

The \$30 Million Problem

What Retail's C-Suite Leaders Are Losing to In-Store Marketing Chaos—and What the Best Operators Are Doing About It

31,000+

Store locations running on Crosscap

5 of 20

Largest North American retailers

\$30M

Saved by a single retailer in 6 years

01 — EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Problem Nobody Wants to Own

In-store marketing is one of retail's largest and least-governed cost centers. For a retailer managing several hundred to thousands to tens of thousands of locations, the annual spend on signage, printed materials, kitting, and distribution can easily reach seven to nine figures. Yet most organizations still run these programs on a foundation of spreadsheets, email threads, and assumptions.

The results are predictable: overprinted materials, wrong kits shipped to wrong stores, expedited freight charges to fix mistakes, and finance teams who can't explain where the budget went. The people running these programs are talented and work hard. The problem is structural - the systems they have were not built for what they are being asked to do.

This whitepaper is for the operations, merchandising, and marketing executives attending the who are responsible for in-store execution at scale. It examines the measurable cost of operating without integrated execution infrastructure, describes what leading retailers have done to close the gap, and outlines what a modern approach looks like in practice.

“Once we got people out of spreadsheets, they finally had time to think.”

— Marketing Operations Executive, Top U.S. Grocery Retailer

Where the Money Is Going

Industry data drawn from engagements with retailers and their print partners across grocery, apparel, department, pharmacy, beauty, and specialty retail identifies six categories of preventable loss that occur when in-store marketing programs run without integrated execution infrastructure.

<p>5%</p> <p>Ink & Substrate Overspend</p> <p>Lost to overprinting caused by inaccurate store counts and flawed versioning decisions</p>	<p>10%</p> <p>Expedited Freight Overspend</p> <p>Charged when print workflows fall behind schedule and require air or priority shipping</p>	<p>3–6%</p> <p>Replenishment Shipping Waste</p> <p>Added cost to correct incomplete or inaccurate kits after initial distribution</p>
<p>33–50%</p> <p>Labor Reduction Possible</p> <p>Headcount reduction achieved in store-opening planning and project management</p>	<p>40%</p> <p>Budget Cut in 6 Years</p> <p>One leading U.S. retailer reduced in-store marketing spend from \$80M to \$50M using integrated execution software</p>	<p>50%+</p> <p>Signage Waste Eliminated</p> <p>Through intelligent kit allocation and store-level metadata embedded in every distribution decision</p>

These are not theoretical losses. They are drawn from documented retailer and print partner engagements across multiple verticals and validated against benchmark data from specialized commercial printers who manage large-format and in-store print programs for major brands.

The cumulative impact is substantial. A retailer operating 2,000 stores with \$40 million in annual in-store marketing spend might be absorbing \$2 million in unnecessary ink and substrate overspend, \$1.5 million in avoidable expedited freight, and hundreds of thousands more in replenishment corrections—before counting the labor cost of managing these failures manually. At scale, the structural cost of the status quo becomes one of the largest controllable line items in the operations budget.

The Root Causes Are Structural

When organizations diagnose their in-store marketing execution problems, they almost always identify symptoms: kits arrived late, the wrong sizes were shipped, stores received materials for fixtures they don't have, finance can't reconcile the spend. The instinct is to add headcount, add process, or add more email checkpoints.

The root causes, however, are structural. They arise from three specific system failures that compound as the store network grows:

1. Fragmented Store Data

No two stores are alike. Fixture configurations, square footage, regional language requirements, promotional eligibility, and seasonal assortments vary by location. When this data lives in disconnected spreadsheets or in people's heads, every campaign requires manual reconciliation before production can begin. Stores receive kits based on assumptions rather than facts. The kits are wrong. The corrections cost money.

Retailers who have centralized store-level attributes into a governed metadata layer report a fundamental shift in how campaigns execute: "If it's in the kit, it's because the data says it should be." That level of confidence does not exist in a spreadsheet-based operation.

2. Manual Approval and Version Control

In-store marketing programs cycle faster than most organizations' approval systems were designed to handle. Seasonal launches, promotional updates, and regional variations create a continuous stream of artwork revisions. When approvals and version control happen via email, the result is predictable: wrong versions get produced, last-minute changes trigger reprints, and expedited freight absorbs the cost of the delay.

Industry data shows that the percentage of print providers using workflow automation doubled from 19% to 44% over a recent five-year period—but automation of production steps does not solve the upstream problem of version control and approval governance. Production can only execute correctly if the inputs are correct.

