Managed Print Service

Frequently asked questions

What is a Managed Print Service (MPS)?

In short it is the *active management* of an organisations print and imaging infrastructure.

Many organisations that decide to actively manage their printing infrastructure chose to outsource this to an external service provider; typically a manufacturer or supplier of print hardware.

Why is it important to actively manage printing?

Many organisations do not know how much they are actually spending on printing, and in many cases if asked to estimate the costs, perceive them to be significantly lower than they really are.

There are numerous industry statistics and all suppliers of MPS will typically state that an organisations total cost of printing will be between 1% and 3% of annual revenue. So for a medium size public sector body such as an NHS Trust with annual revenue of £200m, this equates even at the lowest estimate to £2m. This may sound an unreasonably high cost but it should be pointed out that this is the total cost of printing not just the cost of print devices but also includes support costs, infrastructure costs etc.

The argument for MPS is simple, anything that isn't managed is likely to cost more and deliver less. Actively managing printing will lead to a more efficient and effective print infrastructure at a lower cost and ensure that it is focussed on delivering benefits to the organisation.

The level of savings suggested by MPS suppliers is typically between 10% and 40%. In the case of a £200m NHS Trust this saving could be between £200k and £400K per annum. These are powerful arguments that will be used by the suppliers when promoting their services.

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How are these savings achieved?

MPS benefits are well documented by manufacturers, resellers and industry experts alike. They include savings on capital and operational cost, greater productivity and a more consistent user experience. Simply consolidating and replacing old inefficient devices can deliver significant savings. Improving operational processes such as supplies and maintenance will deliver further savings and enhance productivity.

Implementing an MPS will deliver savings but the real question is whether the MPS provider will deliver the full benefits to the customer or just enough to keep the customer happy? In many cases delivering greater benefits to the customer will lead to lower revenue for the supplier. For example, one of the main benefits and targets of an MPS is a reduction in overall print volume. However this will lead to cost savings for the customer but will also reduce revenue for the supplier.

Are there differences between an MPS provided by a hardware manufacturer and a reseller?

Manufacturers of hardware tend to have the most mature offering as they have been in the MPS market the longest. However, typically they will supply an MPS based solely on their own products and often will propose to replace most if not all devices. Most manufacturers cannot offer a multi-vendor fleet comprising both new devices and retained devices from other manufacturers. Wholesale replacement of devices is not likely to lead to the most economically advantageous solution

Larger resellers or dealers, typically provide products from a range of manufacturers and can provide a best of breed MPS solution.

Smaller dealers often provide an MPS via a manufacturer's channel programme. The channel programmes vary in what they can offer and how it is delivered.

At one extreme the dealer is simply selling the manufacturer's MPS offering and delivering nothing directly to the customer. At the other extreme the dealer simply gets marketing and product support to promote MPS and has to provide all services themselves. MPS offerings from small dealers can vary considerably in their capability and quality.

Each supplier has strengths and weaknesses and these need to be considered when selecting an MPS provider.

What is normally included in an MPS?

Most outsourced MPS contracts typically include the provision of hardware i.e. printers together with rationalisation of the current fleet (including more new devices), supplies / consumables and hardware maintenance. Some may also include software solutions that support features such as secure print release and print job tracking.

However, the key to delivering benefits is active and on-going management of the printing infrastructure and this is what defines a true Managed Service.

Is there a conflict of interest between the customer and supplier?

All MPS suppliers will talk about working in partnership to realise long term benefits, but are the motivations of the supplier truly aligned with those of the customer? At a most basic level customers want to save, suppliers want customers to spend.

The secret to getting the right solution is for the customer to clearly define and consistently articulate their requirements to potential suppliers. The best solution will be the one the customer needs not necessarily the one the supplier wants to sell. An informed customer is significantly more likely to get the best solution.

Over the longer term there is potentially a more significant conflict. Most organisations that implement an MPS wish to continue to reduce print volumes and drive down costs over the course of the contract. However, reduction in print volumes will lead to reduced revenue and profit for the supplier. This leads to the obvious question of why would a supplier actively help a customer to continue to reduce print volumes? Ultimately it is down to the customer to drive any cost reduction programme.

