

The Definitive Guide to Online Proofing



A COMPREHENSIVE RESOURCE FOR UNDERSTANDING AND IMPROVING
THE CONTENT REVIEW AND APPROVAL PROCESS



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Executive Summary

Getting creative work reviewed and approved is an often overlooked business process that's carried out every day in businesses of all sizes and in all industries across the globe. It's also a process that is time consuming and often causes considerable frustration, especially for those in the marketing and creative industries.

The good news is that review and approval is a process that can be greatly improved with online proofing, yielding tremendous benefits to both the individual worker and the organization.

In *The Definitive Guide to Online Proofing*, readers will understand:

- The content review and approval workflow and how it impacts a business
- The market drivers and trends that influence the need for a more efficient content approval process
- The benefits of optimizing the content review and approval process with online proofing
- The spectrum of available proofing options and questions to ask when evaluating online proofing software
- Why Guitar Center chose online proofing in a real-life case study

More often than not, it's only when people are directly impacted that they realize the extent to which the review and approval process impacts their day and overall business goals. Consider *The Definitive Guide to Online Proofing* your wake up call to the importance of the review and approval process and the value of streamlining and optimizing the process through online proofing software.

The Evolution of Online Proofing

The whole concept of document proofing began as a prepress function. Providing a hardcopy proof to a customer was a vital step in the prepress workflow; press time is the most expensive part of the printing process, and prepress proofing served the function of not only catching costly errors, but often served as an agreement between customer and printer that both content and color was as desired.

In the early 2000's, the emergence of desktop publishing and print production technologies enabled soft proofing to emerge as a lower-cost, better alternative to hard copy proofing. Although soft-proofing systems were embraced, they were never widely adopted — expensive to deploy and required significant investments in hardware and client-server software. As well, there were issues replicating the color exactness of hard-copy proofing; light reflected off a computer monitor is different than what would reflect off paper and ink, so calibration was needed.

Today's online proofing and review tools have evolved from soft proofing, but are much more mainstream in their adoption as traditional barriers of entry have fallen thanks to technological advances and broader availability to high-speed Internet.

The need for an efficient approval process happens much further “upstream” these days as nearly every stage of the content creation process, from planning to project delivery, necessitates collaboration and feedback. No longer is review and approval just focused on the end-stage technical aspects of print production now that circulating a digital proof has become far more cost effective and efficient than producing and circulating a hard-copy proof.



The Unmistakable Need for Online Proofing Today

While the evolution from premise-based soft proofing to the cloud-based ease of online proofing was made possible with the might and speed that today's technology provides, there are significant market and social trends that point to the unmistakable need for an efficient review and approval process:

● **The explosion of content on the web** — The sheer volume of creative assets produced has increased dramatically recently. Years ago, mass media and printed advertising were the primary way marketers reached consumers, and the volume of content required for these channels was relatively small. The web has leveled the playing field in the last decade though, and marketers of all sizes now have the ability to directly reach potential customers 24/7/365. Content is how they do it; blogs and articles, videos and podcasts, presentations and images, to name a few. There's just way more content that needs to be reviewed and approved these days.

● The **breadth of media** has grown as well. Never before have consumers had so many options for the way they digest their content (web, image, video, interactive, etc). A singular marketing message or campaign must now be redesigned for many different formats.

Increasingly complex marketing assets often require the addition of specialized talent to marketing teams. More participants in the review process plus increased breadth of content spells chaos for the traditional approval process.

● The **ever-increasing touchpoints** that require unique content (mobile, multiple social media platforms, etc). Now, a singular marketing message must be created in multiple formats to accommodate the broad range of platforms, each and every one requiring approval before it can be used.

● **Remote working** arrangements are more common than ever; the word "team" is no longer synonymous with "place." People work from home, agency partners and outsourced talent can be from anywhere, even internal team members need no longer be co-located. The tools we use must accommodate our mobility.

● The **mainstream adoption of simple, easy-to-use tools** — In the last few years, consumers have moved quickly to adopt simple, easy-to-use tools in their personal lives (Gmail, Skype, various social media platforms, etc), and now expect that their employers allow them to work with similarly easy-to-use web-based tools at work. Online proofing is exactly the type of tool that fits this category.

