

Harlequin Mills & Boon



Overview

Mills & Boon was founded by Gerald Mills and Charles Boon in 1908 as a general fiction publisher and has over three million regular readers in the UK annually. Their books are sold through a combination of subscription and retail sales, both of which use client communication in the form of invoices and promotional letters.

The Position

The data centre is located in Croydon and all systems are run on the AS/400 platform. Client communications were impact printed onto pre-printed paper. There were many different stock types.

As part of a move away from this technology, Mills & Boon purchased a Xerox 4110 printer and Paris Software to create and print the documents onto pre-printed cut sheet paper.

The Requirements

The documents produced by the AS/400 were presented in upper case with all the data positioned for the pre-printed stationery. The documents looked old fashioned.

The first brief was to take the data, as presented, and produce the documents in upper/lower case, using the house print font preferred by Mills & Boon.

Mills & Boon use many different letter text types and, during the implementation, it became apparent that Paris could better manage these by using intelligent lookup tables that contained just the variable elements of the letters. In the old system, a full letter text would have been needed for each of the hundreds of different letters.

The second part of the brief was to create an Index file of key data associated with each letter at the time of its creation in Paris. This was achieved using the Document Interface module that allows either

an XML file or a CSV file to be created with variable data extracted from the print file submitted from the AS/400.

The plain paper stock used on the Xerox 4110 is a non-standard size. Paris can support the use of paper sizes that are not standard, so Mills & Boon were able to use a pre-printed cut-sheet paper stock that was "2-up". When guillotined in half, the resulting document is suitable for the mailing systems used in Croydon.

During the implementation, Mills & Boon took the decision to switch to ParcelNet. The labelling requirements of ParcelNet require barcodes and other delivery data to be printed at specific sizes in specific places on the document. Using Paris, Mills & Boon designed a hybrid invoice / label document that fulfilled the requirements of ParcelNet, while minimising system changes.

From an operational point of view, the AS/400 sees the Paris system as just another Remote printer. The Xerox 4110 is driven at rated speed by Paris, producing 2-up documents ready for fulfilment.

The Benefits

Mills & Boon now send all their documentation to their subscribers in contemporary style, using their house font and in upper / lower case.

The layout of the documents is under their control and the creation of new letters no longer requires text templates to be modified on the AS/400 system.

Where the document is used as a label on a parcel of books, this label conforms to the requirements of ParcelNet. By using a combined invoice / label design, Mills & Boon can continue to use the fulfilment system that they have already invested in.

The Xerox 4110 is fully utilised.

The future

With the Paris system installed, Mills & Boon documents are now digital and changes that are needed can be made quickly.

Using Paris, it is now also possible to send customer documents by email or to upload them to a web-site for customer retrieval.

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