

# Atlantic Media

Steering Atlantic Media toward a new workflow and implementing a publishing management system.



**A**FTER SOLICITING bids in the spring of 2005 for a workflow analysis project at Atlantic Media, Nathan Newton, Publishing Technologies Manager for the Washington, DC based company, was surprised to find a proposal that was one-quarter the cost of the nearest competing bid. Given the tight financial landscape at most publishing companies, it's no shock that Newton decided to respond to the low bidder.

Newton's first thought was that Technology for Publishing—which had been recommended by a colleague at another publishing company—had underestimated the scope of the project, and would need to readjust the bid. He approached Margot Knorr Mancini, President of Technology for Publishing, to ensure she understood the parameters of the project—and then gave her an

opportunity to revamp the bid. Knorr Mancini re-estimated the project, and to Newton's pleased satisfaction, determined that her original bid was accurate.

From there, a relationship was forged between Atlantic Media and Technology For Publishing. Newton states, "I cannot overstate the value of Technology for Publishing's role as facilitator in helping Atlantic Media through the process of revising the content process for our publications. Their ability to quickly and efficiently gather information from our staff, and assist with our technical implementation can only be the result of many years of experience in the publishing industry. Everyone who worked with them found them a delight to work with."

The original project that Technology for Publishing took on for Atlantic Media was an examination of the editorial and production processes at the

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publisher of the renowned *Atlantic Monthly*, among a number of other titles, including *National Journal* and *Government Executive*. Atlantic Media knew that it needed to revamp its admittedly inefficient processes and standardize its publishing technology, but it needed guidance in mapping out the path for change. "Culturally, no one had a concept of stages of proofing," said Newton. For instance, galley proofs would morph into page proofs, but the level of editing changes tended not to correspond to the stage of the

process, meaning that big changes were often made to a story very late in the process-obviously, not an ideal publishing model, but one that proved very difficult to change.

After signing on to the project, Technology for Publishing spent time interviewing editorial, production and art department staff members regarding their existing workflows. The company's three main publishing groups had a mix of employees using both QuarkXPress and InDesign for layout; about a quarter of staff members work remotely, either from a satellite

Atlantic Media office or from home. After getting perspectives from the various editorial contributors at the company, Technology for Publishing mapped out new workflows for each of the company's groups.

Parallel to the workflow review, Atlantic Media was proceeding along toward a goal of implementing a publishing management system. After whittling down a list of 12 prospective software providers, Atlantic Media chose Softcare's K4, distributed in the United States by Managing Editor Inc. Atlantic Media retained Technology for Publishing to handle the K4 integration, training and support, and at the same time, to implement the new workflow changes.

The K4 project initially focused on *The Atlantic Monthly*, with other Atlantic Media publications pegged for process revisions and implementation with K4 at a future date. Since *The Atlantic Monthly*

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was already using Adobe InDesign (having switched from QuarkXPress in 2004), the K4 implementation focused on adapting the publication's new workflow to K4, configuring the system, getting users trained on the system's components and then guiding the magazine through the transition. Technology for Publishing began training for K4 in November 2005, and by mid-February 2006, on a very aggressive schedule, *The Atlantic* had produced two monthly issues using the

system. Over the next few issues, they continued to fine-tune the new workflow with additional facilitation from Technology for Publishing.

Additionally, Technology for Publishing helped guide the implementation of direct XML Export from *The Atlantic's* print content prepared with Adobe InCopy and InDesign in K4 to their web site, working with the internal web team and XML developers.

Newton has identified three major benefits to Atlantic Media of the

new workflow processes and K4. About 80 percent of the benefits, he says, are directly attributable to the process changes that were made, noting that “the technology is not the stick to enforce change; that has to be a management decision.”

**1] The first benefit was a dramatic decrease in the number of changes made to files after they’ve been shipped to the printer.**

The publication historically allowed late changes to page proofs and as a result, errors crept onto pages that were often not discovered until after the pages shipped to the printer. Process changes—and management buy-in—forced the magazine to reduce the number of late and extensive changes to page proofs, and as a result, it’s seen a significant cost savings.

**2] Another big benefit of the new workflow is that the process for getting content posted on *The***

***Atlantic’s* web site, which used to take two weeks from start to finish, has been reduced to two hours.** This significant time savings is primarily due to automatic XML exporting afforded by a combination of technologies in InDesign, K4 and a custom XSLT. This time savings has translated into a cost savings equivalent to about half a full-time employee’s salary.

**3] The third major benefit is that remote users can easily interact with the system.** One West Coast-based fact checker has raved about the publishing system, especially K4’s ability to let her gauge the status of various pieces of content, so that she can see what different staffers are working on and thereby have a much better sense than before of what her workload will be from day to day and from week to week. According to Newton, she has even said that K4 brings her the

feeling of presence in the main Washington editorial office. With about a quarter of the 35 staffers that use K4 plugging in remotely, such a benefit is hard to measure but clearly a valuable one that helps to improve productivity.

Would Newton hire Technology for Publishing again? Absolutely, says Newton. In fact, he says, “I recommend Technology for Publishing all the time. I would not hesitate to use Technology for Publishing again. I strongly recommend their services to anyone trying to evaluate their content workflows or implement a new system.”

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