3. No Single Source of Truth for Budget and Execution

Finance teams at most retailers have limited real-time visibility into in-store marketing spend. Budgets are reactive rather than strategic. Purchase orders are reconciled after the fact. When a \$33 million annual shipping budget has a 25% controllable component that no one has visibility into, that represents \$8 million in preventable spend that simply goes unmanaged.

The organizations that have closed this gap share a common characteristic: they replaced disconnected systems with a single execution platform that integrates store-level data,

campaign planning, vendor quotes, approvals, kitting, freight, and financial reporting into one governed workflow.

0 4 — H O W L E A D I N G R E T A I L E R S C L O S E T H E G A P

A Transformation—and What It Took

The most documented example of this transformation in North American retail is a leading U.S. grocery retailer that cut \$30 million of overspend - 40% of its total in-store marketing budget (\$5 million per year over six years) by overhauling how execution decisions get made.

The situation before the transformation was familiar to anyone who has managed a large store network. Independent divisions ran separate signage programs with their own rules and timelines. Stores received kits based on gut feel. Finance had no real-time visibility into spend. A team of three finance FTEs spent most of their time reconciling spreadsheets.

“What began as a fragmented, spreadsheet-bound signage process is now a centralized, intelligent, and responsive operation.”

— DistroPRO Case Study, Leading U.S. Retailer

The transformation was not a technology implementation. It was a fundamental rethink of who makes in-store marketing decisions, and on what basis. The key shifts:

- Store-level metadata replaced assumption-based kitting. The retailer centralized over 400 store attributes - fixture configurations, entry points, ceiling heights, regional requirements - and embedded them directly into every distribution decision.
- Finance staffing dropped from 3 FTEs to 1 hybrid traffic/finance lead, enabled by automated purchase orders and real-time reporting through integrated system workflows.
- Production costs shifted from local print shops at \$15 per unit to consolidated enterprise printers at \$2 per unit, enabled by transparent automated vendor quote systems.
- Store managers gained direct reorder access, enabling overnight shipments to resolve compliance issues without layered approval chains.
- 20 divisional inventories were unified, eliminating costly local storage and the redundancy of maintaining separate stock across business units.

The results compounded over six years: \$30 million in total savings, positive ROI within 12 months, 50%+ reduction in signage waste, and five full-time roles repurposed to higher-value work.

The pattern has been replicated across verticals. Apparel retailers operating multiple banners with different seasonal cycles, store formats, and regional requirements have reduced launch coordination time by 40-60% and print and ship spend by 25-40%. Kit accuracy at print partners has reached approximately 99% accuracy through barcode and AI camera verification.

0 5 — W H A T T H E O P E R A T I N G S Y S T E M L O O K S L I K E

Five Capabilities That Define Modern Execution Infrastructure

Retailers who have closed the execution gap share a common infrastructure. The specific technology varies, but the capabilities that matter are consistent. Any platform claiming to solve this problem should demonstrate all five:

CAPABILITY	WHAT IT DELIVERS
Centralized Store Metadata	A governed, continuously updated repository of store-level attributes— fixture configurations, square footage, language requirements, promotional eligibility, assortment variations. This is the foundation of accurate kit production. Without it, every campaign begins with guesswork.
Rules-Based Allocation & Kitting	Automated logic that determines what each location receives, in what quantities, based on its specific profile. Eliminates the manual planning steps that introduce versioning errors, overprinting, and mis-shipments.
Integrated Approvals & Version Control	A governed workflow for artwork review and approval that is directly connected to production. When a version changes, the system knows— and every downstream step reflects the change automatically.
Real-Time Budget Visibility	Finance teams and operations leaders see spend as it happens, not after the fact. Vendor quotes are automated and comparable. Purchase orders generate without manual entry. Forecasts are trustworthy enough to plan against.
End-to-End Execution Audit	From campaign approval to kit on shelf, every step is documented and verifiable. Retailers can prove execution compliance. Printers can demonstrate service performance. Exceptions are managed within the system rather than through ad-hoc correction.

The platforms that have emerged to claim this space vary significantly in what they actually provide. Some are catalog-based ordering tools or store profiling systems where allocation

logic, location data, and production planning remain in separate systems or spreadsheets—leaving retailers and their print partners to manually reconcile the gap between client intent and shop-floor execution. A platform that covers store visibility but leaves kitting and freight outside its workflow has not solved the problem, *it has moved it downstream*.

