How to choose the right DFE

5 things to think about
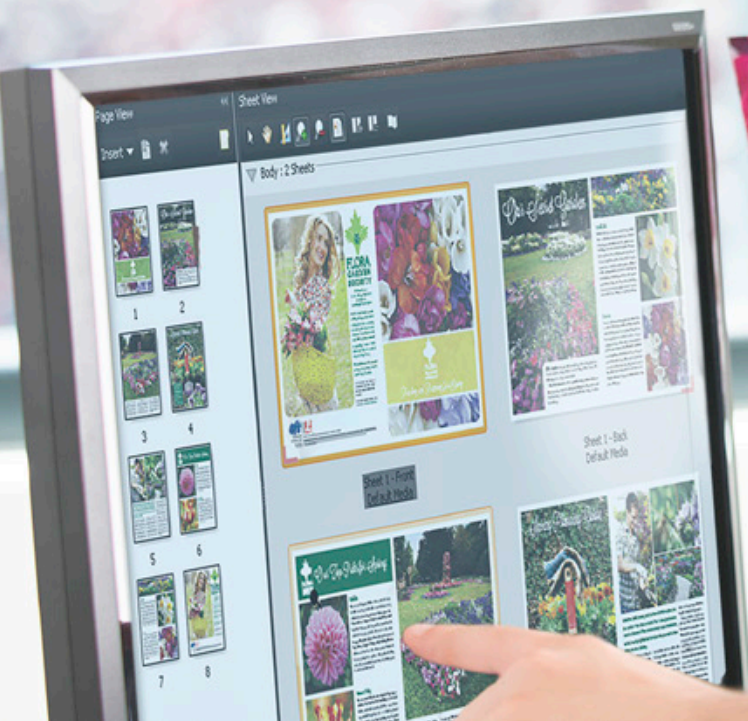
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Why the right DFE makes a difference

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 utilization of your digital printer
- Output color 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 color 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:

- Color 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
- Personalization
- End-to-end job automation
- Improving color output quality
- Online ordering
- Hybrid offset and digital workflows
- Connecting systems through JDF or APIs
- Using print production analytics to improve operational efficiency

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 color quality is to your customers
4. Need for variable data, today and in the future
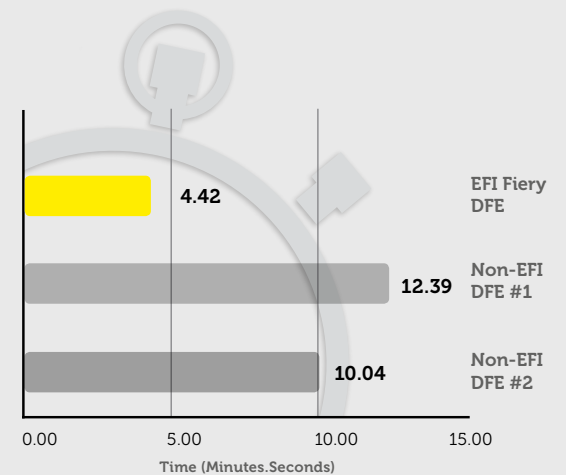5. DFE integration with business systems

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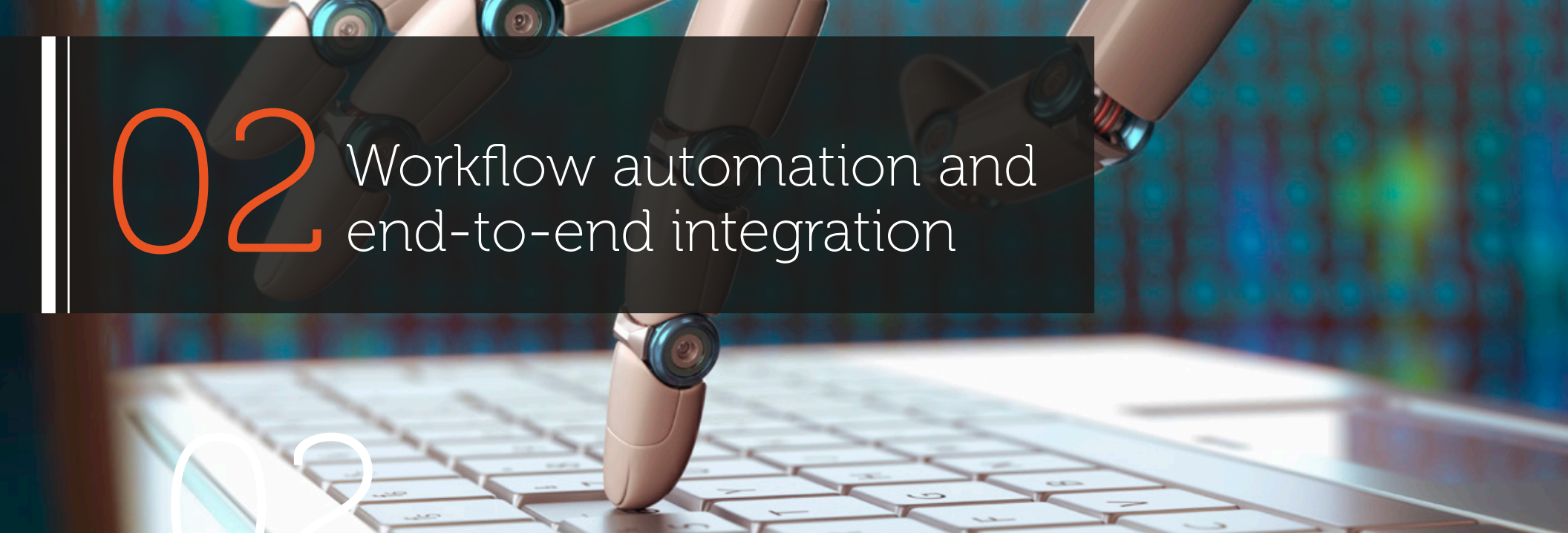
To be sure, test your most complex files on all available DFEs to verify performance differences. This will help you make a more informed decision.

Why speed is important.
Increase your capacity to produce more jobs and meet demands for faster turnaround times.

	Time (Minutes.Seconds)	
EFI Fiery DFE	4.42	
Non-EFI DFE #1	12.39	
Non-EFI DFE #2	10.04	

0.00   5.00   10.00   15.00

Time (Minutes.Seconds)

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

02 Workflow automation and end-to-end integration

Analyze your job mix and see if your current workflow meets your needs. Consider job types and complexity — including specialty 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 color quality is to your customers

Print buyers are getting more sophisticated, and it's likely that color 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 color quality you need, be sure to consider:

- Whether your color management software is fully integrated into the DFE, saving manual entry and avoiding potential errors
- If the color 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
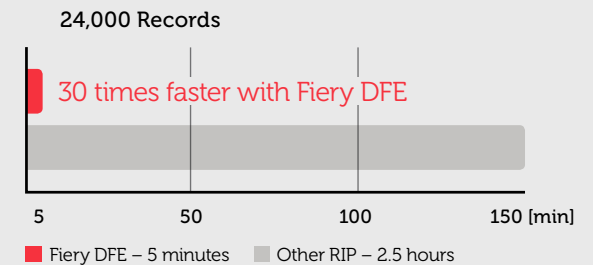
04 Need for variable data, today and in the future

Personalization 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.

24,000 Records

30 times faster with Fiery DFE

| 5 | 50 | 100 | 150 [min] |

■ Fiery DFE – 5 minutes   ▨ Other RIP – 2.5 hours

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 optimize your system.

But what about price?

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 organization 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 color 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 programs, 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 optimized 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 personalized 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 650-357-3500 for more information.