Your Roadmap to More Secure, Cost-Effective Print Management

INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVE

Introduction

In a 2009 survey of federal employees, the Government Accountability Office found that an average of $440.4 million was spent on unnecessary printing each year. Despite its astronomical cost, little effort was made to reduce this financial burden, even as government agencies found themselves needing to do more with less.

But the growing prioritization of cost efficiency has finally prompted agencies to explore the possibility of print savings. As its potential becomes more apparent, managed print services (MPS) is finding its way into the spotlight.

MPS enables agencies to organize and maintain their print environment by providing visibility into print service spending practices and empowering them to control these costs to maximize efficiency. An organized print environment also means better security when handling sensitive documents.

Despite the cost and security benefits that MPS can provide, agencies often struggle to make the shift. But with the emphasis on better tracking and management of IT costs noted in the President's Management Agenda (PMA), MPS is expected to gain more traction. As a previously neglected concept, print management is a difficult system to incorporate, with little precedent for its adoption or use in agencies. Not knowing where to start is the biggest obstacle.

To help agencies better understand how to implement managed print services and cut costs in their print environment, GovLoop partnered with AlphaSix Corporation, a company focused on providing IT products, services and solutions that create cost efficiencies and apply effective strategies at the conjunction of big data and cybersecurity. In this report, we identify current challenges in print services, how agencies can overcome them by adopting MPS and how AlphaSix can help implement best practices in print services. You'll also gain insights from Mark Hughes, Vice President of Strategic Programs at AlphaSix.

The Challenge: Mismanaged Print Environments

Government agencies have been pushed toward efficiency and security for decades, and the President's Management Agenda has continued that focus with its emphasis on IT modernization. One aspect of efficient and modern IT that hasn't received much attention until now is printing.

A print environment is comprised of the devices used, supplies required, and printer maintenance and security. The issue is that most agencies don't know everything that goes into a print environment, and it's not uncommon for printing costs to be scattered and unorganized, leading to redundant or wasted expenses spread across a number of departments.

"Left on their own, agencies would go and acquire separate standalone devices," said Hughes. "That means you end up with multiple manufacturers, all kinds of toner all over the place and different maintenance plans. It gets out of control very quickly, and it's typically a highly inefficient environment."

In addition to the burden that an inconsistent print environment has on budget, security risks are also abundant. Printers today have many of the same risks as computers, smartphones and other devices and can be targeted to steal information. Without a consistent and well-managed print environment to develop structure, agencies are putting themselves at risk.

Poorly managed print environments are a headache for agencies that are already dealing with numerous day-to-day challenges. An inefficient print environment can be caused by a number of issues and redundancies, including confusion about cost, security, and operation responsibilities; unchecked supply spending; maintenance facilitation and more.

"Nobody has control of the print environment," Hughes said. "It's not clear how to get your arms around these costs. You have to go to a very high level because somebody has responsibility for all of those costs at some point."

These are all issues at the forefront for many agencies due to the PMA's focus on IT modernization. Reducing cybersecurity risk is a driving force for agencies to seal any leaks they may have. As printing becomes more clearly defined as a potential risk if not managed properly, poor security practices in this IT category will have to change. The goal of clarifying IT spending in the PMA also makes it clear that the current disorganized spending structure won't suffice. These problems have led agencies toward MPS, but their troubles haven't been immediately solved.

Despite all of the services that MPS can provide, however, another challenge arises in the form of implementation. With so little experience in MPS, government agencies aren't sure where to begin. When agencies try to improve their print management, they usually turn to large print manufacturers that show huge costs savings yet require a significant investment upfront. Furthermore, proposed solutions vary widely among manufacturers, with each suggesting a different approach. As a result, many agencies end up confused and frustrated and choose to do nothing.

The Solution: Getting Started With Managed Print Services

Opportunities to save are few and far between, and it's difficult for agencies to determine next steps when the usual cost-saving methods have already been employed and dried up.

Managed print services is one method still available to agencies looking to spend more effectively. Its practice of trying to control costs and efficiency in an often uncontrolled and expensive category of IT is a holistic approach to managing a print environment in a secure and cost-effective way.

"MPS consolidates print, fax, copy and scanning into a single program that covers the cost of the devices, the supplies and all of the maintenance," Hughes said. "You attach those devices to the network and, on top of that, you can layer technology that helps with the security of the information that's on those devices."

Hughes explained how the connected network makes small problems go away. For example, if you try to print to one device that isn't working, that same print job can be easily accessed on another device, as opposed to expensive four-hour, return-to-service contracts that drive up maintenance costs in a non-MPS environment. He likened it to an ATM system, in which users authenticate their transaction at any available device, promoting ease of use and security. But just looking at the tangible side of MPS doesn't fully explain its uses. And despite the challenges that adopting MPS can have, collaboration and a well-executed plan can make the process easy.

