



PROPELLING YOUR BUSINESS FORWARD IN AN EVER-CHANGING COMPETITIVE ENVIRONMENT  
ENHANCING THE IN-PLANT PRODUCT AND SERVICE OFFERING



A NAPCO Research Study and White Paper  
Sponsored by Canon U. S. A., Inc.

# Enhancing the In-Plant Product and Service Offering

In-house printing operations report making moves to better serve parent organizations, address competitive challenges, pursue new opportunities, and expand services.

As the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic wane and parent organizations are getting back to business, in-plants are facing heightened competition for filling press capacity, hiring staff, and keeping work in-house. Given these market conditions, there's a great need to enhance existing services and add new ones.

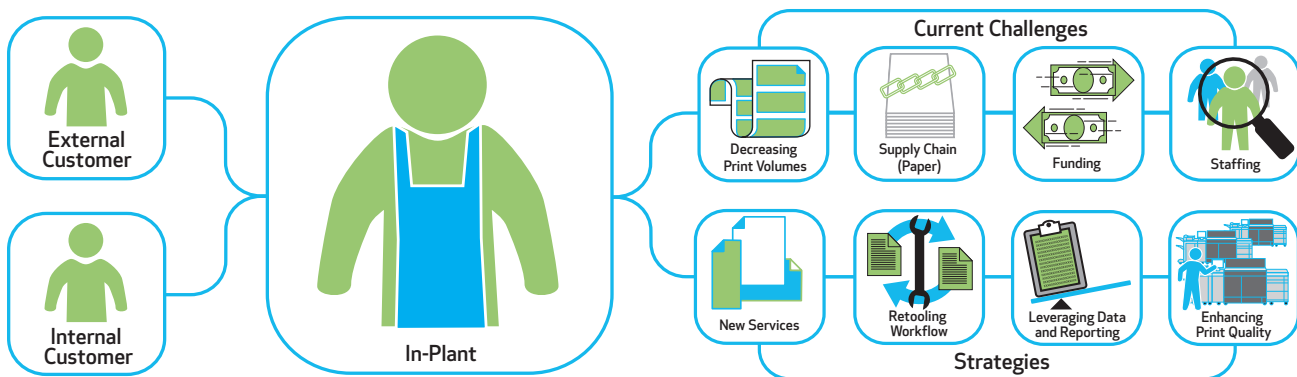
This report offers insights into how in-plants are adapting to changing operating conditions, ways they're enhancing value to parent organizations with products and services, and methods they're using to help strengthen customer relationships.

Canon U.S.A. has been sponsoring annual market research studies by NAPCO Research<sup>1</sup> to help print providers better understand customer needs and the operational investments and capabilities that can help support customers' changing requirements.

The current series, *Propelling Your Business Forward in an Ever-Changing Competitive Environment*, is based on surveys of commercial printers, in-plants, and communication buyers or influencers. This second report (and the two to follow) will take a deeper dive into the most recent survey data.

The survey questions sought answers about how in-plants are keeping their operations healthy along with what parent organizations expect. The responses from in-plant printing operations and communication buyers from organizations with in-plants offer insights that can help support strategies for enhancing services and meeting parent organization needs.

## Enhancing the In-Plant Offerings and Value



<sup>1</sup>A unit of NAPCO Media, the parent company of Printing Impressions and In-Plant Impressions and part of the PRINTING United Alliance.

Here's a summary of key research findings:

### Parent Organization Trends

- Communication buyer respondents with in-plants selected their top factor in choosing to use print as the value of the product or service associated with a communication effort. Other reasons include its “green” benefits, its tangible nature, and its perception as a better tool for customer acquisition as compared to alternatives.
- Top reasons buyers with in-plants reported selecting external print providers are quality, services offered, reliability, turnaround time, and online ordering capabilities.
- Reasons organizations with in-plants reported why they would end a relationship with a print provider are price increases, sub-par quality or sustainability, a desire to reduce suppliers, and poor customer service and responsiveness.

### In-Plant Strategies and Challenges

- Of in-plant respondents, 85% reported that they were retooling operations to increase automation and productivity while 79% reported funding investments in growth, technology, and people.
- In-plants reported that they were leveraging job data to improve decision-making and gain operational insights into press productivity and utilization.
- Over one-third (39%) of respondents reported adding high-speed production inkjet printing technology while another 39% expected to add packaging to their product mix.
- A little over 40% of in-plant respondents reported having the right of first refusal for print work.
- Over half of respondents (54%) reported that they can insource work.
- The top challenge reported by respondents was finding new print work to replace decreasing volumes.
- Over one-third of in-plant survey respondents reported that a key challenge is keeping their operation fully staffed.

### In-Plant Services

- A little over one-third of in-plant respondents reported printing work on offset presses while 22% outsource offset work and 35% no longer offer offset print. This finding highlights the ongoing migration of print work from offset to digital presses.
- Nearly all in-plant respondents reported that they offer bindery services and digital toner printing.
- Over 80% reported offering wide-format inkjet printing and variable-data printing.
- Over two-thirds of in-plant respondents reported offering prepress services (80%), graphic design services (79%), and online ordering (71%).
- A majority of in-plant respondents reported offering mailing (69%) and print procurement services (68%) while over half reported offering warehousing fulfillment services (51%).

