

How to choose the right DFE

5 things to think about





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Why the right DFE makes a difference



Acquiring or upgrading a digital press is an important decision.

But the choice of the digital front end, or DFE, is just as critical. Both decisions will have long-lasting effects on your business and your bottom line.

The right DFE affects:

- Operational and employee productivity
- The utilisation of your digital printer
- Output colour quality
- The services you can offer
- ROI on your print engine investment

What you can do with a modern DFE


Think of the DFE as the brain of your print production workflow. With it, you can achieve:

- Efficient job submission: automation plus integration with Web-to-print systems
- Choice of makeready location: in prepress or at the DFE
- Advanced colour management tools integrated with the DFE
- Integration into a hybrid workflow with offset prepress and workflow solutions
- Management of multiple presses with a single operator interface

A Fiery® DFE provides a wealth of capability:

- Colour management
- Document makeready
- Fiery Command WorkStation®
- Job management of multiple printers
- Media management
- Preflight and softproof
- Job automation
- Late-stage job editing
- Variable data
- Raster image processing (RIP)
- Finishing support
- MIS/Web-to-print integration





Today's operation to tomorrow's needs

Consider future needs for the dynamic, ever-changing digital print environment.

What's good enough now may not keep you competitive in the future. Look for a DFE that keeps you current or ahead of industry trends.

Industry trends:

- Shorter runs
- Faster turnaround times
- Personalisation
- End-to-end job automation
- Improving colour output quality
- Online ordering
- Hybrid offset and digital workflows
- Connecting systems through JDF or APIs
- Using print production analytics to improve operational efficiency

A man and a woman are looking at a tablet. The woman is pointing at the screen, which displays a software interface with various panels and data. The man is looking on, and they both appear to be focused on the content. The background is a bright, modern office setting.

How to choose the right DFE for you

Each printing business is different, and there is no single approach that fits them all.

Your company will benefit from an informed decision and a total cost analysis. This analysis should include the cost savings and productivity enhancements you can achieve with the right DFE and workflow software.

Make sure to thoroughly evaluate:

1. Performance
2. Workflow automation and end-to-end integration
3. How critical colour quality is to your customers
4. Need for variable data, today and in the future
5. DFE integration with business systems

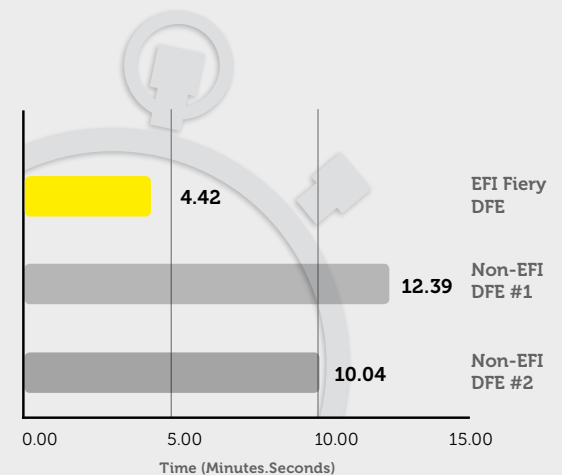
01 Performance

Depending on your requirements, you should consider how your DFE will handle both large, complex jobs and a high volume of smaller jobs. Not all DFEs have the same performance level and a slow DFE can cost you money in idle engine time.


To be sure, test your most complex files on all available DFEs to verify performance differences. This will help you make a more informed decision.

Why speed is important.

Increase your capacity to produce more jobs and meet demands for faster turnaround times.



RIP and hold time: 576-page, colour, 3.5 GB PDF file



02 Workflow automation and end-to-end integration

Analyse your job mix and see if your current workflow meets your needs. Consider job types and complexity — including speciality work such as tabs — average run lengths, numbers of jobs, and pages you typically produce in a shift, day, or week; plus typical turnaround times. Then look for ways to be more efficient by adding automation and integration.

Make sure to consider all levels of automation and integration available:

- Hot folders and virtual printers
- Job preset templates
- Imposition templates
- Automation of prepress tasks
- Web-to-print order entry to DFE integration
- DFE integration with business systems
- A DFE API or JDF capability to integrate into your existing systems



03 How critical colour quality is to your customers

Print buyers are getting more sophisticated, and it's likely that colour accuracy and consistency will continue to grow in importance, especially if you're displacing offset or producing hybrid offset/digital jobs.

