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If Only For the Local Printers ...

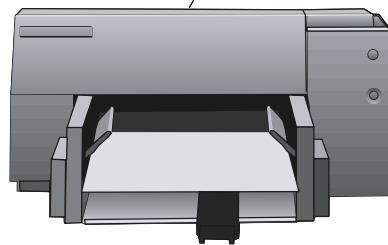
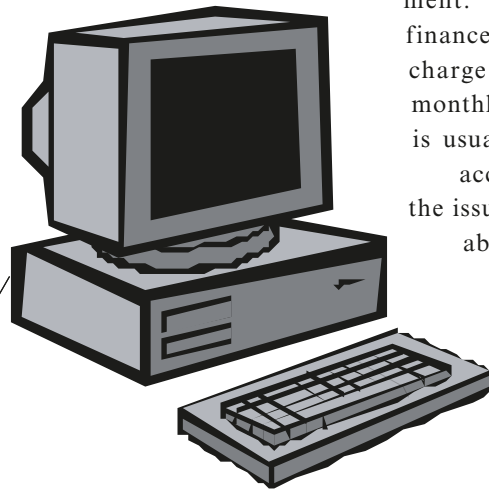
The biggest obstacle in the way of widespread adoption of remote monitoring technology is the number of locally connected/non-networked printers at a customer site. If every device were networked, life for the supplier and IT staff would be much easier. There are a few workarounds and solutions, but the issue will likely need to work its way out of the system as older printers and copiers are replaced with newer and more robust devices. Here are a few suggestions on how to help customers who find themselves in this position.

User-Based Systems

When a supplier and customer sit down to find a solution to spiraling printing costs, they have two basic options: solve the problem by changing user behavior, or try to reduce the costs of supplies, maintenance and management of devices.

The option of changing user behavior is one loosely based on the idea that customers should think before they print. The classic story for this approach is a customer printing out 100-page documents on inkjet printers instead of sending the job to a more economical network copier or laser printer. The solution to this is usually a software program that forces customers to decide where a job should go based on its size. Programs that can do this usually also track printing costs down to a user or department.

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In many cases the finance department will then charge back users on a monthly basis. This system is usually useful to legal or accounting firms, where the issue really isn't so much about cost as it is cost assignment. Some leading software vendors in this approach are Print Audit and Software Shelf.

In certain cases, this type of approach will require some software installation on the computers where the printers are attached. Normally, IT managers avoid local software installations like the plague. That they even consider it is a testament to how big a problem overspending on printing has become. What these programs are monitoring are the users. Overprinting on an expensive device is an issue. It is also important for customers to understand just where (and who) their costs are coming from. This approach may not, however, lower costs. In other words, you can use these programs, but not necessarily see any reduction in your printing-related expenditures.

Network Monitoring Solutions

Other solutions concentrate on getting information from machines instead of users. PrintFleet, Miracom and Wilder Technologies are examples of software vendors. Supplies (toner cartridges) are the No. 1 expense when it comes to laser-based devices. Add maintenance and developer kits to this category for color printers. Hardware is also expensive. Servicing of machines when they break down is an additional expensive element.

A recent test from a vendor that was running a cost-per-copy program found that "empty" cartridges were

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being returned with anywhere from 20 to 60 percent unused toner. Another dealer identified more than 50 percent of his service calls as being preventable. In this case emergency repair calls were predictable based on the age of the device. Think of it this way – should a need to replace a maintenance kit on a color LaserJet be considered an emergency? In addition, the fewer the pages you get from a machine, the higher its print costs over its life. If neglect leads to devices requiring 20 percent higher service or replacement costs, then you need to spend 20 percent more on printers than a customer who is maintaining his assets better. Do you ever notice that the guy out on his driveway on Saturday afternoon washing his car and changing his oil tends to have more cool toys than you? I bet he maintains his copiers and printers at work, too!

