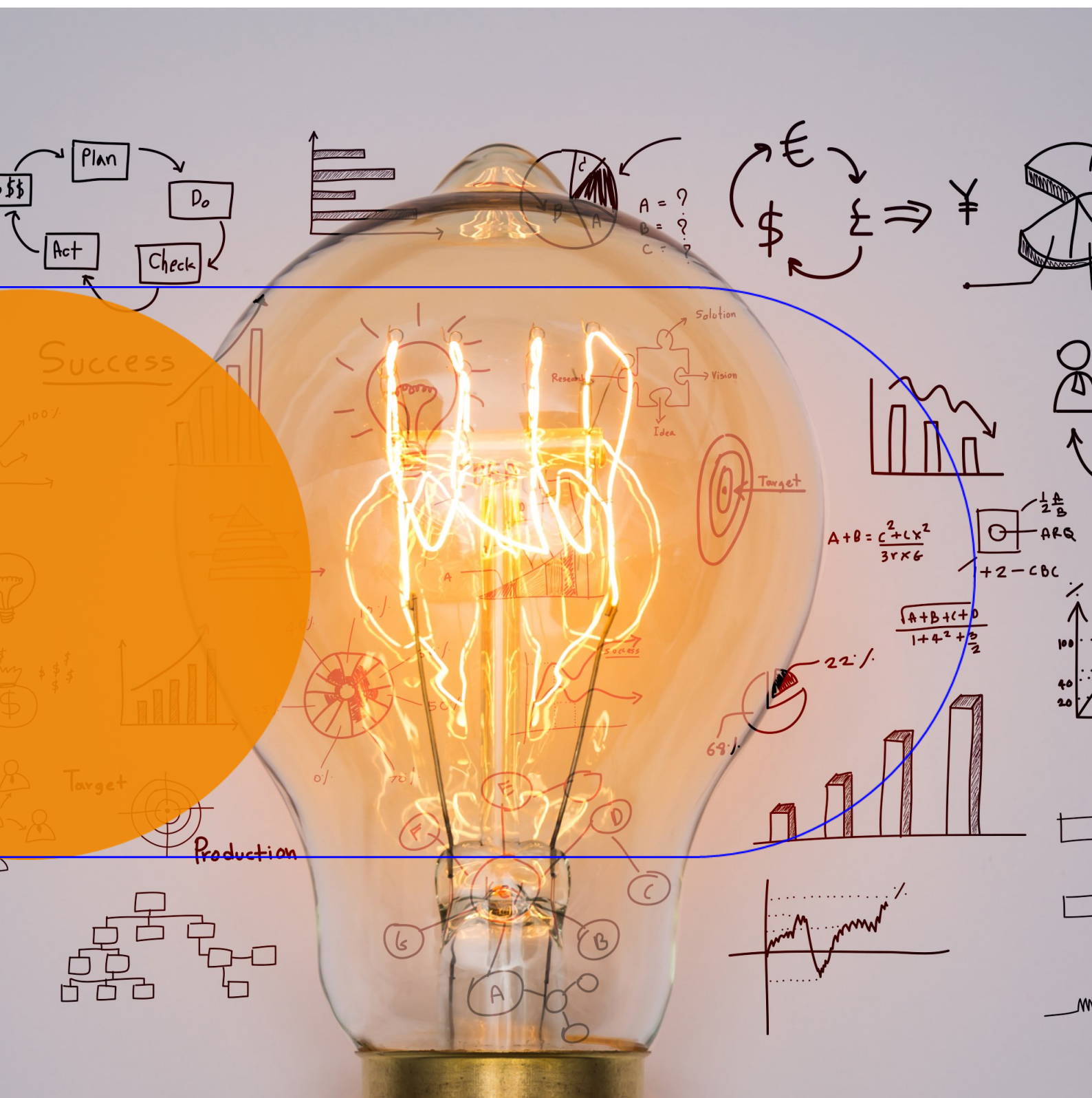


From print to strategy:

Why Print Service Providers need to make the transition to Strategic Communication Outsourcers in a post-pandemic world



The *disruption* caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has sent businesses scrambling to adjust their communications strategies. If there is one lesson to be learned, it is that “thinking outside the box” is vital to survive and prosper in a post-pandemic world.

In an increasingly digitally-enabled world, organisations are demanding highly effective and integrated customer communications across all direct, digital and social channels. For print services providers (PSPs), the challenge is to think more strategically to meet those demands.

The reality is that PSPs can no longer think of themselves as just suppliers of print services – they need to make the transition to what we at Sefas call “Strategic Communication Outsourcers” (SCOs), partnering with clients to meet their strategic communications goals.

Why **comms** need to be more strategic

To be a successful SCO, you need to ensure one thing – that you enable your clients to deliver great customer experience to their customers. That in turn relies on communications delivered in the right format and via the channel that is right for them. In other words, it goes way beyond print.

Analyst firm [Gartner](#) suggests that businesses “must develop effective customer experience strategies to optimise customer interactions and drive business outcomes.” That’s probably never been truer than it is today.

