



Saving Money and Building Efficiency with Managed Print Services

Getting real benefits in the real world

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Printers and copiers are an environment that is ripe for greater efficiency and cost savings. Pick any department or any business process and you can bet that printers and copiers are essential tools to get the job done. But despite their importance to company performance, printers and copiers are rarely managed as a corporate asset. Often budgeting and planning is decentralized across various departments. This inevitably results in increased operating costs and lost opportunity for process improvement.

What is Managed Print Services?

Organizations of all sizes and types are starting to realize the bottom line benefit to getting their output under control. They are doing this through Managed Print Services (MPS) - a strategy designed to analyze and manage document output devices throughout the organization and minimize the costs associated with workgroup printing and copying. The long-term results of a successful MPS strategy includes enhanced productivity, increased savings and improved environmental sustainability, to name a few.

Managed Print Services is a centralized, strategic approach; one that is based upon a well-thought assessment of the costs, volumes, support needs, and employee effort associated with the workflow. With such an assessment, companies often find that they can reduce the number of printers and copiers hanging on their network, cut support and supply costs, and optimize their equipment leases and maintenance contracts.

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The Cost of Mis-Management

The fact is that most organizations have not effectively grappled with workgroup printing and copying. As a result, there are tremendous opportunities to save money and build system efficiencies. Analysts like the Gartner Group and others calculate that that most firms can reduce expenditures by as much as 30% through balanced device deployment and lease/contract reassessment. In addition, capital expenditures can be cut, consumable costs can come down, and workflow changes can make organizations more efficient.

Beyond initial analysis and design, ongoing fleet management is essential to ensure that the environment continues to perform as it should and that the return on investments uncovered are, in fact, realized. This is a challenge for most organizations since internal resources are rarely applied to manage workgroup printers and copiers.

Moving Forward with Thoughtful Benchmarks

If you are considering Managed Print Services as a way to reduce your copier/printer costs and bolster workflow efficiencies it is essential to establish a number of metrics and standards to use in your strategy design. Here are a few important benchmarks that will help guide your success.

Usage - Device usage is a fundamental measurement needed to understand whether your machines are over or under-utilized. Many organizations struggle to understand just how many pages are printed each month and the cost of each sheet of paper that passes through their fleet. Usage data is essential in order to come to grips with your environment - telling you not only what devices you have deployed, but how often and to what degree they are utilized.

Category - What kinds of machines are deployed in your environment today? While this may seem obvious, the fact is that many organizations do not have a clear picture of the number of devices they own or lease, whether they are analog or digital, connected or unconnected, and whether they print in black and white or in color. By examining these categories and gathering this benchmark data about each machine you are in a much better position to design a system that will save you money and better meet the needs of your end users.

Service and Uptime - Once you understand exactly which machines are in use, and how much volume is being produced by each, another important benchmark to consider is service and uptime. Do you have machines that are constantly in need of service? What does that service cost you and what are the implications of the corresponding downtime? Do some machines perform solidly under pressure while others struggle to keep up with the demand? How responsive is your service provider when a service call is placed? Answering these questions provides you with important information that can lead you to valuable system improvements.

Supplies and Paper - While device usage is an important benchmark, it can be difficult to gather the data without an automated tool or dedicated and independent analysis. Supplies and paper, however, can often be more easily tracked through the purchasing process and by examining the habits of end user departments. High volume machines and peak demand periods can be uncovered by looking at paper and supplies as well, and under-utilized equipment becomes evident by examining the rated duty cycle against the actual rate of consumption.

Type of Output - Monitoring the type of output being printed is an often overlooked benchmark that can provide an important perspective that will help you optimize your fleet. Do you have color machines that print a majority of their output in black and white? Do you have additional features like folding, stitching, etc, loaded on to a machine that rarely produces output needing these binding options? Could feature-rich machines be moved or swapped with another device more appropriate to the application? Understanding the type of output being created, and why, can point you to adjustments that can save you money and improve the experience of end users.

Peak Demand - One factor that cannot be uncovered by looking at benchmarks like monthly volumes or paper usage is peak demand. Business units often have slow periods mixed with times of high demand. End-of-month, quarterly close or special projects can drive up demand and skew the overall numbers in ways that can be misleading. Does a machine sit idle for weeks only to be challenged to keep up during peak demand? Would volume requirements during this time be better served by redirecting the output a centralized reprographics department - saving you money and more adequately meeting turnaround requirements? Are high volume machines placed in what would be regarded as low volume environments without these peak periods? This type of thoughtful benchmarking is a must-have in order to make meaningful decisions and beneficial system design.

Voice of the Customer - Statistics are essential, but valuable perspective and information can be gained by listening to end users. What is their experience using your printer / copier fleet? Are they comfortable using all the features, or would additional training be a benefit? Do things like machine warm up time, work-a-rounds or troublesome service issues hinder their efficiency? Listening to your “customer” is essential to make meaningful adjustments and improvements.

Managed Print Services follows this famous adage: *Good data equals good decisions*. By thoughtfully examining these benchmarks - measurements that you observe purposefully - you will gain a better understanding and be in better position to optimize your environment.

Adjust to Fit Changing Needs

One Managed Print Services success factor is the willingness and ability to adjust your environment to compensate for inefficiencies in the system and to fit the changing needs of end users. Too often, once a machine is placed on the floor, organizations leave it to live a life of its own; rarely considering the ongoing performance until it is time to renew the lease or replace the machine.

By contrast, Managed Print Services purposefully monitors and examines the environment with an eye to constantly adjust machines, features and placements as needed to ensure optimal performance and cost-effectiveness. It is important, therefore, to have the proper reporting structure in place that identifies gaps in system performance. From there, you can create a “hit list” of machines to adjust or redeploy to better meet the needs of your organization.

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Things to Look For in an MPS Consultant

Adopting a Managed Print Services approach requires a fairly high degree of dedication and expertise and may require a change in the habitual “this is the way we’ve always done it” mindset. As a result, organizations often benefit from an independent and non-bias analysis.

What are the qualities and attributes you must look for in selecting a consultant to build a meaningful MPS program? There are a variety of MPS consultants available, including those from your current vendor, but many tend to focus on cost reduction alone. Look for a resource that can also improve workflow, bolster efficiency and help with the adoption of new technology. An independent consultant with experience with RFPs, who understands printer and copier technology, and has proven ability to negotiate a deal on your behalf can be a valuable asset. Finally, getting value out of MPS requires a great deal of attention to detail and the ability to construct a practical strategy. Be sure to select a consultant with the proven ability to collect, analyze and gain “knowledge” from the various benchmark data and metrics, and then design systems and strategies to take full advantage of a Managed Print Services approach.

About the Author



Kevin Craine is the author of the book “Designing a Document Strategy” and the host of the Document Strategy Podcast. He is widely respected as an expert in document strategy design and business process improvement.

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