

Teaming up

How to marry hardware and software for smoother day-to-day operations

INTERVIEWED BY JAYNE GEST

Office hardware, such as multifunction printers or MFPs, has its particular strengths, and so do software solutions. But when companies combine the two, they can create a powerful overall solution to help manage pain points for smooth day-to-day operations.

“The market for technology has changed, but employers don’t see hardware and software coming together. They are still having a little difficulty seeing them as one total solution,” says Curtis Verhoff, Systems Integrations and Applications manager at Blue Technologies.

Software solutions can be embedded in your MFP to allow it be more efficient — beyond just being able to scan, copy, print or fax — and in turn make your office more productive. It allows you to take better advantage of the technology that your staff already uses and is comfortable with.

Smart Business spoke with Verhoff about how to pair software solutions with your hardware to boost your efficiency, cost savings, ease of use and more.

Why do companies hesitate to add software to their MFPs?

Many small and mid-sized companies think this software is too cost prohibitive, so their employees continue manually doing processes that could easily be more efficient. However, over the past several years, the price of these solutions has been reduced enough that they are much more affordable and attainable.

What are some examples of how embedded software improves workflow?

These software solutions allow

employees to tag a document, perhaps with an automatic date stamp, and file it. It can be distributed or stored immediately, which streamlines the steps and labor that normally go into dealing with documents and information.

For example, in the finance and lending industry, businesses may deal with documents with barcodes or other tagging information. You can set up the software so that when you scan it into the MFP, it not only stores the document but also breaks it up into additional pieces that get sent to different lenders or financial institutions. You can reduce the 20 minutes it took to process a packet to three or four minutes.

In education, each school may gather and produce student records, in order to send them to a central office, where the staff dedicatedly scans those documents and puts them away. Now you can decentralize that; school staff to make a few selections on a device embedded with software, as he or she scans it in, to reduce the steps to store it properly.

Small and mid-sized law firms also can use their MFP to help prepare documents for litigation with less manual labor and intervention.



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How should companies explore whether these solutions make sense for them?

You may be able to do more with your current investment, as long as your MFP is five years old or less. Or, if it's time to make a decision about updating your office equipment, whether that's buying a MFP and renewing your lease, ask about software that can be tied into your workflow. Most solutions are much more affordable than they used to be.

You'll want to talk to the people in your company who deal with documents, paperwork and information. More than likely, solutions can help minimize their pain points, which will allow your organization to be more competitive.

Four or five years ago, you may have looked at streamlining your processes and you couldn't justify the cost. With the changes in technology and how businesses operate, it's time to look again.

Your technology advisers can help you determine the ROI and how the software could integrate directly or through plug-ins with your customer relationship management and other business software.

It doesn't hurt to at least investigate this with your vendor. ●