● **Cloud technology adoption is growing among enterprise users** — Pioneered by companies like Salesforce.com, the huge growth in software-as-a-service applications has made the adoption of new software much easier for companies. Instead of installing and maintaining servers, software and data centers, organizations can now access enterprise-strength applications online.*

● And, there are **certain applications that can truly only exist in the cloud**; a good example is collaboration software. The very nature of collaboration means easily-facilitated communication between parties; a tool that must run on client servers or where there's an application on each person's computer would make it difficult for this to occur. Online proofing, by its very nature, is a true cloud app.



<http://www.gartner.com/id=2064615>

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/louisclumbus/2012/07/02/forecasting-public-cloud-adoption-in-the-enterprise-2>

Review and Approval is a Business-Critical Process

In light of the importance of having an efficient feedback mechanism, review and approval should be regarded as a business-critical process. And like any other business process, it needs to be optimized to bring the highest level of value for both customers and organization.

Review and approval shares the following characteristics with other, common business processes (such as purchasing, accounting, manufacturing and certain IT functions):

A true business process is a sequence of activities that can be visually imaged, or “mapped out” as a workflow, and has a clearly-defined beginning and ending point. That is certainly the case with review and approval, which begins at the concept stage and clearly ends once the project is delivered.

It is a collection of related, structured activities or tasks that work together to produce a specific outcome. Acknowledged business processes like collaboration, strategy, planning, as well as many defined workflows “live” under the review and approval umbrella.

And like any well-defined business process, it can be project-managed.

But review and approval is an important business process, worthy of recognition because of the number of resources it consumes within an organization. When attention is brought to bear on it, we can see how slow, time-consuming and hugely inefficient the feedback process is. More importantly, though, we can begin to do something about it.





Who Benefits the Most by Using Online Proofing

Who in an organization might commonly be involved in the review and approval process?

Anyone responsible for the production or delivery of creative marketing projects will find an online proofing software especially helpful. Large volumes of complex content, tight marketing and publishing deadlines, and the need to manage feedback across many different files types (documents, audio-visual and interactive) make online proofing a particularly good choice.

This would include marketing managers/directors, project and product managers, creative operations, traffic managers, account managers, marketing operations professionals, technical editors, graphic and web designers, photographers, copywriters, legal and compliance officers and others.

What types of companies? Just about any brand, including consumer package goods, healthcare and pharmaceutical companies, financial services companies, retailers, publishers and promotional item vendors use online proofing, as do others in the marketing value chain.

Advertising, creative and digital agencies have long relied on online proofing for operational efficiency for both client projects and internal functions. Print services providers, including packaging printers and signage companies, also have a definite need for online review and approval software.

And as we describe who might commonly use online proofing, it's worth spending a few moments focused on how it might be best utilized; the difference between collaborative editing (proofreading or copy editing) and collaborative proofing.



Collaborative editing is a faster-paced, more task-oriented activity centered primarily around accuracy, where all team members have permission to edit the document. There is generally no discussion on creative development at this point in the process, so comments and decisions are made fairly quickly.

With collaborative proofing, the document owner retains the right to edit, but is actively seeking feedback from the team on matters of content substance, creative and concept — it's a time when opinions are weighed and viewpoints aired. Generally, when an element of creativity is introduced to a project and a higher level of participation is required from a team to “flush out” the best and brightest ideas, you're talking about collaborative proofing.

Online proofing accommodates both activities, but is truly efficient at facilitating and streamlining the creative collaboration process.

How the Review and Approval Process Happens Today

For the most part, the marketing creative review and approval process is very manual, resource-heavy, and inefficient.

Most companies still manage review and approval by emailing large PDF attachments back and forth, using FTP to send artwork, manually walking proofs from reviewer to reviewer and even sending faxed copies of designs for feedback. Stakeholders generally collaborate via email. Layered on top are dozens of additional tasks:

- manually printing out copies,
- posting comments to a spreadsheet,
- collating revisions,
- chasing reviewers,
- keeping track of who has responded and
- managing the resultant inbox mess.

