how to do things to their system themselves, which is more cost-effective than using us."

While print industry-specific MIS vendors argue that a generic system, even one tailored for the industry, can't

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offer the same degree of specialisation as they can, Crimsonwing argues that the amount of R&D Microsoft invests in the core ERP system makes that argument insignificant.

Modules within PrintVis include finance, estimating, planning, production, purchasing, stock control, warehouse management, human resources, supply chain management, e-commerce, customer relationship management and fixed asset management.

The firm singles out its purchasing and warehousing modules as being particularly strong, especially when compared to an MIS, adding that the warehousing package is used by the likes of Ikea.

Another strength claimed by Crimsonwing is the easy integration of e-commerce into its system, using Microsoft Sharepoint technology. This makes it easy to provide customers and sales reps in the field access to the estimating package remotely, without the need for a separate e-commerce system. When it comes to estimating, the user can set the system up with rules to control the production process and define templates for different job types.

In production PrintVis can take in data from shopfloor data collection or direct from machines via JMF. In fact, the firm claims that its JDF and JMF implementation and integration times are typically half that of rival MIS providers.

Crimsonwing offers three main payment structures: a standard licensed model where the client buys a software licence and integration services, a Microsoft-backed finance scheme to buy the system over 36-42 months and the option to use the system on a software as a service (SaaS) basis.

For the licensed model, prices start at £2,000-£2,500 per concurrent user, with additional costs depending on the modules chosen and the complexity of the integration. The integration and customisation can be bought on a time and materials basis with a monthly invoice based on the time Crimsonwing staff have spent on development or on a milestone basis. In that case, milestones can include completion of stages of the project such as analysis, development, user acceptance testing and go-live of the project. Alternatively, if a phased implementation of the modules is used, payment can be based on when the modules go live.

The third option, SaaS, starts from £80 per user per month, with pricing dependent on the length of the contract, the functionality required and the complexity of the customisation. It's important to note that when supplied with the SaaS option, you never own the software and it is hosted off-site, so you need a robust internet connection.

PrintVis isn't the only ERP system aimed at the print community. Kodak's EMS is another system based on a standard package, in its case from Elpicor, which has been customised for print. And some MIS vendors, such as Solprint, argue that their systems are ERPs, but they use the term MIS to fit in with the more common terminology used by printers to describe business systems.

The combination of a package that is widely used across industry sectors, with the development clout of one of the biggest software giants around behind it, and industry and company-specific tailoring on top is worth looking at. The future direction of business is predicted to include multiple print processes and more non-print services, so having a core system that is adaptable to different industries may prove to be a wise move if it can more easily accommodate the evolution of your firm

## **SPECIFICATIONS**

**Description** A print-specific ERP system based on Microsoft Dynamics NAV

**Platform** Windows

**Usage models** Licensed, financed or software as a service (SaaS)

**Price** Licensed from £2,000 per concurrent user; SaaS from £80 per concurrent user per month

**Contact** Crimsonwing 020 7367 4300 [www.crimsonwing.co.uk](http://www.crimsonwing.co.uk)

## **THE ALTERNATIVES**

**EFI PACE**

Launched in the UK at Northprint, this browser-based system is platform independent and includes customer relationship management, direct machine interface and a Java API to integrate with production software.

**Platform** Cross platform

**Price** From £15,000

**Contact** EFI +31 20 658 8000 [www.efi.com](http://www.efi.com)

**KODAK EMS**

Like PrintVis, EMS is based on a standard ERP (Elpicor). Functions include CRM, quoting, estimating, planning and scheduling, accounting, payroll and reporting. Real-time business data includes key performance indicators and business intelligence to improve decision-making. It integrates with Insite, Prinerger, Upfront and Preps.

**Platform** Windows

**Price** Five-user system £16,000

**Contact** Kodak 01904 619416 [www.kodak.com](http://www.kodak.com)

**OPTIMUS 2020 VISION**

New developments include a focus on integrating the MIS with alternative pricing engines to its estimating module. The iX module is for spreadsheet pricing and the iW module for websites. The system's dashboard Optimus Analysis is also configured to present KPIs suggested by Vision in Print's MIS report.

**Platform** Linux, Windows, Solaris

**Price** From £5,000

**Contact** Optimus 2020 01483 740233 [www.optimus2020.com](http://www.optimus2020.com)

**SHUTTLEWORTH**

One of the leading suppliers of MIS to the print and packaging sectors in the UK, Shuttleworth highlights its 28 year's heritage, the integration of JDF and JMF at the heart of the package and its customer support and training.

**Platform** PC

**Price** £2,000-£3,000 per user

**Contact** Shuttleworth 01536 316316 [www.shuttleworth-uk.co.uk](http://www.shuttleworth-uk.co.uk)

**SOLPRINT**

Based on industry standard SQL database and Crystal Reports report writing technology, modules include scheduling, shopfloor data collection, scheduling, and advanced contract pricing.

**Platform** PC

**Price** Rental option from £50 per user per month

**Contact** solprint 020 7978 0113 [www.solprint.co.uk](http://www.solprint.co.uk)

**THARSTERN T4**

Tharstern is pushing the dashboard functions and the systems capability to use data to support decision making as well as streamlining administration.

**Platform** Windows

**Price** Five-user system £8,000-£10,000

**Contact** Tharstern 01282 860660 [www.tharstern.com](http://www.tharstern.com)

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