Solving some of the above-mentioned cost drivers requires directly interfacing with a printer. This can be done two ways: the sneaker method, or through the network the device is housed on. Technicians using the

sneaker method are typically quite athletic, as their day involves running through a building to check on each “known” device. It takes time for both the technician and the customer. In many cases the customer does not permit a technician to roam freely on site.

Monitoring network printing devices is fast, easy and reliable. A software solution can gather information on hundreds of devices in minutes. Store it in a database and send alerts if action is required. One issue does exist however: *Many devices are not on the network.* They are peripheral devices attached to a user’s computer. Unless the monitoring solution is able to access the data such as life page counts, serial numbers, toner levels and alerts through the computer hosting it, then the benefit of these network monitoring solutions is lost.

So, there we are. User-based systems offer 100 percent coverage, but limited information to lower-cost drivers such as supplies, hardware and maintenance. Network monitoring systems provide critical machine data, but are only useful for machines actually on the network. The sneaker method offers complete data, but can take too long to be practical. What are your options?

There are a few technological solutions on the horizon. Software that can be installed on a computer hosting a printer can give some basic machine data for network monitoring systems. It can never replace the value of a directly connected network printing device, but it can provide such important information as page counts, device model ID, serial number and location.

I caution end users faced with this dilemma to consider that the problem of rising expenditures from internal printing has not happened overnight. They have spent their way into the problem, and there is no magic wand approach that will get them out of it. What does their current environment look like? Although it varies greatly, we are finding from 50 to 75 percent of printing devices are networked – and that number is increasing every day.

Remember, a non-networked printer not only poses problems for network monitoring software, it also causes issues for the IT manager as well. Troubleshooting a customer issue on a network device requires quickly typing in an IP address to view the device’s Web server. Issues are going to show up there. See Figure 1. This option is

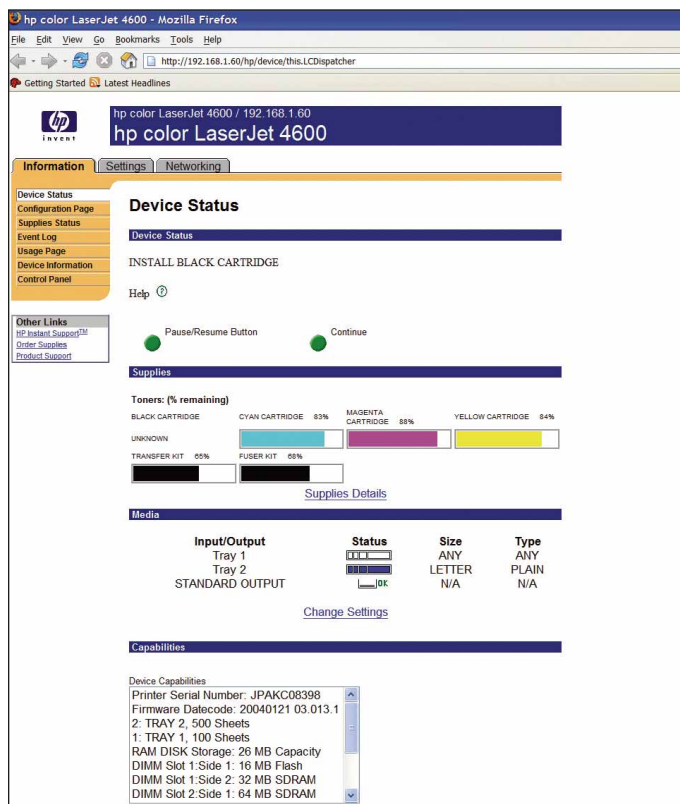
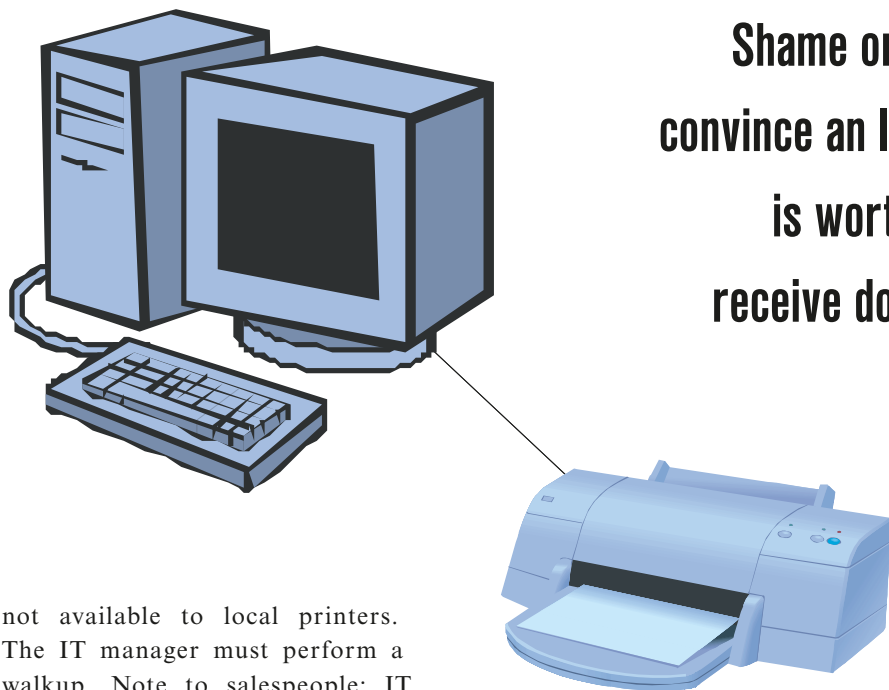


