Why You Can't Afford *Not* to Have Pre-Press

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"I can't afford to pay an extra person to do the job my operators can do."

If you're a startup where you're the press operator, sales team, customer service, and bookkeeper — and your oldest kid is rewinding and shipping — I understand that adding a pre-press person may not be realistic yet.

But this article isn't for startups, not yet anyway, but you will need this on down the line so read on. It's for companies generating $1 million to $1 billion in sales — companies that should already be thinking beyond daily survival and toward **sustainable profit growth**.

And remember; high sales don't automatically mean healthy profits.

What Is Pre-Press?

In simple terms, **pre-press** means gathering and preparing *all materials* for production in a designated staging area near each press to reduce setup time, waste, and downtime.

In short: **pre-press increases productivity, which increases profit.**

The Tunnel Vision Problem

Many companies resist adding headcount, believing fewer people mean more profit. But this "tunnel vision" often backfires. When press operators handle pre-press duties, presses sit idle, output drops, overtime climbs, and margins shrink.

The longer this goes on, the more your profits and growth potential erode — until sustainability is at risk.

What Pre-Press Should Do

A strong pre-press team prepares everything a press operator needs *before* the job starts:

- **Substrates and laminations**
- **Tooling** (dies, print cylinders, mounted plates)
- **Inks and varnishes** (pre-mixed)
- **Anilox rolls** (cleaned and ready)
- **Doctor blades and cleanup** assistance

Each press should have a staging area with at least two jobs ready to run.

If there's no separate plate-mounting or ink-mixing department, pre-press can handle those tasks too.
The goal is simple: **keep the presses running.**

The Cost of Doing Nothing

Let's look at the math.

Assume:

- Press operators make **$25/hour (this will differ by company, but for the sake of argument)**
- Two pre-press persons earn **$15/hour each**
- You have **5 presses**, each running **2 jobs/day**
- Each job requires **1 hour** of prep work

Without pre-press, operators spend that time doing prep instead of printing.

Scenario /5 presses		Cost per Press/day	Cost/ year	Annual Impact
Dedicated pre-press	$30/press	$150/day	$39,000/year	
Operators doing pre-press	$50/press	$250/day	$65,000/year.	$26,000/lose per year

That's **$100/day**, **$500/week**, and **$26,000/year** of pure waste — not counting overtime or missed opportunities due to slower turnaround times.

And in reality, it's usually worse.

The Growth Multiplier

A pre-press team doesn't just save money — it builds your bench strength.
Pre-press staff learn the press, assist operators during breaks, and can move up as your company grows.

You gain efficiency today and talent for tomorrow.

Bottom Line

If your operators are doing pre-press work, you're losing money — period.
Adding pre-press isn't an expense; it's an **investment in efficiency, scalability, and profit stability**.

The sooner you correct this, the faster you'll see results in:

- Shorter setup times
- Lower overtime costs
- Higher output
- Less stress across your production floor

Let's Talk

If you'd like to evaluate your production setup or discuss how to implement a cost-effective pre-press process, I'd love to help.

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