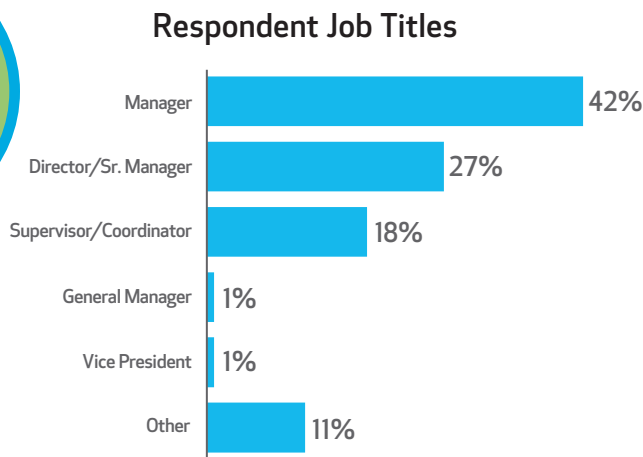
## In-Plant Workflow Trends

- Over half of in-plants reported having automated the following process tasks: job submission, prepress makeready, estimating, job reporting, press makeready, color management, and preflighting.
- Software access is expected to move to the cloud. While the majority of in-plants reported that job submission, workflow, file storage, and color management software mostly reside onsite, they expect a growth in the migration of this software to the cloud over the next two years.

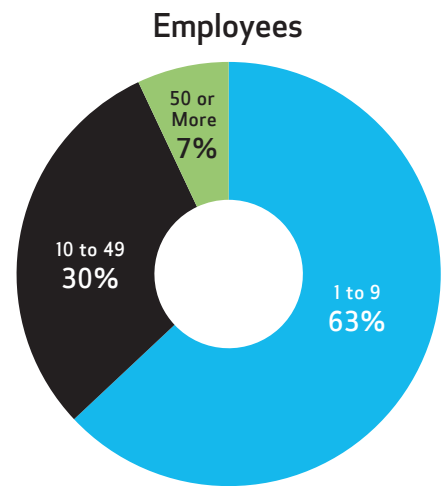
## Respondent Profiles

Figures 1 and 2 show the job titles of in-plants and communication buyers with in-plants participating in the survey along with the size of their operations/organizations.

**Figure 1**  
In-Plant  
Respondent  
Profiles



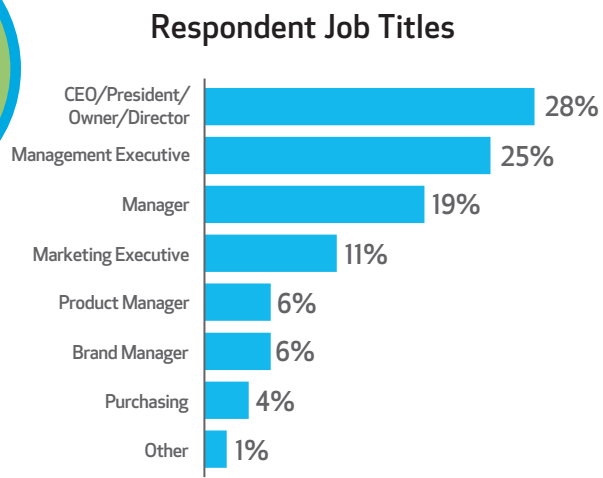
Q. What is your job title?  
N = 128 In-Plants



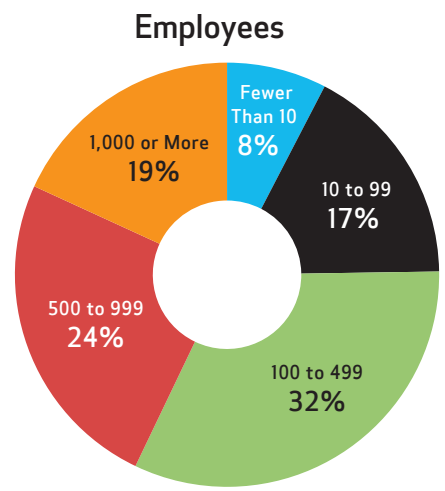
Q. How many employees work at your company or in-plant?  
N = 128 In-Plants

Source: Propelling Your Business Forward in an Ever-Changing Competitive Environment, NAPCO Research 2022

**Figure 2**  
Communication Buyer Respondent Profiles



Q. Which of the following describes your role in your organization?  
N = 53 Communication Buyers and Influencers with In-Plants



Q. In total, how many people does your organization employ?  
N = 53 Communication Buyers and Influencers with In-Plants

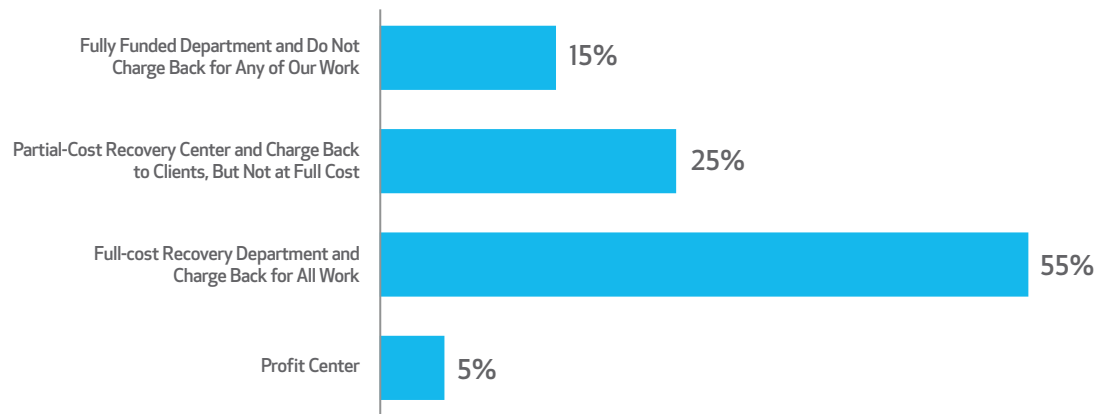
Source: Propelling Your Business Forward in an Ever-Changing Competitive Environment, NAPCO Research 2022

### In-Plant Respondents' Operating Models

Successful in-plants strive to operate similar to “for-profit” businesses. In many instances, they charge back for their work, market their services, compare their costs with competitors, and consult with customers in an effort to ensure their service offerings stay in line with customers’ needs. The majority of respondents (85%) report charging back for work produced for their parent organization (Figure 3).

