The Paper Elephant in the Room

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Print volume and cost reduction has been one of the main themes in the printer and MFD market for the last ten years. Almost without exception manufacturers and dealers all promote Managed Print Services (MPS) as a way for customers to control volume and reduce costs. Quite a simple message really; 'we will manage your fleet, optimise and rationalise the number and location of devices, introduce enhanced automation and optimised service delivery' etc. etc. And this will reduce costs.

This all sounds great and a good MPS can deliver significant benefits to a customer. But, and it is a big but, in almost every customer the focus is on controlling cost by reducing output capability i.e. less machines, controlled access, reduced access to colour; restricting the service, basically creating a bottleneck. It's like trying to reduce the number of cars by closing some roads; all that would lead to is frustration, longer traffic jams, delays etc. people still need to get to work, or go to the shops……

Reducing and rationalising the number and location of printers can lead to some reduction in costs but it can also lead to a decrease in staff productivity. The problem is that

in most cases both suppliers and the customers don't ask a very simple question 'why do staff need to print?' It isn't printers that decide whether to print it's the users, so why focus on the outputs and not the inputs?

Key to any long term and sustainable reduction in print volume and cost has to start by understanding why do users click the print button. Typically there are three main reasons for this. Firstly, print may be required to support a business process e.g. printing a form. Secondly, users may need to print because there is no suitable alternative e.g. taking papers to a meeting. Thirdly, users may want to print for convenience e.g. printing a report to edit by hand rather than on-screen.

Focusing on output i.e. reducing the number of devices will impact on all three but is only likely to have a positive impact on reducing convenience printing. Worse still it is likely to have a negative impact on productivity for the first two reasons to print.

It appears that paper based processes that are the root cause of high print volumes is the 'Elephant in the Room'. Organisations want to focus on restricting output and not dealing with the root cause of printing, but why? Quite simply because it's easier to focus on restricting printing rather than deal with the harder issues around why people print. If an organisation is based on manual paper processes the move to streamlined automated electronic processes is a difficult journey. It can be difficult technically (the IT requirement is significant) but probably more difficult are the people and cultural changes required.

The easy option is to ignore the Paper Elephant and hope it goes away.

However, restricting output will only ever be a short term tactical choice, it will not lead to long term sustainable benefits and in many cases can lead to decreased

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productivity with an associated net increase in business process costs. Organisations need to look beyond restricting printing and understand why users print. The ultimate aim must be to remove paper and not the printers. This is the only approach that will deliver long term benefits and will also deliver competitive advantage.

Going back to the car analogy, reducing the numbers of cars by reducing access to roads will only work if used in conjunction with providing alternative options to meet the needs of people. For example in London the congestion charge works because people don't need to drive they can use an effective public transport system.

Keith Houghton - Linea Associate / Transcend 360

About the author

A Managed Print Service (MPS) professional with over 15 years experience in the print industry comprising strategic development, service delivery management and transition, change management, pre and post sales technical support and project management across the UK and Europe.

Significant expertise in supporting public & private sector organisations to gain maximum benefits from their MPS programmes. Key to this is supporting and leading change within complex environments.

A Member of the MPSA Standards Committee and MPS Europe.

Recently led the full MPS lifecycle management for two large NHS Foundation Trusts, including service design, procurement, project delivery, change management and transition to a business as usual operating model.

About Transcend360

Transcend360 has been a strategic partner of Linea Group for several years.

Transcend360 provide independent and unbiased IT outsourcing consultancy specialising in Managed Print Services (MPS). They provide services that support end user customers in the definition, acquisition, delivery and management of an MPS, providing support throughout the complete contract lifecycle.

Linea and Transcend360 have collaboratively provided MPS procurement, change management, strategy development and implementation support to a range of NHS clients and MPS providers, helping organisations to improve efficiency and reduce cost, without impacting front line services.

About Linea

Linea is a results focused organisational excellence consultancy with a track record of delivering sustained superior performance that meets and where possible exceeds client expectations.

We combine the credentials of a top tier firm with the depth of expertise and flexibility of a niche practice to support clients in addressing their most pressing organisational issues through the provision of highly professional, innovative, customer focussed solutions which deliver expected business benefits on time every time.

With an exceptional track record of delivering multi-million pound savings for prominent Public and Private Sector clients, our Organisational Excellence approach provides the skills and capability required to support clients to maximise efficiency, improve quality and reduce cost.

w: lineagroup.net | t: +44 (0) 124 442 1095 | e: info@lineagroup.net