

The future of print

How to enhance your office operations for 2016

INTERVIEWED BY JAYNE GEST

Thirty years ago, Bill Nelson, vice president of Cleveland Sales for Blue Technologies, was selling typewriters and copiers door to door. People kept telling him that print was dead and everything would be paperless. Fast-forward to today, and print hasn't gone anywhere.

"People are always going to need to print," Nelson says. "It's not that they necessarily print less; it's that companies store less paper. People print the physical documents, use them and then can shred as necessary. They don't need rooms or warehouses anymore to be able to store documents."

Smart Business spoke with Nelson about how he's seeing offices learning to print smarter with flexible solutions that better fit their ever-changing needs.

How have business print needs changed?

Companies require flexibility first and foremost, because their business needs change faster than ever today. As you scale operations up and down, your organization and its print solutions have to adjust.

Organizations still need high-speed color and black and white devices to print on demand. But where before they might have printed 10,000 documents and put them on a shelf, now they print them only as needed.

More areas of a company's workflow can be optimized with a paperless solution. This is key because mobility is also a growing trend, with so many people working remotely. Employees need to be able to retrieve and archive documents electronically on the go, as well as connect to office printers with their portable devices.

What are the latest technologies employers can use to optimize their operations?

Office hardware has become more centralized. Nearly all machines have the

BILL NELSON
Vice president, Cleveland Sales
Blue Technologies

(216) 271-4800, ext. 2242
bnelson@btohio.com

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ability to print, scan and copy, which means companies have more flexibility with their documents. And these advanced machines work more closely with software for added functionality. For example, technology solutions allow employees to walk up to any machine and print from a tablet or phone.

Multifunction devices can easily choose what venue to push documents out to. They integrate with document management software that allows companies to store, index and retrieve documents quickly and transparently in a central database. For example, law firms still print a lot because they need physical paperwork, but they use a comprehensive document management solution to scan the document in, index it for easy retrieval within their system, distribute it, mark it up and collaborate on it electronically. Also, you can set up automated workflows within the system.

Another technology solution to use with print hardware is managed print services (MPS), which deploys print management software to help businesses evaluate usage and streamline their needs with maximum flexibility. It's an area that's typically not managed well or ignored all together in most businesses.

MPS providers proactively manage and service the print hardware fleet, reducing the burden on your IT staff while eliminating costly inefficiencies. Frequent reviews of

print equipment's volume, service and supply history also enable these consultants to offer suggestions for improvements and ways to meet business and printing goals.

Additionally, they can assist with applying rules-based printing across your organization to help further eliminate unnecessary print waste. For example, if someone tries to print 150 pages to his or her desktop printer, a prompt might ask him or her to print to a centrally-located machine that operates at a lower cost. Or you could limit certain job types to print only in black and white.

As organizations plan for next year, how can they improve their printing operations?

You need to assess your office infrastructure, including the print fleet and business process and goals that you want to achieve with your documents — regardless of whether they are paperless or physically printed out. What are you trying to achieve with that document? Where does it go next? Who needs to see it? Who needs to edit it?

The market's technology solutions have never been more affordable or flexible; there are different options that can be tailored to what you want to do. Your office technology partner can help you evaluate your current processes and design a solution to ensure your operations are as efficient as possible in the coming year. ●