Cool Vendors in Print Markets and Management, 2006

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Getting the most out of your output fleet investment is becoming easier and easier, thanks to the latest crop of vendors that offer products and services designed to help businesses better utilize and manage printers, copiers and multifunction products.

ANALYSIS

What You Need to Know

If your organization has not started managing its office printing and has not yet slashed its printing expenditure by roughly 30 percent, you're running out of excuses. These five vendors provide easy entry points for capturing savings and transforming workflows, via products and services that touch virtually all areas of the document output ecosystem. The capabilities that they offer include needs assessment, involving minimal effort on the part of the customer; device usage tracking and reporting; automated integration of paper documents into business processes and applications; and for those willing to explore only the simplest and easiest steps, software that reduces the amount of toner consumed by printers with minimal sacrifice to the appearance of the finished page.

eCopy

Nashua, New Hampshire (www.ecopy.com)

Why Cool: eCopy is an independent software company that helps businesses streamline paper-driven business processes by enabling them to scan documents directly to applications using their network-attached copiers. Its technology scans and routes documents to their destinations via application-programming-interface-level integration to more than 45 enterprise applications (such as EMC Documentum, FileNet, Microsoft SharePoint and Microsoft Outlook/Exchange). The product has helped businesses of all sizes broaden their use of the basic office copier, and it is quickly becoming the de facto software standard for working across different vendors' multifunction products (MFPs).

Challenges: Because eCopy uses office copiers and scanners as enablers for its technology, the company depends on those vendors to open up their embedded architectures by publishing software development kits, which eCopy then uses to connect to the copier's architecture. For much of the past decade, eCopy was tied strictly to Canon copiers, but in recent years, the company has taken advantage of the open architectures now available on copiers from vendors such as HP, Ricoh, Sharp and Toshiba, as well as Canon.

Who Should Care: IT decision makers and procurement managers should know that eCopy now integrates easily into most copying/ scanning environments and greatly enhances the capability of the networked office copier, providing process improvements for the larger enterprise.

Analysis by Don Dixon

Pharos Systems

Rochester, New York (www.pharos.com)

Why Cool: Pharos Systems has created easily deployable software called Blueprint Enterprise, which is designed to help large companies identify the hidden costs of print, to organize, streamline and standardize printing across all departments, and to track printer and MFP page volumes. The old adage that measurement of performance leads to improvement in performance still holds true. Pharos Systems' Blueprint Enterprise print job accounting software monitors and tracks all network and local printing, so companies finally know what they're spending on every

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printed page. This software identifies which employees are printing and copying, what they are printing and copying, where they are sending their jobs, and how employees are using printer and copier features. Pharos' software then summarizes this information by employee, device and location for analysis.

Challenges: Printing isn't centrally managed in most organizations, and there hasn't been an all-out effort to monitor, measure and manage many companies' bloating printer fleets. Fragmented responsibility for print crosses many different departments and budgets, creating a nightmare for large companies when they attempt to centralize tracking and control.

Who Should Care: IT specialists in charge of the network printing, as well as the IT manager in charge of printer deployment.

Analysis by Peter Grant

Preton

Tel Aviv, Israel (www.preton.com)

Why Cool: PretonSaver, Preton's debut technology, is a centrally managed software solution that helps reduce toner consumption while providing better visibility into output fleet utilization and cost structure. Using algorithms, the software optimizes and reduces the amount of toner that the printer applies to each page. Preton's well-developed graphical user interface allows the administrator to monitor, audit and control any print behavior within the organization. PretonSaver could offer enterprises significant savings while helping them become more environmentally responsible.

Challenges: PretonSaver is a new product for which the company is recruiting resellers to expand its customer base. It remains to be seen how successful Preton will be in bringing this product to market. Printing and print costs are rarely the top priority on the IT manager's agenda, so rationalizing investment in this type of software could prove challenging.

Who Should Care: IT specialists in charge of the network, the IT manager in charge of print deployment and executives with environmental responsibility.

Analysis by Dan Sommer

The Print Operations Group

Calgary, Alberta (www.printopsgroup.com)

Why Cool: Most organizations could save 30 percent of their print spending by managing office print better, but many lack the resources to independently identify strategies for correcting inefficiencies. This is a big problem for large businesses, as none of the large consulting companies have made a practice of independently assessing organizations' printing needs. Even when businesses pay a print vendor to serve as a consultant, many worry about real or apparent bias. The Print Operations Group is the only company that we know of that performs independent and thorough assessments of office printing needs. The company employs a network of consultants and staff large enough to have served dozens of Canada's largest businesses and government organizations. It follows a thorough, mature assessment methodology, and its prices are less than half of what some of the vendors charge.

Challenges: The Print Operations Group is a very small company. During the past 11 years, almost all of its work has been confined to Canada. The company recently hired a U.S. salesperson, but it must establish more reference accounts outside Canada.

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