



BETTER TOGETHER: THE BENEFITS OF COLLABORATION

A new way of thinking

Canon

COMMUNITIES COMING TOGETHER

As businesses of all kinds continue their post-COVID-19 recovery, it's clear that many print service providers have been negatively impacted by the crisis. Print is highly exposed to many of the hardest hit sectors – from hospitality and tourism to retail and leisure – reducing print volumes for many. Others have thrived because they serve specific markets or customers which have been able to continue working, and even grow, in these extraordinary times. Some print businesses have been agile enough to pivot their proposition, while others haven't had the opportunity – or investment capability – to widen their offering to meet new and evolving print demands.

Success in tough times demands the flexibility to adapt to changing market conditions. This will be particularly true in the coming months, with uncertainty over staffing levels, the challenges of social distancing in the workplace, erratic revival of customer demand, and the possibility of rolling local lockdowns causing sudden temporary closures or issues with staff continuity.



Cooperate and collaborate

As in previous recessions, it will take time, energy and drive to recover from the impact of COVID-19, to pick up, push forward, innovate and drive growth. But there is help available. The key is to look around you for support and be open to working with people and organisations you trust.

During nearly every crisis, businesses are driven by necessity to co-operate in new and creative ways. The benefits of exchanging information, networks and expertise with peers can include not only new commercial opportunities, but also lower costs and increased resilience. What underpins good collaboration is communication. Openly sharing your vision and maintaining an ongoing dialogue is fundamental to success.

Take a moment to stand back and look at your business as a link in an interconnected value chain, where your success is bound up with that of your suppliers and partners, the businesses that buy your services, and their end customers. COVID-19 has changed the landscape for all of them, so you will benefit from more transparent conversations to understand what that means for each of you, and how you can adapt to the 'new normal' and help each other succeed.



Seek support from your suppliers

A good place to start is speaking to your suppliers to see how they can help you with your plans for business evolution. They may have innovative products and services that would help you to expand your portfolio or be able to offer solutions that could contribute to improved process efficiencies that might resolve staffing challenges.

Speak to your suppliers about their products and services, the way they deliver them, and their future roadmaps and innovations. You have an opportunity to use the capital you have with them to shape the way they work with you. Consider this: do you understand the direction your suppliers are travelling in? If you don't, or if you're not clear on how their ambitions align with yours, you're unlikely to extract all potential value from the relationship.

When business is running well, it's normal to fall into a pattern of buying the same products from the same suppliers, without really looking hard at alternatives that might deliver better value or improved performance. The 'new normal' does not mean going back to how it was before. For many that is not even an option. This is an opportunity to reset the relationships in your supply chain, reflecting both your present and future needs.

It's natural to work by the mantra 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it', but now is the time to question those purchasing patterns, come out of your comfort zone, and speak to your suppliers about how they can play an [active part in your business recovery and help you sharpen your competitive edge](#).

Make the most of your technology investments

Your digital print technology suppliers, including Canon, can almost certainly provide valuable support in the months ahead. For example, we can offer clear guidance if you're looking to [take your business online with web-to-print or to automate more processes](#) to improve efficiency and safeguard continuity of production.

Maintaining the status quo can be regarded as the safest and most comfortable option where suppliers are concerned, limiting the risk of further change and uncertainty. It's also not unusual for a print business to miss out on leveraging the full capabilities of all the production technologies they have already invested in.

Talk to your Account Manager about your production line-up and see what advice they can provide about optimising your workflow to adapt to your changed circumstances, job volumes, work mix and so on.

Consider whether there's scope to use your existing equipment to diversify into other applications that might meet new customer needs that you are identifying in your conversations with them. Is now the time to finally explore [the real potential of personalisation](#), for example, and to develop this as part of your offering to customers?

Your tried-and-tested business models may need to adapt to the new landscape. We can give you ideas for alternative approaches that maximise the potential of your digital production capabilities, as well as inspiring you with positive stories from customers that are successfully evolving their businesses.

Accept expert support

Beyond our own product and solutions expertise, we can also connect you through our [Canon Ascent Programme](#) with a number of independent business consultants across Europe who can offer guidance on topics from implementing web to print, managing cash flow, business planning, marketing strategy, customer insight and value based selling. Many of these experts used to run print businesses themselves and have lived through previous recessions, so they're well qualified to advise you.

You can access their in-depth knowledge and experience via one-to-one mentoring, workshops, webinars or through a range of written guidance created in collaboration with us. Together with them, we can help you find solutions to your most pressing business challenges and move forward with confidence.

We work closely with print service providers (PSPs) to drive business growth by broadening their offering and expanding their conversations with their customers, to add consultative value.

There's never been a better time to be proactive about fostering a more collaborative partnership with your customers. They will more than likely be open to your professional expertise on how to use print to engage with their customers. We can help you embrace the opportunity, enhance your questioning techniques, showcase your full capabilities and demonstrate your value.

The power of collaboration post-COVID-19

COVID-19 has given us all cause to re-examine many aspects of our daily lives. For many of us, an enormous positive has been seeing how neighbours, communities and even competitors have pulled together to bring each other through the worst of the crisis with moral support and practical help. We've learned to ask openly for help and to offer it generously.

As you go back to business, that spirit of community, collaboration and clear communication along with a 'can-do' attitude, will be critical to recovery. By taking this moment to build closer and more open customer and supplier relationships, and to think laterally about how you can realise your ambitions, you have a chance to build a more resilient business and to lay strong foundations for long-term success.

Time for some 'co-opetition'?

Perhaps some of your team is still working to reduced hours as part of a government job retention scheme or you've had to take the tough decision to reduce your workforce. That may be putting pressure on certain areas of your operation, compromising your ability to meet customer expectations.

Or maybe you have a clear business plan that you're confident can deliver growth, but you don't have the expertise or capacity in-house right now to deliver. And you don't want to take an investment risk without proving your concept first.

It seems counter-intuitive in a sector that tends to look at other PSPs as rivals for every order, but your competition might just hold the key to making your idea a success. Coopetition is a business term used to describe the combination of 'competition' and 'cooperation'. It's a common concept in other technology sectors, where businesses thrive by leveraging each other's expertise, sharing insights and building collaborative solutions.

While another PSP might have a similar product offering, they may serve different customers as well as having capabilities that complement yours. Could you both utilise your production capacity and staff resources more effectively by working together to deliver jobs? Could you function as mutual trade partners to maximise each other's production capabilities? Could this lead to opportunities to work in true partnership to close gaps in each other's offering and serve both customer bases with a more comprehensive portfolio of products?

You have the potential to build a win-win solution that reduces costs for both parties and achieves economies of scale. More importantly, by collaborating, you never have to turn a customer down and you could even upsell certain applications.

Your national trade association or a local chamber of commerce could be a valuable intermediary to facilitate this kind of discussion. When COVID-19 started, the UK's Independent Print Industries Association (IPIA) set-up Sourcing Bridge, a community-based platform that enables PSPs to put forward requests if they need resource or production support. The IPIA essentially acts as the go-between, helping partnerships form with other trusted PSPs.

IPIA General Manager Brendan Perring told us, "When you face a crisis, people have to work together. And many PSPs are now in a position where they would prefer to share customers with other PSPs rather than competing for them. With customer pools reduced, it's important to all share a slice of the pie." Through Sourcing Bridge, members can post a request for support confidentially or to the wider membership, member to member and peer to peer. They can ask each other for support, create business partnerships, and even consider potential acquisitions. Perring summarised the value of this original approach: "We're fostering a community that is helping keep print businesses alive and ensure they survive."

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