At the center of this maelstrom of manual activity typically sits a project or traffic manager who acts like a traffic cop trying to keep the process moving and the project on schedule.

Online proofing and review eliminates the vast majority of these activities because it places a single digital asset (a proof) in a centralized, cloud-based location. Rich markup and commenting tools allow participants to review the content virtually. All commenting and discussion happens directly within the online proof, allowing all participants the insight of each other's feedback, minimizing misinterpretations. Multiple versions are easily viewed, compared and managed right within the application, and all the work can be automatically archived to eliminate users from editing outdated creatives.

Online proofing has defined the way to streamline the review and approval process, allowing marketing creatives to be more productive and more creative and marketing operations to increase the bandwidth of the team to take on more projects.

The very best online proofing software utilizes cloud technology, enables collaboration between participants regardless of location or time constraints and effortlessly incorporates the approval process into everyday workflows — even in highly-demanding work environments.

It's interesting to note that the same technological advancements that brought about the evolution of online proofing have also made it a necessity. Unlike any other time, consumers are now firmly in control of the information they get and when they get it. The supply of creative content has exploded to meet the demand, and there is a huge range of media types — web, audio, video, interactive — every bit needing to be reviewed and approved.



Online Proofing Eliminates Many Costly Problems

For marketing and creative teams charged with the production and delivery of creative content, online proofing and review will greatly reduce many costly problems.

Project bottlenecks are eliminated, projects delivered faster

Time to market is a top priority for most; product launches, seasonal campaigns and regularly scheduled content all need to be delivered on time. Delays impact both reputation and the bottom line.

Traditional email and hard copy proofing processes are the main culprits, but an online proofing system can help:

- The team reviews the same cloud-based proof, so everyone can comment and reply in real time

- Back and forth emails, collated summaries and unnecessary revisions are eliminated

- For review teams in different locations, the ability to link to the proof anytime, anywhere removes a large potential bottleneck

Loss of Control of the Process

Most people rely primarily on email, spreadsheets, and hard copy proofing to keep track of marketing design projects. Because these tools are not designed to meet the collaborative needs of review and approval, it's easy to lose control of the process. Keeping track of activities such as who has received which version of the artwork, who has responded or not, who is available for a collaboration call and who is not, can easily get lost in the shuffle, especially when managing more than one project.

Online proofing creates a single, cloud-based copy of the file that can be marked up and commented on for all to see. The efficiencies are real, with a recent [Intellilink study](#) reporting that **online proofing users reported management effort to control the review and approval process was reduced by an average of 59%**. Less overall time was spent routing changes, printing copies, collating revisions, and resolving conflicting feedback.

Ineffective Communication and Collaboration

When it comes to collaboration, traditional review and approval methods like email and hard-copy proofing simply have not kept pace with the way work is done now. Marketing and creative teams are often located in different places and many people work from home at least part of the time. Hard-copy proofing ties people to their desks and makes it difficult to work with outsourced talent. And emailing very large files can cause technical difficulties that only make matters worse.

Online proofing software eliminate these hurdles. The ability for everyone to view, comment, markup and discuss opens up collaboration — 75% of the [Intellilink survey](#) participants said online proofing reduced the need for structured meetings.

And because comments are viewed by all, over 80% indicated an improvement in team member accountability.

The ability to easily collaborate with other members of the review team is a key ingredient in a successful approval cycle — one that produces the highest quality outcome, on time and on budget.



A SPECIAL NOTE FOR MARKETING AGENCIES

Businesses today are demanding more advanced technology and efficient processes from their marketing agencies. In a [recent survey](#), nearly 40% of companies reported declining to work with an agency because they felt the agency did not have the collaboration software or appropriate processes for managing work. When there are efficient tools and processes in place, agencies have a tremendous competitive advantage that will help them to not only win customers, but retain their business for the long term.

A note of caution: your client may not talk about their frustrations with the amount of time they're required to spend on the review and approval process, but that's not to say those feelings don't exist.