Over half of in-plant respondents (55%) report operating as full-cost recovery departments that charge back for all work; 25% report operating as a partial-recovery center and charge back clients and not at full cost; 15% report that they’re fully funded and don’t charge back for work; and, 5% report that they’re profit centers.

**Figure 3**  
In-Plant Operating Models

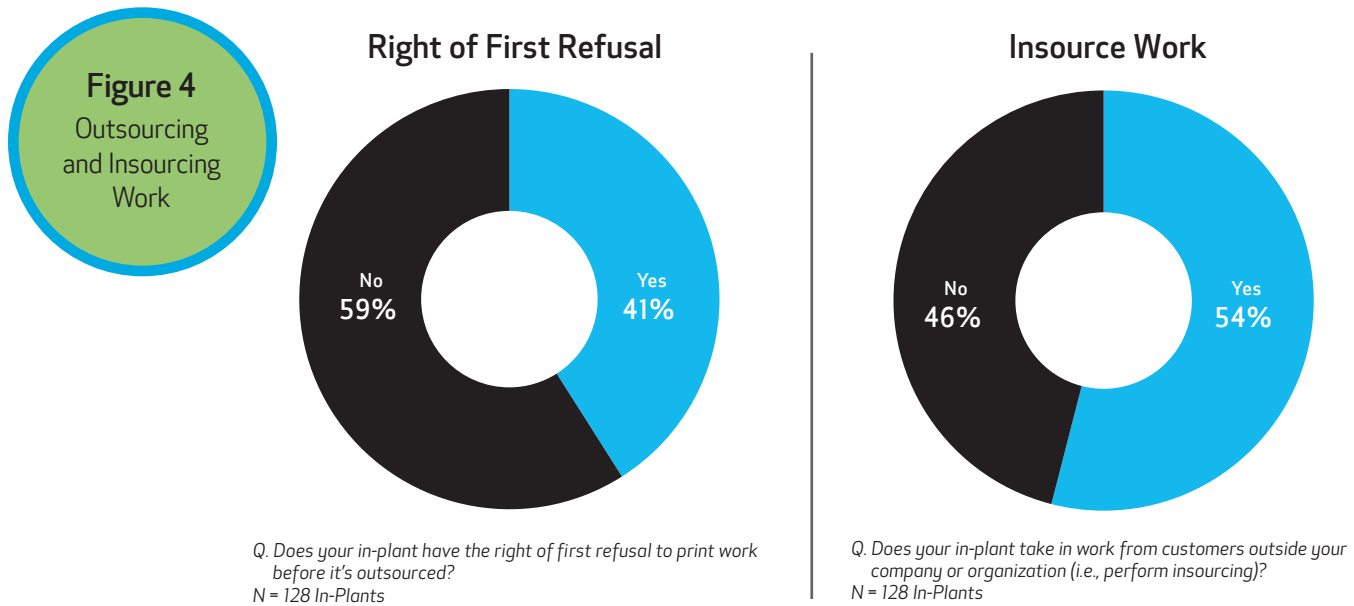


Q. Which of the following best describes your in-plant operation?  
N = 128 In-Plants

Source: Propelling Your Business Forward in an Ever-Changing Competitive Environment, NAPCO Research 2022

## In-Plant Respondents' Decision Options

While it's rare for parent organizations to mandate that all departments send their printing to the in-plant, 41% of in-plant respondents report enjoying the right of first refusal for printing before it's outsourced (Figure 4). Most in-plants must compete with outside printers by demonstrating better service, price, and quality.



Source: Propelling Your Business Forward in Ever-Changing Competitive Environment, NAPCO Research 2022

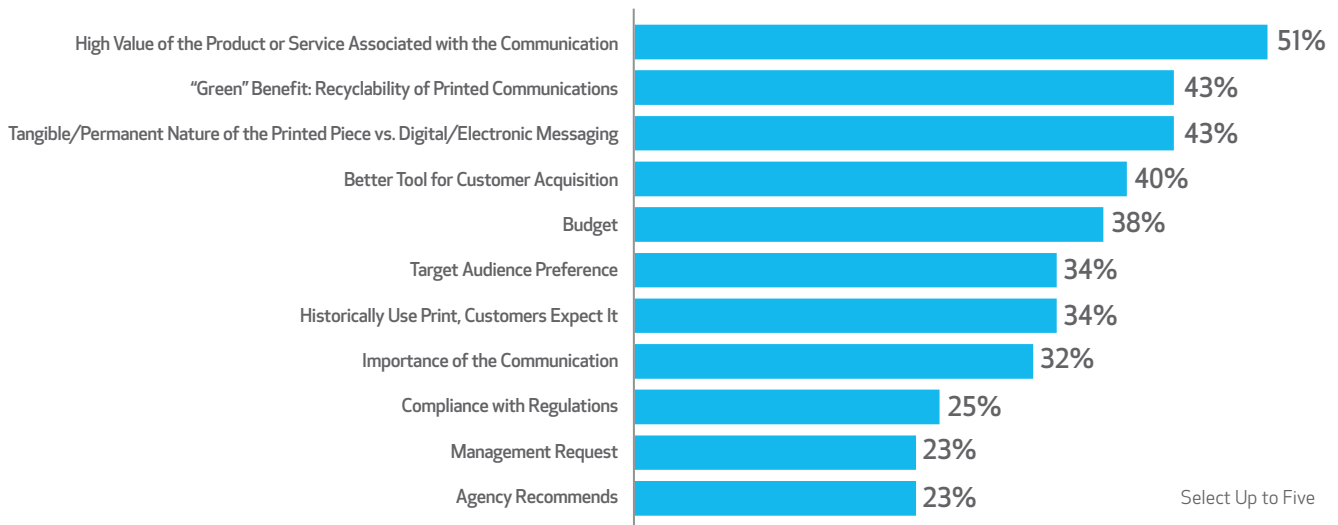
One way in-plants can bring in new revenue to support their operations is by insourcing, or accepting work from outside the parent organization, and 54% report doing this. Benefits of insourcing include increased equipment utilization and enabling the in-plant to return revenue to its parent organization.

