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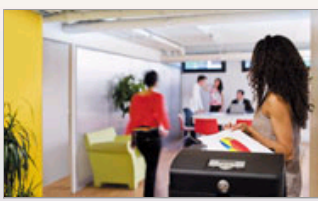


Home > Analysis > Peripherals > Hardware

Analysis: The true cost of printing

Organisations need to get a better sense of how much they spend on printing before finding ways to reduce it

Written by [Martin Courtney](#) **Computing**, 05 Sep 2008



Removing personal printers and printing both sides can significantly reduce costs

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Whether suffering the effects of the credit crunch or not, most commercial organisations will welcome any opportunity to reduce the operational costs of their IT estate. But until they start to look, few IT chiefs may realise the extent of the fat that can be trimmed solely from the corporate printing bill.

Running hundreds or thousands of printers simultaneously is an expensive business, with rising electricity prices combined with the cost of paper, ink or toner, maintenance and other replacement components escalating to a considerable financial outlay.

Yet few organisations even realise how much they spend keeping all those printers churning out documents which may or may not be important to the business, said Phil Sargeant, senior research analyst in **IDC's European printers and multifunctional peripherals** team.

"Firms might be able to save half a million Euros a year in print costs, but the trouble is they do not know how much they spent in the first place. The ink and toner cartridges might be ordered by the receptionist for example, so despite being an IT function, the cost of maintaining printers is taken elsewhere," he said.

Berkshire NHS Shared Services is one organisation that was well aware of how much printer maintenance was adding to its bottom line. The local health organisation recently replaced its existing **Brother 5200** series printers with 900 **Dell 1720DN** printers across around 80 GP surgeries, a move that is expected to save £500,000 in maintenance costs over a three-year period.

"Unlike the Dell devices, the Brother printers did not include a warranty for the fuse units, which we had to pay £150 to replace every 18 months or so making them very expensive to maintain," said Scott Bannister, technical support manager at Berkshire NHS Shared Services.

"We have been instigating a programme of printer rationalisation since mid-2006. There were a lot of instances where everybody had a printer on their desk – the legacy of cultural and historical issues rather than an actual need – and we found we could make huge savings just by cutting the number of those and consolidating onto multifunction devices," said Bannister.

While Berkshire NHS Shared Services had to shell out an undisclosed sum on buying the new Dell printers in the first place, there are far more simple measures that can be used to reduce the cost of running existing printers without investing in new hardware.

"You can also look at reducing the amount of paper being used by printing full duplex for example, which still uses the same amount of ink or toner, but half the amount of paper," said Sargeant.

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Using remote print management software - to keep tighter control of what users are allowed to print to which printers - can also yield dividends in ensuring that ink, toner and paper is not being hijacked for personal use or non-business printing.

Berkshire NHS Shared Services is rolling out **Novell ZENworks 10** remote management software, which will provide the ability to remotely manage printers without requiring the assistance of onsite engineers, and the organisation is also looking at better use of authorisation tools to restrict access.

"We do have printers that allow us to lock them down, though these are not provided by Dell. With the Dell printers we have certain parameters that can be configured to make sure only certain printers can print to them," said Bannister.

Another route to printer cost consolidation is to use managed print and pay-per-print services available from vendors such as HP, Epson, Oki, Samsung and Xerox.

These allow organisations to pay a monthly fee to lease rather than own printers, copiers and other devices, with toner cartridges and onsite support included in the tariff with a web-based portal that gives customers instant visibility into usage and expenditure.

Crucially, the outsourced print management approach can give IT managers the visibility into print costs that they may not otherwise have, though many remain either wary or apathetic.

"Some customers are wary [of signing up to these services] because there is a lot of IT infrastructure to be considered, a lot of hassle, and some reluctance to be tied into long term three-to-five-year contracts. People do tend to like it once they are in, though some do not really care about the print costs in the first place," said Sargeant.

Despite what individual manufacturers say about the relative merits of their own products' toner and ink coverage and electricity consumption, there still appears to be very little to choose between rival printers when it comes to the running costs of different devices.

"There is a lot of 'greenwash' around at the moment which highlights benefits that are really not that useful. Apart from duplex printing, the one thing you can say is that recycling toner cartridges via either the printer manufacturers or third-party refillers does save on plastics and packaging," said Sargeant.

Certainly the technical merits of Dell's 1720DN printers do not seem to have offered any remarkable technical or environmental advantage over similar devices from rival vendors. The manufacturer won the contract on the basis of cost and its hands-on approach to helping Berkshire NHS Shared Services address its particular needs.

"We looked at Samsung, HP and Kyocera, but Dell gave us the best price and product management as well. They worked closely with us to decide the best option for the trust and offered us an entire package which included help with deployment and project management," says Bannister.

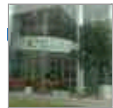
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