

Print Industry Veteran Cliff Hollingsworth Shares Five Decades' Worth of Insight into What Makes a Print Shop Successful



From color standards to automation to adaptability, Hollingsworth – who supports hundreds of AlphaGraphics franchise centers around the US – talks about what it takes to survive and thrive in the print industry.

CASE STUDY



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Let's begin by telling our readers who you are.

I'm Cliff Hollingsworth, and next year marks 50 years in the printing industry. I started in vocational education in high school, earned a degree in printing management, and over the years have been a million-dollar sales rep and led both large and small companies.

Today, I work for Fortidia US — the parent company of AlphaGraphics and PostNet — as part of the field operations team. My focus is on center management and Fiery workflow automation – basically I help AlphaGraphics centers figure out how to improve their operations using Fiery products.

In your role working with many different print shops, are there common patterns you see that make a print shop successful?

What makes a print shop successful in my opinion is alignment: having everyone on the same page.

From the delivery driver to the owner, the entire team has to understand the goal and their role in achieving it and executing it. It's not just about setting goals, it's about involving the whole team and leveraging every position to reach those goals. That creates buy-in, accountability, and a goal-oriented culture where everyone works together.

“The free Fiery JobFlow Base makes it easy to have a conversation about automation with owners without them having to commit thousands of dollars until they are ready.”

Beyond operations, what technical skills are most valuable for printers today? Where do you see the biggest gaps?

Historically, printers haven't been strong marketers.

In today's Google-driven, digital world, you can't ignore technology. You have to be willing to engage in technical conversations, especially around CRM, automation, and customer engagement tools. You either need to be technically savvy yourself, develop those skills, or delegate them to someone you trust. But you can't avoid it. Technology touches both the customer-facing side and the shop floor. It's no longer optional. You either champion it personally or appoint someone who will and then empower them to execute against clear goals.

“When you give people professional development and strong workflow tools, they perform better and they stay longer.”

What's the best indicator of success in a print business beyond raw sales or profit? Specifically on the technical side, what correlates most strongly with success?

Business owners and operators need to be flexible and adapt to how the industry has evolved.

The days of specializing in just one production floor task are largely gone. Today's operator has to be a generalist. Shops need people who understand the entire workflow — from file intake to final output.

That makes file management critical. From the time a file is submitted for estimating to preflight to production, there's no room for mistakes. This goes for wide format, cutsheet, offset or anything else.

Color management is another important factor, but printers aren't managing color like they used to. From 2020 to about 2025, the focus was more on “pleasing color” — good enough for most customers. But recently, I've seen increased demand for tighter standards - better calibration, better profiling, and more use of tools like Fiery Color Profiler Suite.





Can you talk about which Fiery tools you see providing the most value to print shops?

A tool I've been a big fan of for several years is [Fiery JobFlow](#). It's actually the most widely deployed workflow automation tool across our network. What I like about JobFlow is its flexibility. It fits the needs of every size center we have across both our brands. It's a great automation tool.

With Fiery JobFlow, we have the opportunity to educate our owners on how to use automation to improve their business. We start with basic imposition. Then we teach hot folders. Then smart folders. From there, we move into solving real operational challenges, like automating web-to-print downloads directly into the Fiery workflow.

Because we have over 500 centers across both brands, skill levels vary widely. JobFlow lets us meet centers where they are. It allows us to introduce automation and then expand on those skills. The free Fiery JobFlow Base version

makes it easy to have a conversation about automation with owners without them having to commit thousands of dollars until they are ready. They can use the free version to see the benefits of automation, then upgrade to further automate their workflows.

In addition to arming our centers with the best tools, we invest heavily in training from regional Fiery training sessions, vendor-led education, and learning through resources like [learning.fiery.com](#), Fiery certifications, and our internal "Fiery Friday" program. The key is continuous, practical training that fits into the owners/employees' day. Owners and operators don't have weeks to step away from production — they need relevant skills training they can apply immediately.

Ultimately, our goal is to equip our owners with tools and knowledge that help them grow. Employee hiring and onboarding is hard. Retention is critical. When you give people professional development and strong workflow tools, they perform better and they stay longer.

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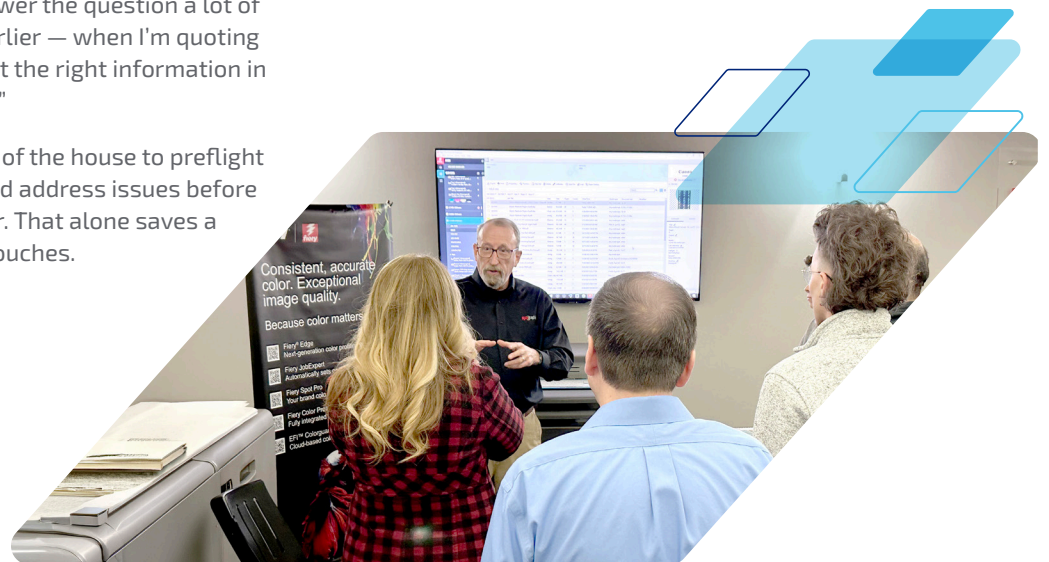
What future print tech features or advancements excite you most?

One of the things I'm really looking forward to is what JobFlow Pro can do to automate upstream tasks to preflight a file. I worked with the Fiery team in India on building a remote proofing workflow in JobFlow. That experience showed me what's possible.

I believe JobFlow Pro will help answer the question a lot of shops have: "How do I preflight earlier — when I'm quoting or entering the order — so I can put the right information in upfront and reduce touches later?"

Fiery JobFlow Pro allows the front of the house to preflight a file, receive a preflight report, and address issues before the job ever reaches the shop floor. That alone saves a tremendous amount of time and touches.

The "nirvana" of printing is a job that goes straight through the shop without a problem. We've been preaching that at AlphaGraphics for a long time. But to get to that, adopting the right tools and workflows takes time. You need to prove it first before you can change minds and culture. But I think the table is set now for tools like Fiery JobFlow Pro. The nice part with Fiery JobFlow is you don't have to be a technical expert. Drop a file here, get a report back. It's that simple.





About Fiery:

Fiery is the leading provider of digital front ends (DFEs) and workflow solutions for the global print industry. With a customer base that includes over 2 million DFEs sold worldwide, Fiery's industry-leading software and cloud-based technologies deliver the best possible performance, color, and print quality across a broad range of production printing devices.

Fiery's innovative solutions empower commercial print, industrial, packaging, signs and display graphics, ceramics, building materials, textiles, and more. Through over 30 years of excellent support and service, Fiery has built an unmatched community of customers, dealers, and partners.

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