Typically, in-plants get this work from a variety of sources. University and school district in-plants may take in jobs from other educational institutions while state government in-plants often produce work for local municipalities. In addition, nonprofits are a rich source of insourcing work for many in-plants.

## Reasons Parent Organizations Use Print

To meet their parent organizations' needs effectively, in-plants must understand how these organizations can benefit from print. Figure 5 shows some of the primary factors communication buyer and influencer respondents with in-house printing operations consider when choosing to use print. This survey question allowed for up to five responses. The top considerations chosen for using print are (1) the value of the product associated with the communication effort, (2) the recyclability of printed communications ("green" benefit), (3) the tangible nature of print, (4) print's customer acquisition advantages, and (5) budgetary considerations. Of note, respondents deemed print's effectiveness more important than budget.

**Figure 5**  
Top Reasons  
Organizations  
Use Print



Q. What are the primary factors that determine your organization's use of printed communications?  
N = 53 Communication Buyers and Influencers with In-Plants

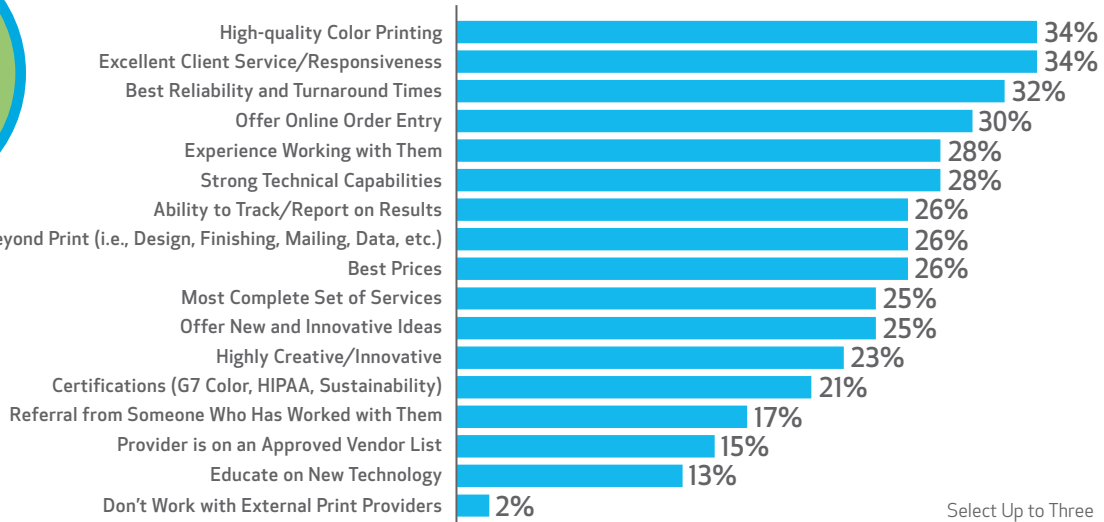
Source: *Propelling Your Business Forward in an Ever-Changing Competitive Environment*, NAPCO Research 2022

## Criteria for Selecting External Print Providers

Communication buyers and influencers with in-house printing operations select external or outside print providers for a variety of reasons (Figure 6). Respondents did not identify a dominant set of criteria, suggesting in-plants' efforts to thwart outside competitors to be wide-ranging. This survey finding indicates that keeping parent organizations' work in-house requires a combination of print quality, customer service, production efficiency, innovative services, and building relationships.

**Figure 6**

Criteria for Selecting External Providers



Q. What are your organization's TOP CRITERIA when selecting an external service provider for printing?  
N = 53 Communication Buyers and Influencers with In-Plants

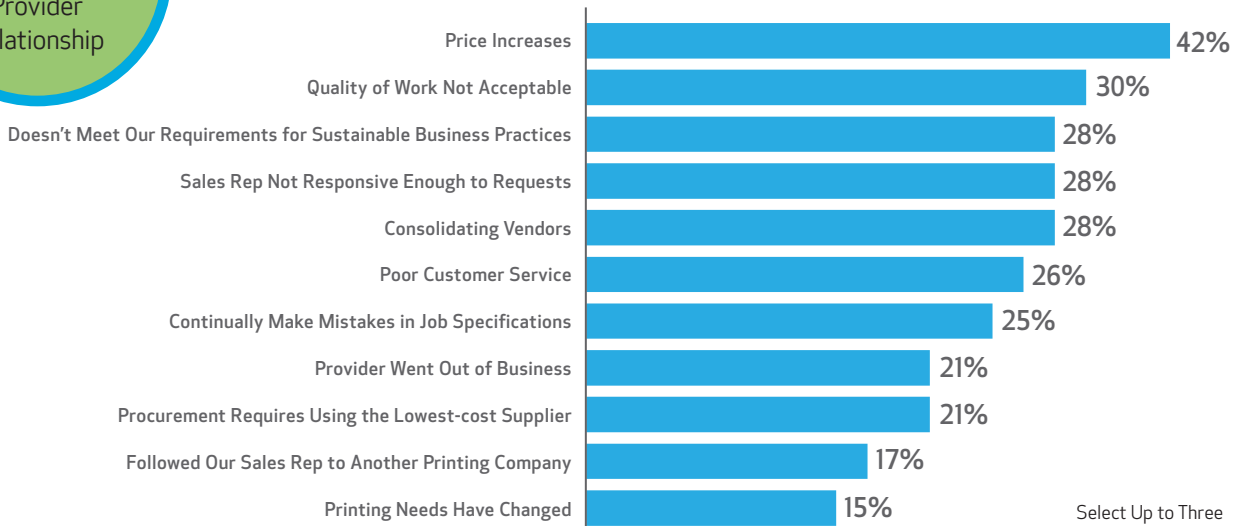
Source: Propelling Your Business Forward in an Ever-Changing Competitive Environment, NAPCO Research 2022



## Reasons Buyers End a Print Provider Relationship

The survey asked communication buyers and influencers to select the top three reasons they would end a relationship with a print provider (Figure 7). Survey respondents with in-house printing operations report the top reasons to be price increases (42%), unacceptable work quality (30%), not meeting sustainability requirements (28%), lack of response to requests (28%), and reducing their number of suppliers (28%). This survey finding can serve as a guide for developing strategies to help keep parent organizations' work in-house.