Online Proofing Solves Special Review and Approval Needs

While the need for content review and approval is universal in nature, there are “hotspots,” particular circumstances where online proofing really lends itself to solving critical business situations:

A high volume of time-critical marketing content

Industries like print services and publishing produce a continuous stream of time-sensitive material. Content can include both editorial and advertising, and many publishers now have digital as well as print properties. Advertising ranges from static display and catalogs to animation and interactive banner ads. Turnarounds are tight, with ads sometimes finalized just hours before publication. Online review and approval software eliminates obstacles publishers face in managing high volumes of highly detailed content.

Many people or many steps involved in the review process

When the number of stakeholders involved in a project or the complexity of the project reaches a point where hard-copy or manual processes break down, online proofing becomes a necessary tool to keep things on schedule. These circumstances are occurring today with greater frequency; the need for many different types of specialized talent due to the breadth and uniqueness of content types is one big reason.

High level of regulatory or compliance issues

Strict regulatory and compliance requirements exist in certain industries like healthcare, financial services, retail and automotive. Design projects must combine compelling brand messages with legally accurate content. Marketers in these industries must factor rigid compliance demands into their deliverables, and each step of the approval process must be documented to show that guidelines were followed. Online proofing provides the speed, accuracy and auditing backup to ensure compliance, productivity and business agility.

Where Review and Approval Lives Within the Creative Process

Although proofing started in the prepress function as a way to catch errors prior to the costly production phase, in reality review and approval begins much earlier and happens continuously throughout the entire creative process. Online proofing and review accommodates all stages of approval, from the early strategic phases to concept, design and then implementation and improvement:



Strategy

This is the discovery phase, where business goals are vetted, stakeholders interviewed, competitors analyzed and markets researched. Team members are gathering information and formulating strategy with the goal of creating a strategic vision for the project. Effective collaboration is critical in this phase, and often the culmination of the strategy phase is a comprehensive presentation to either senior management or clients. Review and approval is critical to each step in the strategy phase.



Concept and Design

Strategic vision comes to life now, as creative teams begin the translation of ideas to concrete marketing assets. Iterations are frequent and the need for a quality collaboration software is high, as proofs get passed back and forth between the entire creative team. Are the colors right? Did the photographer capture the essence of the message, or must photoshoots be redone? Does the web page convey the simplicity the client is seeking? Is this ad bold enough to grab the attention of the intended audience? Are there any obvious errors like typos and have all the right images been used? And when satisfied with the outcome, review and approval must be sought from management, clients and other stakeholders such as legal, public relations, product management, etc.



Produce and Implement

Implementation includes many different workstreams, including visual design and content development (such as video, copy, ad banners and such), print and display production, web design and social media planning. Review and approval happens at virtually every point in these processes, over and over again until the content is perfected. And as deadlines loom, the ability to turn decisions around quickly becomes critical. Online proofing assists in every capacity here.



Measure and Evolve

Once published, the project continues to evolve as performance is measured, campaigns are adjusted and tweaked accordingly. It is important to have all previous feedback and versions available, so adjustments can be made quickly and with accuracy.

The Range of Available Proofing Tools

There is a wide range of proofing options, from simple desktop tools to the more costly premise-based software. This table indicates how each category satisfies key approval functions.

	Ease of Use	Feedback	Ability to Collaborate	Approval Workflow	Versions	Handles many file types?	Organize/Archive Feedback	Intergrates with other tools	Cost
Desktop Tools									
Microsoft Word									LOW
Adobe Acrobat									MED
Cloud-based Products									
Cloud-based Online Proofing									LOW-MED
Server Based Products									
On-premise Proofing Software									HIGH

Desktop Approval Options

Desktop software is not considered a proofing tool per se, but widely-used options (like Microsoft Word, Adobe Acrobat) contain simple commenting and markup capabilities. Collaboration takes place via email. With their large, already-in-place base of users, desktop approval tools often become the “default” proofing solution because of their ready availability, and can be adequate solutions when both proof volume and number of reviewers is low.

Cloud-Based Approval Solutions

Online proofing provides the best blend of feature-rich product sets, use across a wide range of media types and the collaborative capability that only a cloud solution can provide. Online proofing software is generally affordable, easy to learn and use and will enhance existing workflows. The best tools in this category will integrate with other widely-used applications like project management, cloud storage or collaboration software.

