

Many firms regularly explore ways to reduce costs and boost employee productivity. Print is sometimes overlooked as part of this smarter workplace plan, but its consideration can lead to more efficient office operations and substantial benefits.

Making the Move to a Smarter Workplace with an Efficient Print Environment

April 2022

Questions posed by: Sharp

Answers by: Keith Kmetz, Program Vice President, Imaging, Printing, and Document Solutions

Q. Why should an organization be thinking about a smarter workplace with an efficient print environment?

A. The global COVID-19 pandemic forced organizations to think about how to maintain business operations in this crisis period with employees who primarily completed their work in home or remote locations. Since then, organizations have been gradually getting back to the office, but workstyles initiated during the past two years are expected to remain largely in place.

This recent "return to the office" activity, combined with newly established remote and home locations, makes it an ideal time to act on a formalized approach to a smarter workplace. Considerations include how broad technology needs such as safety, security, collaboration, and communication will be addressed within the context of hybrid working between office and home/remote locations. Mobile and cloud-based tools will be at the center of this strategy as the conduit to access, use, and manage business content.

Print will play an important role in this shift to a smarter workplace. As a proof point for print's mission-critical function in how work is done today and will be done in the future, IDC's data shows that more than 1 trillion pages were printed in the United States during 2020 and, despite a pullback over time, over 930 billion pages will be printed in 2025. In a recent IDC survey that examined how different generations of office workers view print, 67% of all U.S. respondents thought of printed material as either important or very important to their job responsibilities.

What does all this point to? The print environment will remain a critical part of both the current workplace and the future workplace. If an organization is embarking on a journey to make a smarter work environment for the business and employees, the push to a more modern and efficient print infrastructure should be part of that transformational journey.

Q. Besides having an appropriate fleet of multifunction printers (MFPs) for employees to use, what else should an organization consider in ensuring an efficient print infrastructure?

A. Having the right set of MFPs to address document processing requirements is a good start, but having an efficient print environment goes beyond hardware. An organization must also focus on efficiency across the entire print experience to realize several cost and productivity benefits. Efficiency requires the following:

- » **Automating break/fix service delivery and supplies replenishment.** Downtime equals inefficiency. When an MFP requires service or is out of toner, the device is rendered inoperable for an often unknown period. Inefficient manual intervention is needed to get the machine running again, and employees waste time seeking alternatives to complete their important work tasks. Buyers should look for providers that have processes or technologies in place that automate service calls and supplies replenishment so that downtime can be minimized as much as possible.
- » **Appropriately managing the print fleet and how it is being used for cost efficiency.** Producing output on paper comes with a price to the organization, and this cost is probably higher than most think. Typical cost-per-page metrics (<1 cent per page in black and a few cents per page in color) may not sound like much, but when a typical single MFP produces hundreds or even thousands of pages in one month alone, the costs can add up quickly. Over an entire fleet of several devices, this usage cost could be enormous. Any wasted output (e.g., discarded, not picked up) results in unnecessary expense to the organization and should be reduced. Unnecessary toner and paper costs can be eliminated with some basic technology implementation. Further, knowing who is using the equipment and how much the copy/print fleet is being used overall helps the organization understand workflow and how resources can be best deployed for efficiency benefits.
- » **Digitizing workflows where possible.** Many organizations are working on transitioning inefficient, manual paper-based processes to automated, digital forms to help drive cost and productivity efficiency. Identifying key document processes where these benefits could be gained has almost immediate positive bottom-line impact with "anytime, anywhere" access to content, lowering errors, meeting specific industry compliance standards, and speeding up operational processes.
- » **Considering a managed print services (MPS) engagement with a provider.** Many of the actions described in this section are usually part of an MPS engagement with an outside provider. Such programs have been available from print manufacturers and channel partners for several years but continue to evolve in scope and coverage. Since their inception, MPS programs have delivered substantial cost savings and business process efficiency to organizations that decided to implement them.

Q. What are the benefits available to an organization by engaging with an MPS provider?

A. A recent IDC MPS survey identified several benefits of an MPS engagement with a print technology provider. Key findings include:

- » **Almost all respondents were pleased with their MPS results.** Among respondents, 48% said MPS at least met their expectations, while another 31% of respondents indicated that the MPS engagement exceeded their expectations.
- » **Several benefits gained drove high MPS satisfaction levels.** Delivery of promised cost savings (42%) was the highest benefit response in the survey, but numerous other responses indicate the potential for a wide range of positive influences. These other important benefits included the demonstration of innovation (39%), breadth of services provided (36%), rightsized device count in an optimal way (35%), consistently met SLAs (32%), breadth of software solutions provided (31%), kept informed of progress (31%), and proactive suggestions for increased savings and efficiency (31%).
- » **Cost and page volume reductions were significant under MPS.** According to the survey results, the average print-related cost reduction was 15%, while the average page volume decrease was 16%.

The survey results demonstrate that MPS offers a significant route to achieving lower costs and improving employee productivity as part of a smarter workplace program.

Q. How should organizations decide between managing the print environment on their own or having an outside company take care of it?

