Stop thinking. Start doing.

How to control your printing to save paper, your budget and more

INTERVIEWED BY JAYNE GEST

A shift has started with managing print. Organizations, no matter the industry — legal, education, manufacturing or business services — may wonder if their printing costs are excessive. While they've talked about taking control to manage their print better to reduce waste, impact the environment, cut costs and make the workplace more productive, many of these organizations are only now beginning to take action, says Curtis Verhoff, advanced solutions manager at Blue Technologies Inc.

"Print has been one of the last things organizations take a look at because their employees were comfortable with paper," he says. "But now, we're seeing a pattern in small and midsize businesses where people are taking a serious interest."

Print management solutions can help companies move from thinking about managing print to doing it because managed print provides data, which can be used to make smarter decisions and help change behaviors.

Smart Business spoke with Verhoff about print management and cost recovery strategies.

Does management typically know how much they're spending on printing or if the organization is wasteful?

Many people have a good handle on large items like a lease on their multifunction printers (MFPs), but when it goes beyond that to local or network printers and supplies, they don't have a clear picture of the related spend or what people are doing. They have a list of questions about the environment.

They don't realize too many color pages are printed, when black and white would have been sufficient. They may arbitrarily see unclaimed print jobs sitting around or a considerable amount of paper in the recycling bin by the printer, but they don't know if it's enough to be considered wasteful. They haven't taken an inventory to see if they're paying for supplies and equipment they don't need. They don't know whether people are printing documents that would be just as effective if they were shared electronically.

How do organizations start to change this?

It begins with the ability to gather additional information to make better decisions through silent monitoring. The company needs to know its culture and end-user tendencies before it can make changes to who, what, why and where. Print management solutions and an assessment from an office technology provider can help give organizations a place to start. After some tracking, they'll see habits that can be changed to reduce costs, waste and inefficiencies.

What are some steps that can make a difference?

Companies can eliminate expensive desktop printers, which cuts the cost of maintaining those additional devices. Depending on the volumes and printing practices, the ratio is usually eight to 12 people for each print device. If the employees are concerned about the security of sensitive documents, secure print can be added to a shared device. This is where a document doesn't print out unless someone manually releases it from the machine using a PIN (personal identification number) or swiping a card.

Organizations also can create rules or defaults at whatever level they'd like — on a transaction or print job level, or by user or department. For example, all pages from a web browser might automatically print in black and white, double-sized.

They can upgrade hardware to something that's more efficient to operate. New equipment may cost more upfront, but the lower cost of operation outweighs that. (Again, these kinds of decisions cannot be made without having the right data first.)

Other tools include introducing tracking and controlling MFPs and then optimizing those with reports.

Beyond setting print policies and user quotas, education is critical. The bigger the organization is, the harder it is to keep everyone on the same page, and different organizations have different drivers. Employees may not get excited about cutting costs, but they can get behind a definitive environmental impact or the idea that savings will be used for something that directly benefits them. Your technology provider can help you craft a strategy that is more apt to create buy-in. ●

CURTIS VERHOFF
Advanced Solutions Manager
Blue Technologies Inc.

(216) 271-4800, ext. 2251
cverhoff@btohio.com

FOLLOW UP: For help creating a print strategy to save paper, your budget, and to create buy-in across departments, contact Blue Technologies.

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