**Figure 7**  
Top Reasons for Ending a Provider Relationship



Q. What are the top THREE reasons your organization would end a relationship with a print provider?  
N = 53 Communication Buyers and Influencers with In-Plants

Source: *Propelling Your Business Forward in an Ever-Changing Competitive Environment*, NAPCO Research 2022

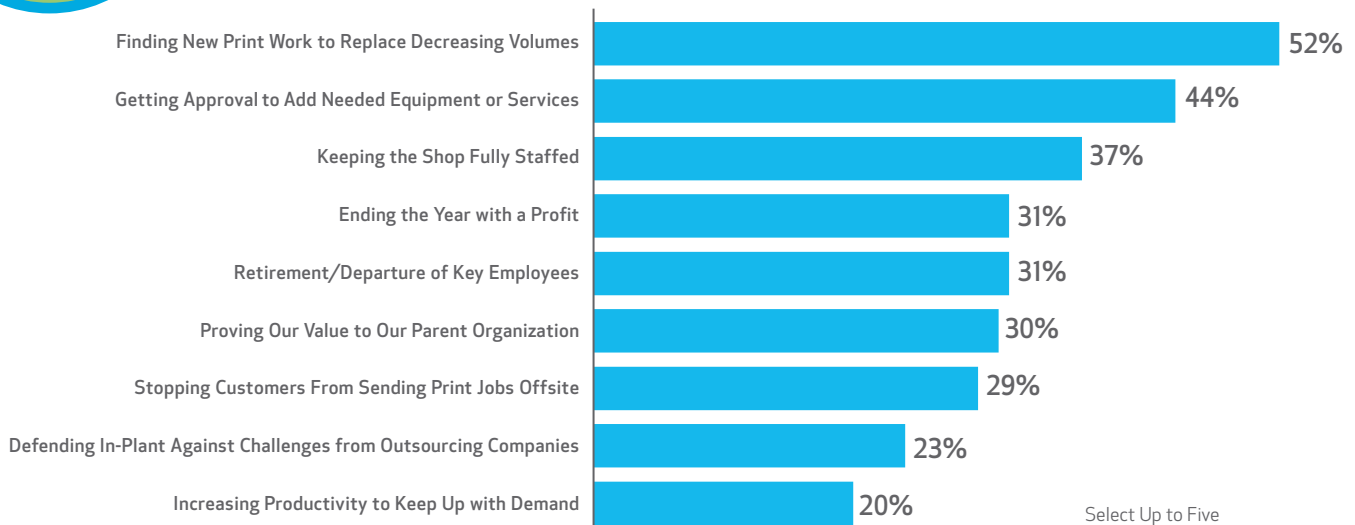
## In-Plants' Top Challenges

In-plant respondents identified their greatest challenges (Figure 8) as finding new print work to replace decreasing volumes (52%), getting approval from parent organizations to add new equipment or services (44%), keeping operations fully staffed (37%), meeting profit goals (31%), and employee retirement or departure (31%).

Some key sources of decreasing print volumes are competition from alternative media, commercial printers, and outsourcing organizations. An ongoing challenge for in-plants is proving their value to their parent organization while also convincing other departments to utilize the in-plant rather than outside printers.

**Figure 8**

Biggest Challenges



Q. What do you expect will be the biggest challenges to your in-plant over the next year?  
N = 128 In-Plants

Source: Propelling Your Business Forward in an Ever-Changing Competitive Environment, NAPCO Research 2022

Because in-plants' parent organizations may not be well versed in the printing industry, in-plants often experience difficulty in convincing upper management of the benefits that equipment upgrades or service expansion can bring to the organization.

## How In-Plants are Addressing Staffing Challenges

A constant industry challenge is finding qualified workers to staff operations. In-plant respondents report using a variety of methods to find and hire staff, including online job sites, referrals, LinkedIn™ recruiting services, and classified ads (Figure 9).

**Figure 9**  
Methods  
for Staff  
Recruiting



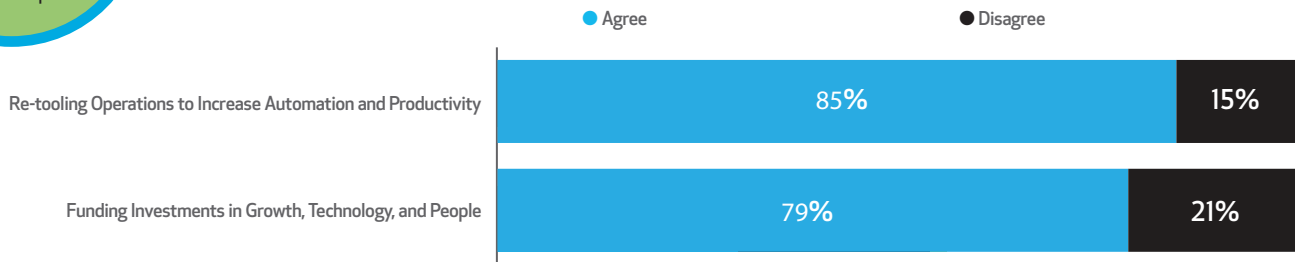
Q. Which of the following methods is your organization using to recruit and hire production staff?  
N = 71 In-Plants Actively Recruiting and Hiring Production Staff

Source: Propelling Your Business Forward in an Ever-Changing Competitive Environment, NAPCO Research 2022

## In-Plant Investment Plans

In-plants report taking action to expand their products and services to better serve customers and enhance their relevance within their parent organizations by re-tooling operations to help increase automation and productivity (Figure 10). Actions to that end include investing in growth, technology, and people.