"AlphaSix is a systems integrator at heart," Hughes said. "Our job is to go into an agency and figure out where the problems lie. The No. 1 thing that agencies gain from MPS is understanding their costs. The costs are everywhere, and they're not held by one department. If you can walk away from an MPS engagement and understand your costs, you've moved the ball immensely."

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>
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How AlphaSix Helps

AlphaSix has developed an easy-to-implement, cost-effective method for managing agencies' print environments. It requires a relatively small upfront investment with a quick return. The solution is scalable, so agencies can start small and add additional features until all aspects of their print environments are fully optimized and managed.

Implementing this service through AlphaSix is a straightforward process. Below is the six-step roadmap to adoption:

1. Estimate the current environment to develop a rough return on investment (ROI).

AlphaSix uses an automated spreadsheet to determine how many devices an agency has, what their functions are, how often they are used and what print management tools can help.

2. Load the print management client on each computer to begin tracking habits and usage.

With a basic understanding of the environment, AlphaSix tracks printing to test its theories and verify ROI estimates made in step one.

3. Start adding cost-savings features such as policy print and toner savings.

Once certain of printing practices at an agency, AlphaSix conducts small pilots in floors, departments, groups, etc. to create a sample of what those features can provide. AlphaSix also works with agencies to implement print policy, which sets guidelines for how and when certain printing functions can be used.

4. Right-size and optimize the printer fleet and service levels.

At this stage, AlphaSix brings in a manufacturer, such as HP, to optimize the environment by determining the number of devices needed, functions required and more, allowing for the most efficient spending. AlphaSix and HP also assist with mapping out the physical location of devices within a department to make them as economical as possible.

5. Initiate just-in-time supplies replenishment.

Once the devices are organized, attention is turned to the supplies needed to run them. AlphaSix provides "just-in-time supplies," which ensures that the correct materials are purchased on an automated timeline and in the right quantities. Hughes explained that this process adds to the lifespan of the device and highlighted the importance of replenishing supplies as needed and not storing them in bulk for extended periods of time.

6. Implement secure pull printing.

AlphaSix implements secure pull printing, which uses an authentication method such as a password or keycard to allow certain users to access print jobs on their devices. This keeps files safe and avoids important documents being left in the print tray at the end of the day.

By following these steps, agencies can save millions of dollars each year while being in complete control of their printing environment. Steps one through three provide a deep understanding of how the print environment is used, while steps four through six provide secure printing and supply management in order to further reduce unnecessary spending.

CASE STUDY:
Department of Education

Efforts are already underway to introduce MPS at the Department of Education. Seeking a stronger management system to handle its printing more efficiently and avoid unnecessary spending, the department adopted print policy, which allows it to better manage color printing and rein in spending.

"Color is expensive," Hughes said. "We think they may have underestimated the amount of color impressions that are produced. We have to take a close look at their print policy and lay down some laws. Print policy can make a huge difference."

In addition to print policy, the department has also started to move toward pull printing, the authentication system that allows individual users to access certain print jobs.

"I think [pull printing] will be a real eye-opener for them," Hughes said. "They'll see a lot of efficiencies because you'd be amazed at how many jobs are left at the printer. We think they'll see significant differences over what they had in the past."

Conclusion

Controlling IT spending is a difficult task, but it's essential to keeping agencies productive and mission-focused. The emphasis on better regulation of IT spending in the President's Management Agenda makes this goal even more crucial. Agencies need to be airtight when it comes to IT spending and security.

Managed print services represents a clear opportunity to accomplish this by taming print environments. As a previously neglected topic of focus, the potential for cost efficiency in printing has begun to stir agencies to action. The introduction of MPS into the workplace will create savings where they previously hadn't been considered.

"Printing is the last bastion of cost savings," Hughes said. "If there's nothing else you get out of MPS, if you understand your costs, you will be in a much better place to make decisions and save money in your environment."

ABOUT ALPHASIX

AlphaSix Corporation is an IT solutions and services provider specializing in Big Data and Cyber Security. Additionally, we design, support and maintain Secure Managed Print Services projects. AlphaSix works with Federal agencies, often in highly secure environments, to harness, manage, monitor and protect the vast amount of data being generated today. Big Data and Cyber Security are not just buzz words, at AlphaSix they are our core competencies. Our current projects span Federal Law Enforcement, Financials, Healthcare and Education.

ABOUT HP

HP creates new possibilities for technology to have a meaningful impact on people, businesses, governments and society. With the broadest technology portfolio spanning printing, personal systems, software, services and IT infrastructure, HP delivers solutions for customers' most complex challenges in every region of the world.

More information about HP (NYSE: HPQ) is available at www.hp.com

ABOUT GOVLOOP

GovLoop's mission is to "connect government to improve government."We aim to inspire public-sector professionals by serving as the knowledge network for government. GovLoop connects more than 270,000 members, fostering cross-government collaboration, solving common problems and advancing government careers. GovLoop is headquartered in Washington, D.C., with a team of dedicated professionals who share a commitment to connect and improve government.

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