

On-the-go

How multi-function printers can enhance your company's mobility

INTERVIEWED BY JAYNE GEST

Multi-function printers (MFPs) that incorporate printing, scanning, faxing, copying and document storage have yet another role they can take on — promoting your company's mobility. Even though these machines stay in the office, they can create a more productive, mobile environment for your employees through printing, scanning or collaboration that can be linked to popular web-based or hosted solutions, says Curtis Verhoff, advanced solutions manager at Blue Technologies.

"We talk to a lot of small and midsize organizations that have had MFPs on their premises for a long time, but they don't know these capabilities exist," Verhoff says. "With limited IT resources and staff, they often think these technologies are too expensive or they don't know where to start. But it's simple to install these solutions on an MFP and get your workforce, especially millennials, to use this technology."

Smart Business spoke with Verhoff about how the MFP can help organizations take advantage of a more mobile workspace.

How can an MFP increase productivity with a mobile workforce?

Employees often work independently in separate silos, not as a unit. But by utilizing your MFP's feature set or adding a small solution, your employees can scan a document directly to common hosted services, such as GoogleDrive, Box, Microsoft OneDrive or Dropbox for easy sharing and collaboration.

In addition, if employees work while on the road or at home, they can send their print jobs in advance. Then when they walk up to the MFP on Monday morning, it's just a matter of typing a code or tapping a security card to release those jobs. They also

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can release print jobs from their tablet or smartphone while in the office.

This is helpful to people who travel between offices, as well. They don't want to print everything and carry it with them, especially if they walk in and find out three more are coming to their meeting. If you need to share with a team, you can print it to a shared location or scan it and share that document with the group's account.

How do employers get these technologies? How much does it cost?

Depending on the manufacturer, it's often as easy as downloading an app from a marketplace of apps, which is then installed onto an MFP with little or no IT involvement. That ease of integration is enticing to small and midsize businesses that want to save IT consultants for bigger issues. Some of these capabilities are built into the MFP; some can be downloaded for free. Others with advanced feature sets cost a one-time fee, but it can be worth it if your employees use it on a daily basis.

Most people find these capabilities easy to use because they mimic the hosted solution that employees are already familiar with.

However, if you use older technology like an iPhone 4 or a Droid that's a few versions back, you'll still have the basic functionality, but you might need newer technology to take advantage of the extended features.

What problems might crop up? Is security an issue?

One complication can be if your infrastructure — internet connection — can't handle this type of traffic to send a scan or receive a print. If you're scanning a colored document, even if it's a compressed PDF, you still need the internet backbone to pass it to the hosted Microsoft solution or another third party. However, as bandwidth becomes more affordable, it's easier for companies to overcome this barrier.

As for security, employers may be concerned about pushing sensitive information, whether it's scanned or printed. But most of these mobile technologies — OneDrive, GoogleDrive, Dropbox — use an encryption method of sending data to and from your device. If it somehow fails to make it to its destination, not only is it encrypted, typically the MFP deletes it in a secure manner.

If your workforce could use these capabilities to become more productive, it's time to talk to your technology adviser. You might be surprised at how affordable it can be to go mobile — even if you're not gearing up your staff with tablets and smartphones. If you're using laptops and desktops, you can still give people the freedom to be productive and work outside of the office by integrating the features and technology that's available through your MFP. ●