**Figure 10**  
Investing in  
Operations,  
Growth,  
and People

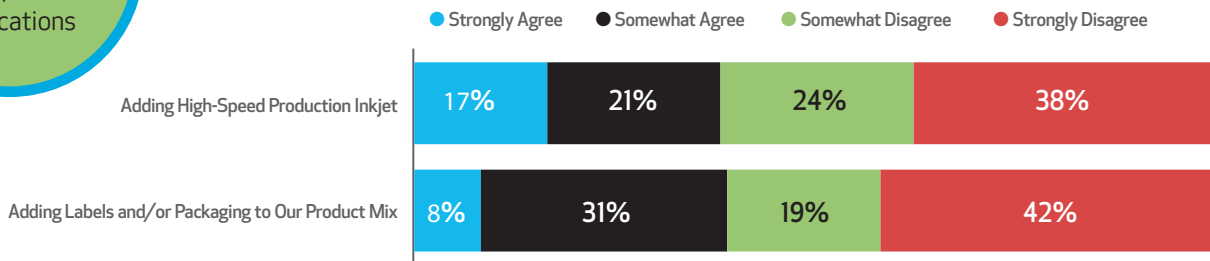


Q. For the following statements, please indicate your level agreement. Our operation is ...  
N = 125 In-Plants

Source: Propelling Your Business Forward in an Ever-Changing Competitive Environment, NAPCO Research 2022

Two areas in which in-plants report investing are equipment and application expansion. Thirty-eight percent of respondents report that they expected to add high-speed production inkjet printing technology to their operations (Figure 11).

**Figure 11**  
Investing in  
New Equipment and  
Applications



Q. For the following statements, please indicate your level agreement. Our operation is ...  
N = 125 In-Plants

Source: Propelling Your Business Forward in an Ever-Changing Competitive Environment, NAPCO Research 2022

Production inkjet printing can offer in-plants the opportunity to bring in new business, generate additional revenue, and produce more work. Key benefits include:

- Cost-effectively printing monochrome and color jobs on one press
- Transitioning black-and-white applications to higher-value/higher-margin color products
- Extending the cross-over point for digital print versus offset, helping more pages migrate to digital print
- The ability to use variable data to enhance personalized materials, which can be particularly helpful for increasing communication response rates

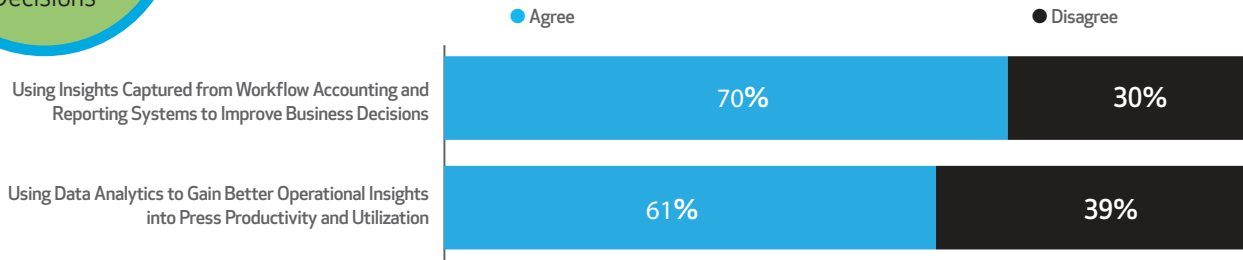
In addition, 39% of respondents plan to add labels or packaging to their product mix. Packaging is an application that's often in high demand and cannot be easily replaced by digital media. Many factors contribute to removing entry barriers and accelerating print providers' migration into packaging. Ongoing progress in technology innovation, digital printing, early adopter successes, process simplification, customer demands, and fierce competition are all forces enticing and enabling in-plants to offer labels and other types of packaging to parent organizations.

## Leveraging Operational Data in Decision-Making

In-plant respondents report collecting and analyzing accounting and press productivity and utilization data to gain better operational insights (Figure 12). For example, 70% of in-plant respondents use insights captured from workflow accounting and reporting systems to help improve business decisions.

In-plants recognize that collecting and analyzing data are valuable in providing a full picture of their operations and uncovering trends and bottlenecks. By leveraging key data consistently, in-plants can help optimize their operations and make data-driven investment decisions.

