

Best practice in managed print services

Retail Systems sits down with Matthew Jones, Head of End User Sales at Brother UK, to discuss how retailers can use managed print services to boost efficiency and control costs across their operations

What is the current state of play with leased print solutions in the retail sector?

Whether you're leasing your printers and receiving the consumables they use on a managed contract, or you're simply having the consumables managed and delivered in that way, it's more a case of when, not if, for leased print solutions in the retail sector. Four to five years ago, we were going out to the market to educate retailers more about managed print solutions, whereas now there's a demand for it. The retail market has adapted and that's the direction it's heading in, recognising the clear benefits for leased or managed print contracts.

What are the benefits to retailers of having a robust print management strategy in place?

Managed print solutions come with a catalogue of services and solutions to choose from, not just the basics like helping with delivery and installation. You can select the level of service that's specific to your needs, such as whether you might need a business-critical machine fixed straight away, or next-day support. This means that you can plan and budget for your hard costs in terms of purchasing assets, as well as your soft costs in terms of person hours used in the process.

For instance, there might be a business that has three or four



different types of device in their fleet, but doesn't have any understanding of what's really being used. They might have a stock room jam-packed with all different types of ink and laser cartridges, and have someone in charge of sending them out to branches. We're the experts in what we call 'uniform disparate environments' – that's where you have the same overarching system in a lot of places, all mirroring each other. The first thing that does is take ordering supplies out of the equation, because it can be done administratively via a portal in one place at head office or automatically. From there, the business can also have a view of anything from the status of the machine, if it's turned on or plugged in, right through to reading if the toner is low or how many pages have been printed in comparison to other branches. If one branch has printed 1,500 sheets in a week, and another has printed 200 sheets in a week, what's the difference and why? What are the different processes that are being used in that store, and can the business work towards better practices in other stores?

How can retailers control costs through efficiently managing their print services?

The most important thing when selecting a manufacturer to work with would be the tender process. During that tender process, a retailer can really analyse their current printing activities, as well as the capabilities of a selection of manufacturers at once. As part of our service, we provide an audit which means that pre-sale technical support engineers visit stores, work on pilots, and give the retailer an up-to-date view of what they're currently spending on printing – and then provide solutions for saving costs. On our managed print service you only pay for what you print, there is no minimum spend. And because we've already told the customer what they're printing currently, they can then accurately forecast over the next three to five years how much they're going to spend on print. This is key, because it's measurable, it gives you control, and you can hold each location accountable quite easily using the managed software.

You mentioned the tender process and its importance. How do you think a retailer can follow best practice, and what are the challenges of doing this?

The most switched-on retailers do follow a tender process when they've got a preferred incumbent supplier. It's best practice to do the due diligence from a cost and compliance point of view, and look at different vendors that are in that market.

I think that some of the risks for a business in the tender process would involve not engaging with the manufacturer properly, and simply buying on price, then finding out later down the line that the true cost can sometimes be much more than price in terms of person hours. It can be tempting to buy things cheaper

upfront, and certain players do come to market trying to win deals by selling their hardware very cheaply upfront. But you also need to take into account the value of a machine that makes the ink last longer and has high-duty toners, as well look at the warranties and extended service level agreements available.

So what factors should retailers be considering when selecting a solution?

Accurate forecasting and having the right information is key. In terms of a retailer coming to market, the main things on their mind would be cost and efficiency, and there might be a CSR and environmental issue that they're particularly interested in. There's also a lot to take into consideration in terms of what the machine needs to be, even down to the basics like what size it is, how much space is available in-store, does the paper feed from front to back, is it going to be kept in a cabinet or is it going to be against a wall? When it comes to these type of physical factors, we have a strong portfolio of high-performing printers – very solid, very durable machines that are trusted by 92 per cent of doctors' surgeries in the UK, as well as eight of the twelve largest grocers.

How can retailers use print technology to link all of their operations?

One of the things I have found is key is having a network to manage print solutions in the field – some customers have over a thousand sites with the same device in each one. They can use our 'scan to network folder' option on the multifunction printers – this is built in and will recognise the profile of the user. So, if the document is for accounts, expenses, daily takings, etc., it'll go to a defined destination issued for

the user. This can be controlled by head office who can also limit access to users e.g. colour or mono print, restricting USB functions, etc.

Presumably having all of the machines on the same network is a big advantage, as there is a seamless flow of information between the shop floor, head office and management?

That's right – I remember we were working with one well-known High Street retailer and when we went to their IT helpdesk at head office, over 50 per cent of the calls they were taking were regarding printer issues. So, what you have is IT experts, with the ability to talk about any issues regarding IT in the business, spending over half of their time talking about paper jams and changing ink cartridges. Ideally, they should be free to be working on what the business wants them to do, working on solutions and integrating IT effectively throughout the business. The status and network of machines can all be monitored remotely by individual or multiple users. Levels of the toner can be viewed remotely, so that we can forecast how much a business is going to budget for.

Retailers can also drill down to a store level to see their busiest stores, quietest stores, and what they all print. Perhaps if one machine has done three times the amount of a machine in a quieter store, they could switch the machines to get more life out of the one that has not been used as much. So, they could strategically manage their fleet to get the most out of it before having to refresh again. That control, supported by the software and by our helpdesk in Manchester, has got us across the line in many of our deals, through the "at your side" ethos that we have.

Finally, what are the security advantages of having a managed print service, with regard to both file storage and restricted machine access?

In relation to file storage, encryption is built into our software and secure scanning solutions. In terms of document management, we have a solution called Printsmart, which is split into two versions: Cost Control and SecurePro. Both Printsmart Cost Control and Printsmart SecurePro are designed to integrate into your existing IT infrastructure. Cost Control provides print costs, reporting and monitoring of all Brother third party devices. SecurePro combines all the benefits of Cost Control, together with advanced security features, such as pull-printing, where users can either use a swipe card when they get to the device, or they can send documents with their own preferential PIN, so that things are not printed out until they actually get to a machine and enter that PIN – which is a paper and cost saving benefit, as well as a security advantage. If you don't manage to get to the device and print the document out, after a set amount of time the uncollected print job will be removed from the storage location, which doesn't sit on the hard drive of the device. Issuing separate user IDs allows some users or locations to have custom profiles, such as the ability to print in colour, while others are only able to print in greyscale. That can all be managed from the software when it's on the network.



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