Server-Based Approval Solutions

Server-based solutions are the most costly of all proofing options, requiring on-premise software and technical support. Feature sets can be robust, but tend to lean toward print-based and prepress industries, so they serve limited markets. There is some movement of products in this category to migrate toward a SaaS environment, but they currently remain an expensive review and approval software.





Guide to Evaluating Online Proofing Software

As you can see by now, today's online proofing software provide tools that simplify and facilitate the review and approval process.

However, determining whether a solution meets your organization's requirements can seem a daunting and time-consuming task. These nine questions highlight major issues you will want to take into consideration as you evaluate online proofing software. Addressing these issues will help you focus quickly on the capabilities you need from online proofing.

1. What is your current review and approval process?

Be sure that the solution you select will work within your existing workflow and offers flexibility to improve your workflow easily.

Talk to your stakeholders to understand the issues that your organization faces with your current process. Getting their input will help you justify the implementation of a new online review and approval software and ensure high levels of user adoption when you deploy.

Understanding whether there has been an event or change in your business that has created the impetus to implement online proofing. This will help you make the business case for your solution. Examples might be the implementation of a new regulatory structure, or a new client win.

Factors to Consider:

- Which groups, departments and individuals participate in the process?
- Are reviews sequential or parallel? If sequential, what is the order?
- How many review cycles do materials typically undergo in your current process?
- What specific problems are you experiencing in the current process?
- What is driving you to consider moving to an online review and approval software?

2. What types of content are being reviewed and approved and what are typical volumes?

Most organizations produce a variety of materials. It is important that you take into consideration the types of collateral and media you will be reviewing and ensure that your solution provides the appropriate workflow and review tools. For example, if you produce catalogs, you will probably need to be able to do page-by-page reviews instead of having to review a single, large document. Producing text-heavy material will require text markup tools more than drawing tools.

You should also consider the file types that are used to create your materials to make sure that your online proofing software works with each e.g. Adobe InDesign, Microsoft Word, SFW or web pages.

Most organizations also experience peaks in workload. You will want to check that your solution provides the flexibility you need to handle fluctuations in volumes, storage and the numbers and identities of reviewers.

Factors to Consider:

What kinds of materials are you reviewing and approving — marketing collateral, web pages, videos, podcasts, packaging, newsletters, advertising, press materials?

Which file types do you use e.g. PDF, Adobe InDesign, Microsoft Office, audiovisual, SWF?

What is your average monthly volume? How many pages are there in a typical document?

Is your workload consistent day-to-day or does it tend to vary?

3. What sharing options does your approval process require?

It is important that your online proofing software provide easy-to-use, intuitive sharing options both for internal and external users. Decide whether all of your external reviewers will need to have usernames and passwords to access proofs or whether some will be allowed access via an email invitation.

Be sure that the tools you select support your external user access requirements. Verify that the solution can be customized to comply with your company's branding guidelines.

Factors to Consider:

How many reviewers are there in a typical approval?

Who typically reviews proofs? Are proofs shared with internal team members only

or are there external team members who need to see them?

Do your external reviewers need to have logins and passwords?

Do you want your proofing tool to be branded with your logo?



4. How do you want reviewers to provide feedback?

If you are primarily reviewing design materials, you will need a solution that offers sophisticated drawing tools. If most of your materials are text, text markup features are critical. Also be aware of other review tools that you might need such as the ability to attach files to comments.

If feedback and collaboration are an important part of your review process, you will want to ensure that your solution provides robust tools that support and facilitate collaboration. You will also want to look closely at the commenting tools.

Factors to Consider:

- Do you need drawing and markup tools or do you need only text commenting tools?
- Do you want to be able to attach files to comments?
- What kind of measurement and navigations tools will you need in order to comment on the proof?
- Do you need a collaborative capability that will allow reviewers to comment on previous feedback and participate in interactive discussion threads?

5. Does your review and approval process require reviewers to make a formal decision?

Online proofing software typically provides a standard set of decision buttons. Make sure that you will be able to add decision buttons if necessary and that the tool offers sufficient flexibility to allow you to support different roles in the process such as reviewer only, reviewer and approver, primary decision maker or final decision maker.