**Figure 12**  
Using Data and Analytics to Make Decisions



Q. For the following statements, please indicate your level agreement. Our operation is ...  
N = 125 In-Plants

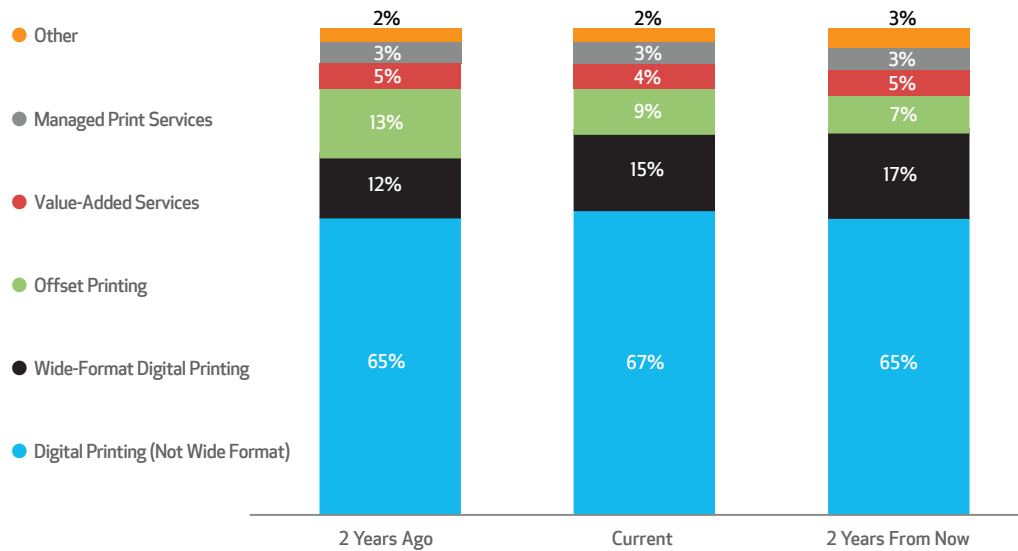
Source: Propelling Your Business Forward in an Ever-Changing Competitive Environment, NAPCO Research 2022

## Distribution of In-Plants' Services

Figure 13 shows the past, present, and expected future distribution of in-plant respondents' services. Respondents report that digital printing represented the largest share of work by a wide margin. In the early 1990s, in-plants led the printing industry's transition to digital printing and have continued to build on the digital opportunity.

Offset printing's share of work produced has declined, and as work shifts to wide-format printing and value-added services, this is expected to continue.

**Figure 13**  
Distribution of In-plants' Services



Q. What percentage of your organization's work falls/fell into the following types of services 2 years ago, today, and 2 years from now?  
N = 128 In-Plants

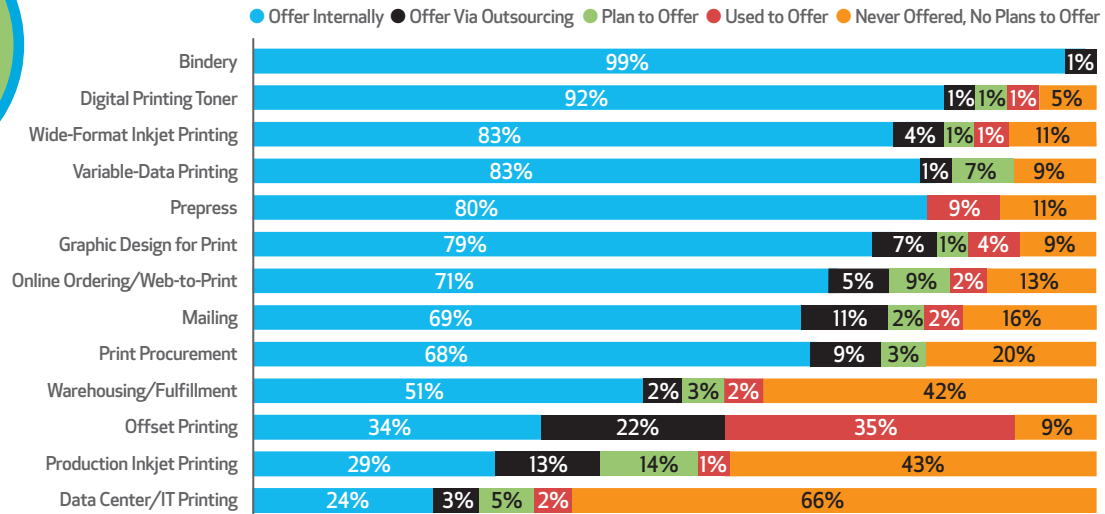
Source: Propelling Your Business Forward in an Ever-Changing Competitive Environment, NAPCO Research 2022

## Pursuing Services Beyond Print

There are many reasons for in-plants to expand their products and/or services. Providing services that complement and enhance print can create stronger bonds with the departments that in-plants serve, potentially making them less likely to outsource work over a minimal cost difference. Additionally, these services can create opportunities for new and recurring service streams.

Figure 14 highlights in-plant respondents' product and service offerings. Nearly all respondents report offering bindery services and digital toner printing, and over 80% report offering wide-format inkjet and variable-data printing.

**Figure 14**  
In-Plants'  
Product and  
Service  
Offerings



Q. Which of these services does your in-plant offer?  
N = 128 In-Plants

Source: Propelling Your Business Forward in an Ever-Changing Competitive Environment, NAPCO Research 2022

Over two-thirds of in-plant respondents report offering prepress services (80%), graphic design services (79%), and online ordering (71%). A majority report offering mailing (69%) and print procurement services (68%) while over half offer warehousing fulfillment (51%).

At many in-plants, printing and mailing services go hand in hand. Their parent organizations have recognized the value of merging the two operations under one manager and cross-training staff. Printed work can flow seamlessly into the mail workflow and out the door, and adding mailing services to in-house printing operations could see the benefits of increased print volumes.

