

# The value of independence

## Focussing on the customer

Many organisations have achieved significant benefits by implementing a Managed Print Service (MPS). In fact MPS is now seen as the de facto printing solution for medium to large organisations.

The objective of the first stage of an MPS implementation is to gain a thorough understanding of the organisations current state. This typically will include identifying print device numbers, locations, output volumes and associated costs but should also include understanding the current printing issues, such as poor service levels. Once the current state is defined the organisation can then review how re-configuration of the print fleet (printers, multi-functional devices / copiers, faxes and scanners), introduction of software solutions and improved support services can deliver benefits including cost reduction and increased productivity.

To understand the current state, organisations typically undertake a Print Assessment or Print Audit. The information collected is then used to design an optimised print fleet and support services. The assessment and optimisation process is complex, requiring specific skills, tools and knowledge; therefore many organisations use specialist service providers to complete this work.

A Google search for provides a long list of potential suppliers and interestingly, and without exception, they all proclaim to offer 'Independent' print assessment and design services. These suppliers typically include hardware dealers, software vendors and hardware manufacturers. But what do they mean by independent?

**All major hardware manufacturers offer print assessments but proposed designs only include their products and services**

Independent can mean many things:

- Manufacturer independent
- Supplier independent
- Technology independent
- Outcome independent

**Manufacturer independence** – the print assessment supplier can recommend hardware products from a range of manufacturers.

**Technology independence** - the print assessment supplier can recommend software solutions from a range of vendors.

**Supplier independence** – the print assessment supplier can recommend a solution from a range of supplier partners.

## Suppliers of print products often use print assessments as a 'door opener'

However, true independence can only be achieved when the supplier of the print assessment and design is not linked in any way, or motivated by, the supply of the proposed solution; this is outcome independence. This unbiased approach is the most critical element but isn't typically provided by suppliers of print assessments and design services as they will normally deliver the proposed solution. Therefore they are likely to be biased towards a solution they can provide.

All major hardware manufacturers offer print assessments but any proposed designs will typically only include their products and technology. Perhaps more significantly a manufacturer may be unwilling or often unable to include legacy devices and technology from another manufacturer in the re-configured print fleet. Wholesale replacement of all print devices is unlikely to be the most cost effective.

Many suppliers of print products use a print assessment as a 'door opener', a way of getting in front of a customer with the ultimate aim of selling products and services (including an MPS). The print assessment is therefore likely to be biased towards the products and services that the supplier can provide and usually those that are most profitable.

These suppliers may still be classed as 'independent' from a technology, manufacturer or even supplier perspective but the key question the customer should ask is 'what is the supplier's motivation behind the print assessment and proposed design?' Will the supplier be interested in providing an unbiased assessment and solution that meets the customer's business requirements or focus on a solution that meets their sales targets? Are the suppliers objectives fully aligned with those of the customer?

## Will the solution be best fit for the customer or best fit for the supplier?

A provider of truly independent print assessment and design services must have no motivation beyond that of:

- Advising the customer of their current position.
- Recommending the best, most appropriate, efficient and effective solution.
- Ensuring the recommended solution effectively meets the customer's needs

Many Independent suppliers of MPS will state they will provide 'best of breed' or 'best fit', but is it best fit for the customer or best fit for the supplier?

Currently the MPS market is following a 'supplier centric model' where the supplier is driving the MPS requirements, setting the current baseline, defining what the customer needs and delivering the solution. In almost all cases it is the same supplier who conducts the assessment, produces the design, undertakes the delivery and leads the monitoring and management of service delivery.

There are a number of significant risks for customers with this approach:

- Is the supplier's design methodology unbiased?
- Will the proposed design meet the customer's requirements or the supplier's sales targets?
- Once the solution is deployed will the supplier really want to drive down elements of the contract that will reduce its value to the supplier e.g. reduced volume or colour output?
- Will the Supplier really be interested in continual service improvement and driving out additional cost savings and reductions in volumes when this will reduce their revenue stream?

Overall, in the current market the MPS supplier tends to rule, it is the suppliers that are defining the market and driving the customer. Ideally the customer should lead and control the MPS engagement and the market needs to move to a 'customer centric model'.