A. Like a lot of things...it depends. Many organizations like to keep all forms of IT management in-house, including print. The primary reasons they opt for this approach are that they do not want to take on the additional cost of working with an outside company and do not want to relinquish control to an outside organization. Fair enough.

However, the benefits of going outside the organization should not be ignored. Considerations include:

- » **Leveraging print-specific expertise.** Print isn't the expertise of a lot of companies, but it is considered a necessary function for organizational document processing. As an alternative to a do-it-yourself (DIY) approach to print management, an expert in print efficiency lends credibility to achieving immediate return-on-investment (ROI), especially if that provider has an established track record for such accomplishments with other organizations.
- » **Alleviating IT's workload.** Outsourcing print management to an external expert allows the IT department to focus and spend more time on specified strategic initiatives. As noted previously, print is a necessity as a mission-critical function of the business, but it may not be where an organization wants its internal IT resources focusing a lot of their time. Outsourcing print management relieves IT of this time-intensive task dedicated to ensuring that print is running efficiently inside the company's operations and enables the IT department to focus on more strategic technology IT initiatives.

- » **Utilizing cloud as a print management tool.** The value proposition of cloud printing is consistent with the broader rationale of adopting a more cloud-based IT strategy and helps modernize the organization's print ecosystem with its use. Key benefits available revolve around cost reduction and productivity enhancements. Specifically:
- **Eliminate IT infrastructure and reduce costs.** Company technologies and services are not on premises; rather, they reside in the cloud. This helps eliminate considerable IT infrastructure to maintain and support technology implementations onsite. Additionally, the elimination of certain IT infrastructure aids in reducing operational costs and driving operational efficiency for the organization.
 - **Enable increased security, particularly for a hybrid workforce.** Cloud enables the general management of remote, off-campus printers and MFPs. With the expectation of an increasingly hybrid workforce, the need to secure technologies used for work in home/remote locations is critically important. The hybrid work strategy for print needs to be more than just equipping work-from-home employees with devices. Instead, organizations would benefit from extending print management to these devices to drive efficiencies in usage, security, access to advanced services, and the establishment of a formal process to addressing home/remote printing costs. In essence, the plan creates a seamless working environment, independent of home or office location.
 - **Provide more insights into usage.** Cloud provides an avenue to leverage more IoT and data analytics to provide better management and support for security and equipment maintenance. This availability should improve device uptime and service accessibility to maximize overall business performance.

IDC's research shows little difference in cloud adoption between small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) and enterprise organizations, but the motivators for adoption are different. For enterprise organizations, the ability to optimize print to achieve availability and scalability while ensuring the print infrastructure does not impede digital transformation initiatives is key. For SMBs, the provision of a range of print-related services at various levels and cost/billing options helps reduce costs, offer more security, and support an increasingly distributed workforce. Regardless of company size, businesses should shift their focus beyond optimizing print assets and more toward driving better business outcomes around improved uptime, scalability, sustainability, and security and enabling "print from anywhere at any time." Individual organizations should consider their own broader IT initiatives around cloud within the scope of a cloud-based print management program.

Q. If an organization decides to move forward with an MPS plan, what are the necessary next steps to take?

A. Start by connecting with a technology provider and begin discussing the options available on how greater efficiencies and benefits can be achieved by moving forward with a smarter workplace initiative. The plan should consider all technology categories. The case for print being part of this work is compelling. While print may not have top-of-mind awareness, there are significant opportunities to address lower costs and enhance employee productivity that directly impact the firm's bottom line.

The assessment should go beyond examining the hardware portfolio and consider all elements of the organization's business processing ecosystem. It starts with hardware and ensuring that the organization has an optimized fleet of devices, but these machines should also be supported by efficiencies in the aftermarket (supplies, service) where a greater percentage of costs reside when considering the total print infrastructure.

Important and/or repetitious workflows should be explored for potential adjustment to a paper-to-digital transformation. Productivity gains are available to organizations that make changes from manual, paper-based processes to digitally transformed workflows. An MPS provider can help an organization determine how to move forward with a plan that focuses on more than just reducing devices. Instead, such an engagement brings a long-term vision into how the organization can maintain ongoing benefit by continuously reinforcing new employee behaviors and workstyles. The organization must make sure that benefits can be quantified as much as possible so that the plan's impact can be measured and evaluated for its effectiveness.

Ultimately, each organization needs to consider several options to determine how any plan will be integrated and to ensure acceptance across the employee base. IDC suggests a collaborative approach between internal stakeholders and outside providers to create a formalized plan that outlines goals and objectives along with a step-by-step plan of implementation. This carefully mapped approach should enable an organization to gain company buy-in to the plan while ensuring maximum benefit to its business operations.

About the Analyst



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Keith Kmetz is the Program Vice President of IDC's Imaging, Printing, and Document Solutions programs. He is responsible for all written research in these areas, including analysis on the printer, multifunction peripheral (MFP), and 3D printing markets as well as related transformational hardcopy software/services developments. Based on his 25+ years of experience at IDC, Kmetz's research coverage has spanned a wide variety of significant print industry topics with an emphasis on both forecast and survey analysis; vertical market opportunities; and client go-to-market strategies.

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