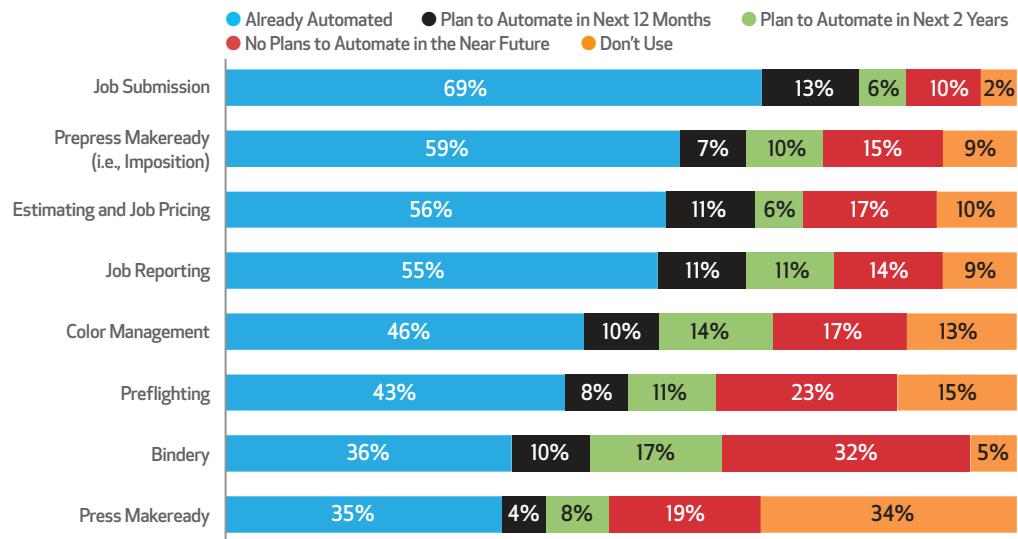
Another interesting finding from this question is that a little over 33% of in-plant respondents print work on offset presses, 22% outsource offset work, and 35% no longer offer offset print work, an indication of the ongoing migration of print work from offset to digital presses.



## Investing in Workflow Automation

Balancing customer requirements with efficiency can help in-plants' success. It's no secret that automating processes can aid in efficiency. In-plant respondents report that their operations have some level of automation across workflow activities (Figure 15), but that there's room to expand. The most frequently automated activities include job submission (70%), prepress makeready (65%), estimating (62%), and job reporting (60%); the least automated area is the bindery.

**Figure 15**  
Workflow  
Automation  
Actions



Q. What best describes your plans and priorities for automating the following workflow activities?  
N = 128 In-Plants

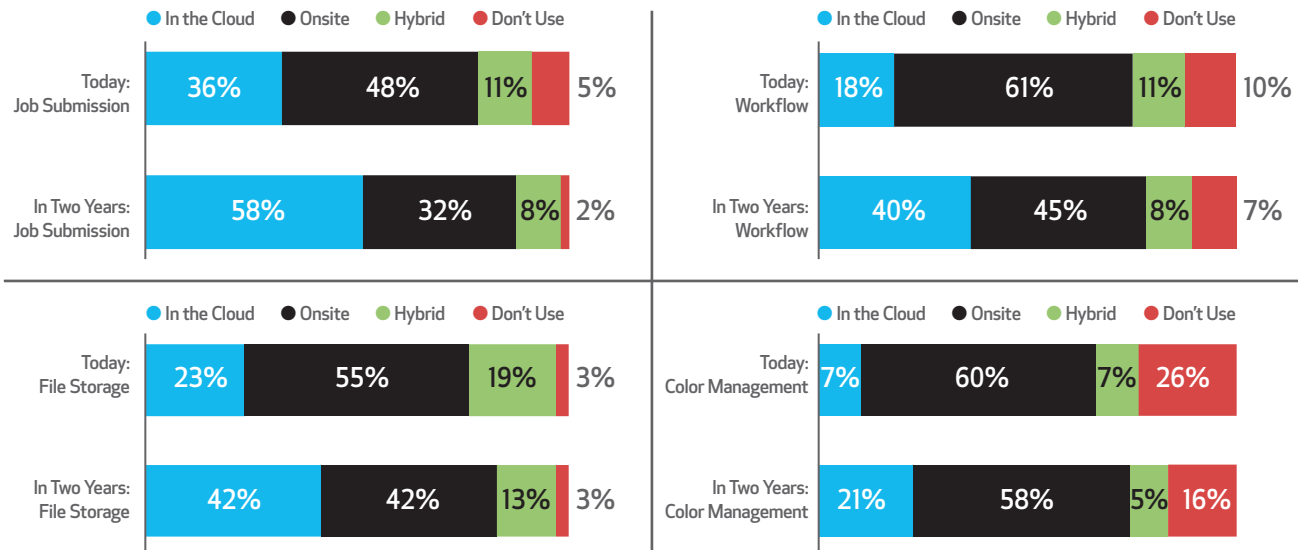
Source: Propelling Your Business Forward in an Ever-Changing Competitive Environment, NAPCO Research 2022

## Software Migrating to the Cloud

Software is transitioning more and more to cloud-based platforms. While the majority of in-plants report that job submission, workflow, file storage, and color management software mostly reside onsite, they expect growth in the migration of this software to the cloud within two years (Figure 16).

Using cloud-based software or workflows can often reduce costs. In-plants can reap advantages without some of the headaches and expenses of maintaining, upgrading, and staffing the infrastructure that may be associated with onsite solutions.

**Figure 16**  
Software Moving to the Cloud



Q. What best describes how the following software used in your operation is hosted?  
N = 125 In-Plants

Source: *Propelling Your Business Forward in an Ever-Changing Competitive Environment*, NAPCO Research 2022



## Conclusion

In-plants are seeking ways to add value and better serve their parent organizations. Because of their close relationships with their internal customers, in-plants routinely hear about new services their customers need, thereby enabling them to add capabilities to offer these services in-house.

Respondents reported investing in operations on all fronts: equipment, technology, workflow, and people; operational data and analytics are guiding those decisions.

In-plant respondents reported providing parent organizations with a range of products and services, with the most common offerings being digital printing, bindery services, variable-data, and wide-format printing. They also reported plans to expand digital print capabilities with production inkjet and application offerings with labels and packaging.

Despite today's competitive forces, in-plants remain dedicated to their parent organizations' success and are committed to pursuing the strategies and services needed to help accomplish their goals.

**About The Research  
and Report Series**

***Propelling Your Business  
Forward in an Ever-changing  
Competitive Environment*** is a  
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pieces based on a NAPCO Research  
survey of communication buyers,  
commercial printers, and  
in-plants, sponsored by  
Canon U.S.A., Inc.

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- 2. Enhancing the In-plant  
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- 3. Pinpointing and Pursuing  
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