

Liquid GOLD!

Savings from print.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that printer consumables are expensive. So, how much does it cost for ink jet liquid? Well if we measure the cost by the gallon.....

	Cost per gallon
Lead free petrol	£3.92
Bollinger Special Cuvee Champagne	£246
Giorgio Armani De Gio perfume	£1,394
Epson Colour stylus	£3,736
HP Deskjet toner	£5,528

Latest market research shows that a company could reduce document output costs on average by 10-30% by reorganising its document production equipment (desktop printers, copiers, fax machines, high speed copiers, laser printers and the print room) and introducing disciplines and software that measure, monitor and control when, where and through what device documents are printed, copied and distributed.

Out of control?

So how out of control is document production? Certainly, most users of office printers, according to Gartner in a report from 2005, are completely unaware of costs. It has been found that only just over 20% of European companies have a strategy in place to manage and control output.

There are a number of reasons this situation has arisen. First, who takes charge of document production management varies enormously from organisation to organisation. In some, printers are mainly under the remit of IT while facilities management takes care of copiers; in others, office services or marketing and communications are in charge. It's either an uncontrolled environment or there are multiple budget holders. There's generally no centralised control.

Hotchpotch of equipment

Most offices have acquired a hotchpotch of equipment that they aren't using efficiently and as Brian James, regional marketing manager at IBM Printing Systems, points out, office printing is the last uncontrolled expense and could be the one remaining area where costs can be reduced.

Second, the fall in the cost of desktop printers has enabled them to be purchased through petty cash or on expenses without anyone looking into the total cost of ownership. Most would recommend converging several desktop printers into a laser multi-function device to improve efficiency. But the situation is far more complex than this simple solution.

Balanced deployment

Many of our competitors say their customers should get rid of desktop printers. Their advice is to channel all print volumes to a smaller number of high volume machines that they will service.

Although a high volume machine, highly utilised, could reduce costs, the customer must look at the machine to user ratio. If more than seven to eight people are using a high volume machine, there will be a high impact on their productivity they will constantly be wasting time searching for their documents in the out tray, and since 70% of users only print between one and three sheets at a time, these could easily get lost.

High volume printers create a huge amount of waste when shared by lots of people, not to mention the bad feelings they stir up because of their inconvenience and effect on productivity. Do you really save money by having highly paid people walking across the office to the printer all the time?

How to conquer the mountain?

So how can the document mountain be conquered? The first step would be to carry out a full analysis of all output technology, then work out total output volumes and type of document by department and work group, and the use of consumables such as black and white and colour ink cartridges.

It is also important to look carefully at service contracts and warranties to see if there are any penalties if you do not print an agreed minimum number of copies a month. It's important to understand your document flow where, how many and what type of document and then devise a strategy around it.

Examine your workflow

Software that sees all of the print jobs on the network and knows the characteristics of each job and sends it to the most appropriate device, organising the output queue in order of urgency, possesses the ability to bring significant benefits.

Distribution costs can also be reduced through 'distribute and print', where a document is sent to a printer near the eventual recipient, instead of being printed then put in the post. These software solutions are able to track and record the output of each department or even each person to provide essential management information for a document control strategy.

Other ways to improve efficiency include installing multi-function printers with data capturing facilities that can scan in documents and store them electronically for future use.

Cutting out costs

Whatever strategy is devised, the result can only be greater efficiency, improved staff productivity and enormous cost savings, and who would complain about that?