Also establish whether you will need to add fields to collate justifications for decisions. If you are required to have confirmation of the identity of individuals submitting decisions, ensure that your solution supports electronic signature functionality.

Factors to Consider:

- Does your review and approval workflow require every reviewer or only some of the reviewers to make a decision? Is there a final or primary decision maker?
- Will you need to customize decisions for your organization?
- Does your process require decision reasons to be specified?
- Do you need to comply with standards that require you to confirm the identity of the person submitting the decision?
- Does your compliance process require you to have electronic signatures?



6. What systems and security capabilities will you need and what does the solution provide?

It is important to confirm that your online proofing software can support your organization's technical security requirements. Be sure to evaluate the tool's security strengths and weaknesses and determine if the level of security it offers is acceptable to your organization. Ask your solution provider to provide you with details about storage hosting to be sure that your digital assets will be stored safely.

You should also determine whether a provider will be updating and developing additional capabilities to meet changing needs. Checking the frequency of new product version releases is a good way to gauge a provider's focus in this area. Verify service level statistics to evaluate the reliability of the system. If the system uses SAML 2.0 to support single sign-on, you will have full control over the authorization and authentication of your users.

Factors to Consider:

- What are your organization's security requirements for creative assets?
- Does the tool you are considering require any systems or security capabilities you cannot meet?
- What kind of storage does the solution provide and who hosts storage?
- How frequently is the solution updated?
- What are the solution's current service level statistics?
- Does the solution require users to maintain multiple user names and passwords or does it support single sign-on with SAML 2.0?



7. Will you need to integrate the solution with other systems such as project management or production tools?

If approval workflow is part of the larger production or project management process, you may want to add proofing functionality to existing tools rather than implementing a separate system.

It is important to ensure that you will have the ability to integrate other applications with the proofing tools both immediately and as your requirements change. At a minimum, the solution provider should offer you guidelines for API integration.

If your project management, digital asset management or production system is widely used, it is possible that the online proofing software will already be integrated with it. Look for applications already on the market that will meet your requirements and that can integrate easily or that are already integrated with the solution to reduce time and expense to implement. Be sure to calculate the cost of integration with existing systems.

Factors to Consider:

- Are there any existing systems or processes that will need to integrate with your new online review and proofing tool?
- Are the systems or processes already integrated with the tool or will you need to integrate them?
- What will integration cost?



8. What tracking and reporting capabilities do you need?

Think about the reports and metrics you need and confirm that you will be able to access and extract that information easily from your online proofing software. You may need a combination of dashboard and email notifications to track projects. Ensure that your project managers and reviewers can adjust notification settings to suit their personal preferences. It is always good to have options for adding customized fields and collecting additional data for more detailed and personalized reporting.

Factors to Consider:

- Will you use a dashboard or do you prefer email notifications?
- Will the proof owner want to receive updates throughout the process or only when the review is complete?
- What reports will marketing operations need to provide to management, the review team or to maintain an audit trail? Does your system have any unique reporting requirements?
- Do you need any custom fields?
- Do you want to be able to export the reports to a spreadsheet?

9. Are there any audit and compliance regulations you need to follow?

Ensure that your online proofing software meets all of your audit and compliance requirements. The solution needs to be capable of recording all steps in the review process and should include a time-stamping capability. It should also let you archive and store digital assets in such a way that they will be accessible at any time should the need arise.

Factors to Consider:

- Is your approval process subject to regulatory or brand compliance?
- What specific regulatory requirements do you need to meet?
- Will auditors ask you to provide detailed records of the entire review and approval workflow, including such information as when the proof was created, comments and who made them, changes and decisions?
- Will you need to be able to review historical approvals?



Case Study: Guitar Center

A real-life example is the best way to provide clarity on the benefits of online proofing. Here's the story of ProofHQ customer Guitar Center.



Guitar Center is the world's largest retailer of musical instruments with 230 brick-and-mortar stores across the U.S. To fulfill new product releases and promotions across these stores, Guitar Center must deliver a multitude of marketing materials; everything from print ads to postcards, in-store signage, radio and TV commercials, web graphics, and more.