It is fair to say that customer communications hasn’t always been regarded in the same light as customer experience – but the fact is, technology transformation really does enable businesses to implement omnichannel communications strategies that support enhanced customer experience.

As the PSP transitions to SCO, there will be other challenges beyond the operational and technological. Many PSPs will find that they will need to develop and build new relationships with their clients. Customer Experience is a strategic imperative for many organisations and the champions of CX may be unfamiliar to you and relatively uninterested in a print-centric supplier—there is a need to understand their drivers relating to CX and be able to position the role of an SCO to support this shift.

The right **combination**

Combining customer communications and experience is therefore a major goal for any aspiring SCO. Operating strategically means thinking about and defining what is technically possible – e.g. accessibility of data, billing processes, document composition, and so on – and combining that with clients’ marketing objectives, such as customer acquisition and brand awareness.

It’s about partnering with clients to deliver complex customer communications that are omnichannel and often real-time and that allow their customers to move seamlessly from platform to platform and from device to device.

Functionally, solutions should provide multi-channel outputs from multiple data inputs, connecting inbound and outbound communications within an intelligent, end-to-end strategy that maximises customer experience and fulfils business objectives.

What will the **future** look like?

As PSPs emerge blinking into a post-pandemic world, what will the future really look like? According to a recent survey conducted by [IDC's](#) European Imaging, Printing, and Document Solutions (IPDS) Research Group, aimed at gaining insight into the market dynamics related to print management, decision makers have had to revise their priorities with a view to achieving "business as usual."

That in itself is an opportunity for PSPs to start a strategic conversation with those decision makers to help them meet their goals going forward.

Overall, the outlook is positive for the print services channel in 2021, with growth in opportunities to offer cloud services and support for hybrid working. According to [Quocirca's 2020 State of the Channel survey](#), which looked into attitudes among print services providers in Europe and the US, the sentiment regarding the impact of the pandemic is one of optimism and resilience.

Certainly, it appears that the crisis has served as a catalyst for many PSPs to remodel and reinvent their businesses in order to survive these turbulent times. While 50% of those surveyed reported that revenues declined in 2020, 66% said they expected them to rise in 2021, with 34% saying selling print services "has opened new opportunities to provide value-added services."

What are the key **lessons**?

As we look to the "new-normal", what lessons have been learned, and how should PSPs address them from a strategic standpoint?

There is no doubt that PSPs can leverage the right tools and techniques to build on the unique attributes of print to operate more strategically and strengthen their omnichannel offering.

It is absolutely essential for PSPs who want to set themselves apart from the competition to put on a "strategic head" in order to help clients secure and enhance customer loyalty in these uncertain times.

SCOs need to consider how to:

- Make print count. It will become increasingly vital to ensure that each print communication is hyper-relevant and designed to enhance [customer experience](#).
- Consolidate your [technology infrastructure](#). Ensure control of your clients' customer communications strategies within a modern centralised platform that integrates with marketing and other systems and enables the identification of points in the customer journey where communications can deliver maximum value.
- Use the right channels. An [omnichannel strategy](#) is about ensuring a consistent look and feel across all platforms and providing the best customer experience. Make the most of both print and digital media to meet customers' strategic objectives.
- Reinforce your [digital credentials](#). You need to work with your clients to make sure that their expectations in meeting Customer Experience can be matched by your digital capabilities—this may mean having to build, nurture and maintain new relationships.

Summary

There is no doubt that the digitisation of customer communications has, and will, accelerate in response to the effects of pandemic. Consumers want and expect a choice of communications channels and a seamless, personalised experience across all of them.

In the post-pandemic world, organisations will need to be able to meet the demands of their clients as effectively as possible, and indeed, be more proactive in offering additional added value to those customers than ever before. The key goal for PSPs going forward is to make the transition to becoming SCOs so that they offer their clients enhanced levels of service, and ensure that they are able to deliver an integral and effective omnichannel strategy.

If the post-pandemic indicators are right, there is momentum in the market towards outsourcing. PSPs who successfully transition to SCOs will therefore be better placed to take advantage of this business opportunity.

How Sefas can help

Sefas works with a wide range of SCOs and PSPs. Our Harmonie Communications Suite is a tailor-made modular solution that meets the specific needs of the client, whilst allowing room for expansion and adding important capabilities, such as hybrid communications, postal sorting, archiving tools and artificial intelligence capabilities.

Our solution enables both on-premise and cloud-based implementations, the latter enabling our clients to save on expensive hardware, software and skilled headcount investment. Depending on the implementation, clients can opt for traditional licencing or an SaaS subscription model, or a hybrid approach, and move from a CapEx to an OpEx pricing model.



Sefas is a software organisation that helps organisations produce meaningful, omnichannel customer communications to enhance customer experience. Sefas's customer onboarding solution incorporates Harmonie Communication Suite (HCS), a solutions toolset for designing and managing customer communications across all delivery channels. It provides the tools to create, enhance, preview, proof and approve communications, allowing you to easily enhance the customer experience through every interaction.

Find out more about Sefas and our services at www.sefas.co.uk