



[IFRA Track 4.1 ready for publication](#)

IFRA Track: the late breakthrough of a visionary standard for newspaper inter-system communication

Darmstadt/Amsterdam, 28 October 2008 – IFRA Track is a global communication standard especially for newspapers. After initial reluctance, it now seems as though the ice has been broken: PRIME NETWORK, a syndicate of leading manufacturers, has assured the standard its full support. For publishing houses this means that new systems can be integrated seamlessly into working operations.

The basis for a functioning communication is that everyone speaks the same language. This applies also for communication between systems. The vision of IFRA Track is that all systems at news publishing houses speak the same language and are linked to form an integrated production management system. To allow this, already in 1994 IFRA formed a working group on production tracking and consequently proposed a standard: IFRA Track, developed by the Royal Institute of Technology (KTH) in Stockholm, Sweden. The standard was adopted by a small number of systems manufacturers (MWM Media Workflow Management in Sweden, ppi Media and Denex are among the long-standing supporters of IFRA Track), but the overall echo fell far short of expectations.

With the change of the proprietary message format into a new XML-based format early this millennium, the interest in IFRA Track began to rise amongst system providers. The version 4.1, that is currently being revised and will be released soon, is the product of a well-functioning news publishing community under the guidance of IFRA.

The more widespread acceptance of IFRA Track was undoubtedly also hampered by the emergence of JDF (Job Definition Format) of the CIP4 industry consortium that it was hoped would provide a comprehensive solution to interface problems – for the entire graphics industry. In fact, JDF turned out to be too complex for the specifications of newspaper production. Harald Löffler of IFRA comments: “The early adopters of JDF among the manufacturers of production management systems for newspapers then abandoned JDF for the newspaper industry. The IFRA Track process model is also the basis for JDF; however, IFRA Track is limited to communication between systems and does not lay claim to represent a file format for the complete process chain.”

*For further information about
IFRA Track, please contact:*

*IFRA
Harald Löffler
Research Manager
Phone: +49.6151.733-766
E-Mail: loeffler@ifra.com
<http://www.ifra.com/ifratrack>
<http://www.ifra.com>*

Because this is an open standard that can be downloaded from the IFRA website (www.ifra.com/ifratrack), all systems manufacturers can now benefit from it by using the provided data format to themselves programme interfaces for their systems. Combined with the widespread support of the PRIME group, the way is now clear for the establishment of IFRA Track as an industry standard.

ABB and EAE, both founding members of the PRIME NETWORK, explain why they have put effort into Version 4.1 and now strongly support it. Andreas Dau, Head of Product Management, EAE explains why: "Version 4.1 exactly describes the needs of a newspaper production. With this standard, the complete newspaper workflow is covered. The advantage is that IFRA Track solves the problem of terms being used and interpreted differently. Using IFRA Track interfaces, there is a clear explanation what an 'edition' is. There are no misunderstandings. The framework is extendable and continuously developed, project by project. IFRA Track is open and stable at the same time and helps to reduce the time of delivery to the customer, because the interfaces are clearly described and able to validate with the used XML technology."

Susanne Knoepfel, product manager at ABB and a major driving force behind the design and implementation of Version 4.1, expresses her satisfaction with the delivery now after some long months of hard work: "IFRA Track Version 4.1 now is a well structured and concisely documented framework that covers the complete newspaper workflow and doesn't stop at the folder: from prepress to the press and the mailroom, even up to the ramp. We now use state-of-the-art XML technology. Object definitions can now be automatically parsed and validated. This tremendously speeds up the time and lowers the cost needed to implement interfaces. This leads to faster proliferation of these important interfaces throughout our industry, which will bring more stable, robust, and cost effective integrated solutions to everyone."

The framework

The IFRA Track specifications define what is often called a framework, a common base for the implementation of specific solutions. IFRA Track's XML Schemas define a large set of production objects that serve particular purposes in the production process, for instance, a PrintingJob object for tracking purposes including properties, such as number of copies printed, waste and speed. Also, IFRA Track specifies how these objects should be assembled and packaged into an XML message for transport, the IFRA Track Message Format.

IFRA Track objects from the framework are intended to be used by production system suppliers in the implementation of information exchange interfaces. An interface defines the use of a subset of the IFRA Track objects which also may be extended with additional system specific properties and controlled vocabularies (i.e. lists of values).

Thanks to this framework approach, IFRA Track permits flexibility and business development, while at the same time providing a solid base for system integration. Even extensions by vendors and the use of vendor-specific controlled vocabularies are validated using XML Schema technology to ensure that only agreed structures and values are used. This approach has been used successfully also in other areas within the media industry, such as the IPTC's NewsML G2 standards for news content and the AdsML Framework supporting the advertising workflow.

About IFRA

IFRA (www.ifra.com) is the worldwide research and service organisation for the news publishing industry. With headquarters in Darmstadt, Germany, it has acted since 1961 as the platform for decision-makers from the newspaper industry. IFRA offers its services primarily to its more than 3100 members in nearly 80 countries. A Board, comprising publishers as well as central, regional and specialised committees drawn from IFRA member companies, steers the work of the international newspaper community. IFRA's research work provides the basis for this and results in standardisation projects as well as international and regional exhibitions, conferences, workshops, study tours, training events, Newsplex consulting and international competitions. The IFRA Expo – “the annual event of the news publishing industry” – held at major European venues, is the world's most important trade exhibition for newspaper companies and their partners. IFRA Expo 2009 will be held from 12 to 15 October in Vienna (www.ifraexpo.com). IFRA Magazine, the international magazine of newspaper business, strategy and technology, is published in several languages in both print and online versions (www.iframagazine.com). IFRA is also running IFRA Search, a vertical search engine for the news publishing industry (www.ifrasearch.com).

About PRIME NETWORK

PRIME NETWORK (www.printmedianetwork.net) is a syndicate of leading manufacturers in the printing industry that was established in 2004 with the objective of simplifying system integration and lowering the project costs involved for the participating manufacturers and their newspaper customers. Whereas initially individual interfaces between the different manufacturers' systems were developed, it has now been agreed to adopt IFRA Track as the common communication framework.

Members of PRIME NETWORK

The following 16 system providers are members of the PRIME NETWORK with the goal to simplify system integration. They all support IFRA Track:

- > ABB Switzerland – www.abb.com/printing
- > alfa Media Partner – www.alfa.com
- > EAE Ewert Ahrensburg Electronic – www.eae.com
- > Ferag – www.ferag.com
- > Funkinform – www.funkinform.de
- > Graphics Microsystems – www.gmicolor.com
- > JJK Verlagssoftware – www.jjk.de
- > Koenig & Bauer – www.kba-print.de
- > Krause-Biagosch – www.krause.de
- > MWM Media Workflow – www.mwm.se
- > Müller Martini Versand-Systeme – www.mullermartini.com
- > ppi Media – www.ppimedia.de
- > Q.I. Press Controls – www.qipc.com
- > QuadTech – www.quadtechworld.com
- > SolidAM – www.solidam.com
- > Maschinenfabrik Wifag – www.wifag.ch