The Problem: Hard-copy proofing is extremely manual

Core production is comprised of buyer's guides and monthly catalogs, with page counts varying anywhere from 16 to 200+. The number of reviewers varies as well, from 4-5 people reviewing

a small proof, to more than 120 reviewing a proof for a buyer's guide.

Guitar Center typically goes through 2-to-4 proofing rounds for each proof; each round is comprised of three stages, with larger publications requiring four proofing rounds. They previously relied heavily on traditional hard copies for proofing, requiring multiple copies of each proof to be printed and "walked" to each reviewer for every round of commenting. As the company expanded, so did the volume of marketing material that needed approval. Hard copy proofing in this environment was a very difficult process — manual, clunky and burdensome to manage.

A good example was Guitar Center's Buyer's Guide, where 50+ copies of a proof would need to be generated and distributed. Some copies would simply land on a desk as an "FYI", while others were marked-up with handwritten notes and returned to the creative department. The creative team would then scan each copy of the returned proofs to determine which comments to act upon or not, and which were just duplicates.

This was a really inefficient process, with huge amounts of time spent just managing the proofs, walking them around, following up and summarizing all the feedback. There were also large amounts of ink and paper being used. Hardcopy proofing made accountability difficult and all those copies needed to be archived. Trying to locate the source of an error meant digging back into stacks of hundreds of proofs.

As Guitar Center grew, their need for marketing content did too. Their current way of operating simply was not scalable.

The Solution: Online Proofing

Director of Merchandise Operations James Smith says the simplicity of online proofing and the personal attention, of ProofHQ in particular, caught their interest.

The first phase of ProofHQ implementation was only supposed to be for large projects. But the Guitar Center team found the solution so simple to use, they decided to upload all projects to it. After the first few weeks, system acceptance was so complete, that all proofs were done via ProofHQ.

A key item for Guitar Center was their insistence on keeping approval process and policy unchanged, and implementing online proofing allowed these workflows to remain the same. Beyond the introduction of the tool, the only change ended up being vastly increased levels of productivity.

As Smith describes it, "The difference in our approval process was night-and-day. We're now much faster and efficient getting projects out the door. Since there's no printing involved, the time we spend managing proofs — distributing and collecting them; figuring out who wrote what; and what comments to enact — has been reduced by over 90%!"

”

***What once took hours and hours
now takes less than 15 minutes.***

”

"Now we just upload and it's done. Comments and decisions are made within the comment thread, so now the creative team starts enacting changes before the proof has even come back.

And because of the simple interface, adoption was easy. In fact, many of our reviewers did not need the training. They just picked it up and ran with it."

The ROI Potential of Online Proofing is Huge

The costs and inefficiencies of the review and approval process can be hard to isolate. When looked at on an individual level, the inefficiencies can seem localized, almost insignificant. But when the time and effort is aggregated, we can see the magnitude of the problem.

All of the tasks traditionally used for reviewing and approving creative assets — using email to collaborate, printing copies, physical meetings to resolve disputes, collating feedback, and the repeated organization required to keep versions straight — represent real time, real productivity drain and real expense to an organization.

When the sum total of these activities are rolled up, examined and clearly labeled for what they are, it's astonishing to see exactly how much time and effort is really spent on the review and approval process.

Hopefully *The Definitive Guide to Online Proofing* has shown that any corporation, brand marketing team or digital marketing agency, regardless of industry or size, can benefit from optimizing the review and approval process through online proofing.

At the end of the day, we all want to complete our projects quickly and efficiently. The last thing we need is a roadblock from a botched review and approval process that effectively derails the whole project.

Perhaps it's time you remove those roadblocks and give online proofing software a try.



More productive. More creative.

ProofHQ is the global leader in online proofing used by over 2,400 of the top brands and agencies worldwide.

ProofHQ streamlines the review and approval of content and creative assets so that marketing projects are completed faster and with less effort. It replaces email and hard copy processes, giving review teams tools to collaboratively review creative content, and marketing project managers tools to track reviews in progress. ProofHQ can be used across all media including print, digital and audio/visual.

For more information and to take a free trial, please visit www.proofhq.com.



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