To make sure you get the level of control and colour quality you need, be sure to consider:

- Whether your colour management software is fully integrated into the DFE, saving manual entry and avoiding potential errors
- If the colour management software is a G7 Certified System with verification included
- If the DFE and print engine you are considering has achieved Fogra certification or Idealliance Digital Press Certification

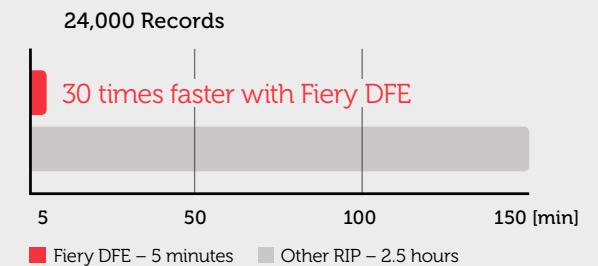
04 Need for variable data, today and in the future

Personalisation is an important industry trend.

Look for a DFE that supports PDF/VT, or other variable data formats such as PPML, VPS, and additional composition software file formats.

Be sure to give full consideration to variable data needs when you select a DFE and associated workflow elements.

Test a large, complex variable data job to check performance before purchasing.



DFE performance on variable data jobs can vary by as much as 30 or more times, which can significantly impact profitability.



05 DFE integration with business systems

If you are looking to replace your homegrown business system, look for a DFE and workflow solution that is already integrated to print management information systems (MIS).

If you have manual processes, integration of a MIS to DFE system can take touch points and the potential for error out of the process by eliminating manual steps.

If you want or need to keep all or part of your current business system, make sure the DFE vendor can provide integration through industry-standard job description format (JDF) or their own application programming interfaces (APIs) to help you optimise your system.

But what about price?

Total Cost of Ownership

The DFE purchase price is just one element of your total cost of ownership. For the full picture, consider:

- Higher performance to process files that are becoming more complex and variable over time to reduce costly engine idle time
- The potential to automate from order entry to print to reduce touches, time, and chance of errors in the process
- Productivity and workflow advantages of managing jobs through the same operator interface across all digital presses in a multivendor engine environment

Calculate the ROI of cost savings from productivity enhancements, improved turnaround time, and differentiation in your printed products.

Consider the bottom line.




The best buying process

Don't let "We've always done it this way" prevent you from fully investigating DFEs to find the right fit.

Test your actual files on DFEs to truly understand workflow and performance and their impact on your bottom line.

Be aware of the potential risks of the following decision processes when making a DFE choice — they may not take the 5 key factors into consideration:

- Purchasing makes the DFE decision based solely on price with little or no input from production
- Only the current mix of jobs is considered in workflow and performance analyses
- The press manufacturer's proposal is accepted without further investigation into all available choices



After you decide on a DFE

Once you've made your DFE decision, it's a good idea to have a member of your organisation get fully trained and certified in how to operate your new DFE and workflow software.

Good training helps you get the most from all the DFE features; plus provides in-depth colour knowledge, operational best practices, and more.

Training and certification can give staff a higher level of confidence in their skills and increased job satisfaction.

Certification programmes, such as EFI™ Fiery Professional or Expert certification, help to improve quality, productivity, and throughput for your shop. And give your employees a career development path.



Invest for a competitive tomorrow

To get the most out of a digital press investment, take the time to fully examine DFE choices.

Consider the long-term implications of a streamlined and optimised workflow.

Your investment decision today may help you stay ahead of the curve tomorrow, and stay competitive in a changing marketplace.

Learn more by:
[reading the full white paper.](#)

To learn more about EFI Fiery digital front ends, contact us at
fiery.products@efi.com.

EFI fuels success.

We develop breakthrough technologies for the manufacturing of signage, packaging, textiles, ceramic tiles, and personalised documents, with a wide range of printers, inks, digital front ends, and a comprehensive business and production workflow suite that transforms and streamlines the entire production process, increasing your competitiveness and boosting productivity. Visit www.efi.com or call 0808 101 3484 (UK only) or +44 (0)1246 298000 for more information.



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