Welcome to Premedia 2.0
By Joe Cha

Five years ago, as the president of QuebecorWorld Premedia, I wrote an article in Gravure Magazine titled “Premedia RIP.” Any prepress professional who only saw that headline, didn’t read the copy and still has a job might have recalled the famous quote attributed to Mark Twain—“The report of my death was an exaggeration”—and would have proclaimed, “Hey buddy, I’m still alive!”

Indeed. Not only did he survive, but that prepress professional now stands poised in 2012 to thrive in a new media production marketplace. Welcome to Premedia 2.0, where media is integrated into production and publications are distributed among a growing number of platforms of which print is just one of many. It’s actually a great time to be in premedia services because premedia stands in the center of what I call the media “bow tie.” Premedia professionals can now be expected to accept rich media, feeds, blogs and video, as well as traditional layouts with text and photos. Premedia adds value to that content through organization, manipulation and management, and can distribute it all through a growing number of channels. If it’s done right, premedia services can offer an integrated media system.

INTEGRATED MEDIA SYSTEMS
This is where it gets interesting, because an integrated media system can build on a traditional printing business. With so much excitement in publishing centered around emerging platforms and the recent news that mobile devices in America now outnumber the population, publishers realize that they can’t cost-effectively distribute their content to all of the new smartphones, not to mention tablets, e-readers, the Web and print platforms on their own. Too many outlets and software upgrades, coupled with reduced staff from layoffs and management’s reluctance to increase headcount mean that content publishers need help and have started looking for answers from all corners. In lieu of a service provider coming up with the answer, a publisher’s default position is to make a minimal investment to “just get something up,” like a replica of a print edition on a tablet, and call it a day. It’s a poor experience, but creating a digital edition is cheap. And since no one has shown publishers how they can make money from digital publishing anyway, they might feel that putting up a digital replica of the printed publication is good enough, at least until something better comes along.

PRINT-FIRST WORKFLOW WITH TRADITIONAL PREMEDIA
A premedia services provider can help customers improve on a basic digital replica because the premedia department holds the key: the files. Regardless of the delivery vehicle or platform, if the files are managed, maintained and tagged appropriately, the publisher’s content can be transformed easily and quickly from print to a variety of platforms so that publishers can communicate and complete transactions with their customers at minimal additional cost. Consequently, emboldened publishers might feel that they can afford to experiment.

A prepress company’s greatest asset will be its “relationship primacy,” a long-term, cultivated, trusted relationship built over countless hours under color booths lights, on weekends and at odd hours delivering final files, or onsite at press approvals in horrible weather. As a result, clients have faith in their premedia partner.

Prepress companies also have technical advantages, with digital asset management expertise, as well as access to the latest versions of software, including tools for integrated, multichannel media production. They can lead their customers down a path where with the help of prepress services they can do more with...
less, and redefine the professional relationship because the premedia company is no longer just part of the print delivery channel but is now an integral content steward.

Certainly, the details can be daunting and success will come from the execution of the concept. However, a printing company’s biggest challenge might be its fear of experimenting and the temptation to seek the answer from an outside provider. Outsourcing premedia services might sound good initially. You make no upfront investment, maybe learn a little along the way and even get paid by a third party to service your customer. You might even lull yourself into thinking the time-to-market savings for the client is the right thing to do for them. But be forewarned: If a printer’s greatest asset is its relationship primacy, outsourcing new premedia work to someone else can be the most dangerous choice you make for the future of your business. Today, the dollars for new media prep could be quite small relative to traditional work, but take a look at the future growth for both types of work. If traditional print work is flat to shrinking and the rates are going down, why wouldn’t a company outsource that traditional work and instead focus its energy on the new growing parts of the business to make sure it can answer its customers’ questions about what they are paying more attention to now and in the future?

New media is good news for premedia. Your next life is knocking, open the door and say hello. ✪