Can an organisation just do it themselves?

Of course they can. But it is not as simple as it at first appears. The printing infrastructure of an organisation is more complex than most people realise. The simple act of printing requires multiple components to function efficiently; the application, the print driver, the network, the print server and finally the output device. An issue with any element can lead to problems with printing and end up with an unhappy user (and usually a support call!). Just talk to any service desk manager and they will describe printing as one of their main problem areas that soaks up resources. In addition to the day to day operational management of the printing infrastructure there is a requirement to manage the number, location and capability of devices to ensure that the organisation has the right device in the right location with the right capability.

Building and maintaining an optimised print infrastructure that delivers what the business needs and the user demands requires:

○ Specific set of skills and experience

○ Dedicated staff resources

○ Correct technical infrastructure, solutions and tools

○ Operational and management processes

Most organisations do not have all these in place and therefore will need to invest significantly if they want to implement their own MPS.

The simple act of printing requires multiple components to function efficiently

How hard can it be to procure an MPS?

Most organisations can run an effective procurement process. But the process isn't the problem. As with so many things, what you get out is only as good as what you put in. If the subject matter expertise and knowledge is not available to support the procurement process chances are critical requirements could be misunderstood, or worse still ignored and missed out.

Procurement of an MPS should be treated the same as procurement of any other IT service and not as a hardware or product procurement exercise. The problem is many procurement departments are good at buying products but do not have the required experience of buying services. In addition, service procurement tends to be more complex and resource hungry. For example, defining in detail the services required and how they will operate requires more engagement with the business when compared with defining simple product specifications.

Access to MPS specific skills and experiences can complement the existing procurement function of the customer and ensure the procurement process is efficient and effective but above all delivers what the customer wants.

Can't I simply buy an MPS from a public sector framework?

Most public sector organisations would benefit by buying their MPS through one of the many public sector frameworks. The problem with frameworks is they are, as the name states, just frameworks.

The early frameworks tried to define in detail what should be included in an MPS. However, every organisation is different and one size does not fit all. A prescriptive MPS definition can restrict the customer and limit the suitability of the framework. More recent frameworks have tended to provide a looser definition with customers defining what they require in more detail via a mini or further competition. This does allow more flexibility but does require the customer to think a lot more about what they want i.e. to clearly define their MPS specification. A poor or incomplete specification will lead to a poor contract and in turn lower benefits and increased risks.

Access to MPS specific skills and experiences can ensure that a framework based MPS delivers what the customer needs and what they expected.

As with so many things, what you get out is only as good as what you put in

I am already implementing an MPS, what can go wrong?

Implementing an MPS has its own set of challenges. Many organisations approach it as simply another technical project. However, printing impacts on almost all business processes, and changes to the printing environment e.g. reduction in the number of devices or moving from printers to MFD's, will have an impact on these processes and therefore the business as a whole. Implementing an MPS should be viewed as a change and transformation programme not just an IT project. This includes developing and implementing a communication plan to ensure that changes are implemented and the users buy in to the benefits of the MPS. Many MPS deployments struggle with end user adoption.

In addition to project management, implementation of an MPS will also require other technical resources. Tasks such as building new servers, installing new drivers, removing old drivers, installing network points etc. etc., all require technical resources. These tasks also need to be co-ordinated to minimise service disruption during the migration to the MPS.

Access to MPS specific deployment skills and experiences will ensure the smooth and timely implementation of the MPS. This will enable organisations to accrue savings rapidly with minimal disruption and risk to the business.

I already have an active MPS, why do I need any help?

Many customers assume that once they have implemented the MPS the hard work is over and the benefits will start to flow in. This is typically not the case. The contract must be actively managed and the supplier driven both to deliver the contracted services and focus on continual service improvement. As outlined above reduction in customer costs typically lead to a reduction in supplier revenue. Why would a supplier continue to drive down costs if they are not driven by the customer?

Many MPS customers find that once the MPS is operational the supplier loses focus and the benefits do not fully materialise.

Setting up, running and maintaining an active service review programme is fundamental to driving out the maximum value from the MPS. But this requires skills and experience in service level management and more specifically experience of managing an MPS and the MPS supplier.