

Guitar Center Case Study



How Guitar Center cut proof management time by over 90% with ProofHQ



Guitar Center is the world's largest retailer of musical instruments with 230 brick-and-mortar stores across the U.S. along with multiple online storefronts. 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.

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.

Director of Merchandise Operations James Smith talks about his experience with proofing and working with ProofHQ...

We typically go through 2-to-4 proofing rounds for each proof, with each round comprised of three stages. Everyone involved in commenting and approval receives the initial proof. Our merchant group's comments comprise stage one. The merchant group then steps back and leaves it to the marketing managers to provide feedback (stage two). Then the proof is left to our creative personnel (stage three).

Our larger publications will have four proofing rounds – an extra round for pricing teams and then a table read, which is the last review of a proof before it is sent to print.



The Problem

“Hard copy proofing is extremely manual.”

Previously, we relied heavily on traditional hard copies for proofing. This required printing multiple copies of each proof and “walking” them to each reviewer for each round of commenting. As the company expanded, so did the volumes of marketing material we needed to approve. We quickly realized that hard copy proofing in this environment was a very arduous process. It was extremely manual, clunky and burdensome to manage.

In the example of our Buyer’s Guides, we’d need to generate and distribute 50+ copies of a proof. Some copies would simply land on a desk as an “FYI,” while others were marked-up with hand written notes directly on them and returned to the creative department. Our creative team would then have to scan each copy of the returned proofs to determine which comments to enact, which to not, and which were just duplicate.

This was a really sluggish process, which kept us from operating efficiently. For example, a three-day window allotted to proofing was in reality, just a few hours for the individual. The rest of the time was being used to manage the proofs, walking them from one reviewer’s hands to another reviewer. We also realized we were using large amounts of paper and ink doing this.

Proofing on hard copies also made accountability difficult. Aggregating all those comments took a long time, and we would have to archive all those copies used for mark-up. If errors happened, we’d have to go back into the archives just to find that one page in a stack of hundreds. As our stores’ demand for content continued to grow, we knew we had to get out of the Stone Age...



ProofHQ Solution

“Because of the simple interface, adoption was easy.”

The simplicity of ProofHQ and their very personalized approach really drew us to the company. As well, they were really interested in what we were doing; what we wanted to do; where we were going and what it was going to take for us to adopt the tool. ProofHQ proved to be quick and nimble enough to serve our needs, yet powerful enough to handle the vast amount of activity we were throwing at the tool. That really was the tipping point for us.

Our first phase of implementation planned for ProofHQ was only supposed to be for large projects. But our team found the solution so simple to use, we quickly uploaded all projects to it. By the first few weeks,

everyone was asking “why not just put it in ProofHQ?” There was not even a question of going back to hard copy.

We also love how flexible it is. Before implementation, we made it clear that we were not going to change our policies or processes, only the tool. Our process remains the same, but it is much more efficient. 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 Results

“What once took almost four hours now takes less than 15 minutes.”

The difference in our approval process is 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.

We also get to market much quicker, particularly with smaller projects. For example, we wanted to deliver a promotional bingo card, which required three people for proofing. Two of the reviewers were in different buildings, and one was traveling. The artist uploaded the initial proof and all three reviewers were able to make comments almost immediately. The artist was then able to make revisions and have another version ready to proof in minutes.

Previously, we'd be printing and walking files around or attaching PDFs to emails that could easily get lost in the shuffle. Now, we're much more nimble and we're saving money on paper, ink and manpower in the process.

Our accountability has also greatly improved. Since everything is centralized online, visibility into each project is increased exponentially. We now have the ability to see what others are saying and can jump into the conversation when needed.

The features that ProofHQ provides has benefited us tremendously; the threaded commenting allows each of our reviewers to see all feedback provided, focusing our discussions; version compare lets our reviewers verify that all feedback has been incorporated in latest versions of drafts; the archive facility allows us to reference past proofs at any stage; and the status view gives our managers greater visibility into the status projects alert any reviewer delaying the process that a deadline is approaching.

Working with ProofHQ has been such a great experience for us. The product is top-notch and the customer service has been wonderful. Guitar Center is a company that prides itself in exceptional customer service and we think ProofHQ is in alignment with the level of service we provide to our own customers.

About ProofHQ

ProofHQ is an online proofing solution for marketing teams of any size in any industry who need to deliver marketing projects faster and more efficiently. Unlike email and hardcopy proofing, ProofHQ enables review teams to collaborate simultaneously on creative content. ProofHQ streamlines approval workflow and can be used across all media including print, digital and audiovisual. It measurably speeds up project delivery and significantly reduces management time, revisions, errors and costs.

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