Figure 1.



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not available to local printers. The IT manager must perform a walkup. Note to salespeople: IT people hate walkups.

A starting point is to review the customer's planned expenditures over the next year. In addition, look at the information available on the network fleet today. It may be that much of the volume is already going to network devices. This makes sense, as local printers are usually used by one person, and actual volume is low. Low volume usually translates into few problems.


You may be able to propose that by retiring a few older local/shared devices that capture some print volume with new networked devices, you can ensure that 90 to 95 percent of the page volume is on the network. I guarantee one thing: You will not need to sell the IT manager on the benefits of going network. They know it. Their whole mission in life is to be networked. They make purchasing decisions on printers. Until the last 18 to 24 months, there was no tangible benefit to having printers networked; there was only an additional cost. Today, the various solutions on the market prove the benefits.

That price difference between networked and non-networked printers has gotten smaller. At www.insight.com, an HP 1320 printer was recently selling for \$399 plus shipping. The networked version, the HP 1320N, costs only \$449, a difference of only \$50. Staples sells an HP 2430 printer "network ready" for \$899. The 2430 lists a duty cycle of 100,000 pages a month and 35 pages per minute. What more do you need? Shame on any dealer who is unable to convince an IT manager that the \$50 cost is worth all of the benefits they will receive downstream from the ability to monitor the device. Even if the

HP 1320N was being used as a personal printer, on the desk of the CFO or the human resources manager, it would still make sense to have

it networked so it could be managed better.

Managing a customer's printing fleet has many long-range benefits. Once you partner with a customer to work on a solution for lowering printer costs, you will be in a great position to secure their business for the long term. You have options, but nothing is magic. You may even find yourself deploying different solutions (user-based versus network-based) depending on client needs. In working on a strategy it is important to focus on where the customer is, and where they want to be. My vote is to migrate your clients to a network-based printing environment. It is the best way to gain visibility and control over the key drivers of printing costs. This model will then give you pricing options not open to you right now. Cost per copy is by and large unmanageable without a network printing model.

As my dad is fond of saying, the journey of a thousand miles begins with one step. Baseball great Yogi Berra was more succinct: When you get to the fork in the road, take it. 

Contact Norman McConkey at (866) 382-8320 or visit www.printfleet.com.

For more information on some of the products mentioned in this article, visit the following Web sites:

Print Audit: www.printaudit.com, Software Shelf: www.softwareshelf.com, PrintFleet: www.printfleet.com, Miracom: www.miracomnetworks.com and Wilder Technologies: www.wildertechnologies.com.