The most complete approaches on the market today cover the full campaign-to-shelf lifecycle: from the moment a campaign is planned through artwork approval, production, kitting, warehouse pick-and-pack, freight, and physical verification that the right materials reached the right store. Systems that stop at production planning or stop at store portal visibility leave the most consequential failure modes, kit accuracy and freight compliance, unaddressed.

0 6 — T H E C O M P E T I T I V E S T A K E S

In-Store Execution as a Strategic Differentiator

For the marketing executives, in-store execution is not a back-office problem. It is a competitive one.

From a strategic dimension in-store marketing execution determines whether seasonal launches hit stores on time, whether promotions run as planned, whether store managers have the materials they need to execute visual merchandising standards. In apparel, where seasonal launches happen six times a year and the competitive response window is measured in days, losing three days between campaign approval and store execution can mean losing a material percentage of a season’s revenue.

Beyond strategic advantage, retailers who operate with fragmented execution infrastructure are absorbing costs that competitors with integrated systems are not. The 5% overspend on ink and substrate, the 10% on expedited freight, the labor cost of manual reconciliation—these are advantages surrendered to competitors who have structured their operations more efficiently.

The retailers who have built modern execution infrastructure consistently report three categories of competitive benefit:

Speed to Market 3-5 day reduction in time from campaign approval to materials in-store. Top-quartile	Capital Efficiency 25-40% reduction in print and ship spend through precise kit allocation. In documented	Execution Certainty ~99% kit accuracy at the print partner, verified at the assembly line. The wrong-kit-
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apparel retailers achieve 5+ day reductions on seasonal launches.

cases, \$8M in shipping costs recovered on a \$33M annual base.

to-wrong-store failure mode becomes a solved problem rather than a chronic risk.

There is also a sustainability dimension that is increasingly non-negotiable for enterprise retailers. Unnecessary print production, oversized kits, and avoidable freight movements conflict directly with the ESG commitments embedded in vendor scorecards and investor reporting. Retailers cannot meet sustainability targets while running execution programs that structurally overproduce and overdeliver.

0 7 — A B O U T C R O S S C A P

The Operating System for Retail Marketing Execution

Crosscap is the platform that enterprise retailers and their commercial print partners use to run in-store marketing programs at scale. Trusted by some of the largest retailers in North America, including category-leading names in grocery, pharmacy, beauty, apparel, and department store – Crosscap’s software manages more than 31,000 store locations across seven retail verticals.

The Crosscap platform covers the full campaign-to-shelf lifecycle through three interconnected products:

- The workflow platform that manages multi-location print program execution. Store-level metadata, rules-based allocation, version control, kitting logic, and distribution orchestration in a single governed system. DistroPRO is the platform that replaced the spreadsheets at the \$30M grocery retailer case. It is used by printers and retailers alike. DistroPRO
- The campaign planning and budget management layer. Connects upstream campaign intent to downstream execution, giving marketing operations and finance teams a single source of truth for spend tracking, vendor quote management, and budget governance. MarketerPRO
- AI-powered physical verification at the assembly line. Barcode scan confirmation, AI camera validation, and an immutable audit trail that closes the loop between what DistroPRO calculates should be in a kit and what actually gets packed. The wrong-kit-to-wrong-store failure mode, closed. PickITPRO (and KitPRO launching in Q3 2026)

Crosscap operates with an unusual commercial model. Before asking for a commitment, the team runs a workflow audit with the operations teams that actually do the work—intake, kitting, freight, field support—and builds a quantified business case in the retailers’ or printers’ own numbers. Most engagements produce a defensible net annual savings figure between \$25,000 and \$100,000 on a single banner or client, net of software costs. Multi-banner retail enterprise deployments compound the same math across the full store network.

The first deployment phase lands in four to six weeks and produces measurable savings within the first quarter.

“Crosscap’s DistroPRO allows us to react to the competitive promotional landscape that ultimately improves our store traffic.”

— Greg N., Former Marketing Operations & Supply Chain Executive, The Children’s Place

0 8 — T H E C O N V E R S A T I O N

What Crosscap Would Like to Explore With You

If your organization manages in-store marketing programs across 100 or more locations, the structural costs described in this whitepaper are almost certainly present in your operation, even if they have not been quantified.

Crosscap is ready to have that conversation. Not to demo software, but to run the math with the executives who are accountable for what happens between campaign approval and what actually appears in the store.

Crosscap is part of the Volaris Group, an operating group of Constellation Software Inc. (TSX: CSU), one of North America’s largest software companies.