The transition of office printing in the cloud era

ITDOCUMENT
SOLUTIONS

Cloud technology and digital transformation are changing the way we live and work. But what opportunity does this bring and how can it improve business efficiency and office productivity?

We are in an information age, and technology must keep pace with the ever-changing needs and requirements of the modern office environment.

The advent of 'Big Data' and the Internet of Things (IoT), means that businesses and individuals are consuming and processing more data than ever with the desire to access information, anytime, anywhere. All of these factors are driving the need for changes in digital infrastructure with cloud technology quickly becoming an important commodity and the demand for cloud based applications has surged. Forbes estimates that the cloud technology market will be worth an astonishing $411bn by 2020.
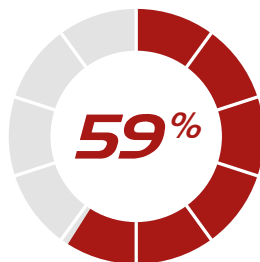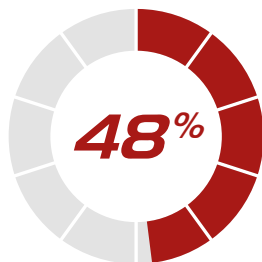
Photocopiers and printers have been a key part of the office environment for decades. Today they have been transformed into smart Multi-Functional Devices (MFDs) that can integrate with a range of technology and applications to improve productivity for users and business alike.

A recent survey by Quocirca stated that 48% of respondents believe paper remains very important to their daily business. Far from a dying technology, 59% state that they actually expect their print usage to increase.

The way we work and manage documents is certainly evolving. Documents are now being captured and routed electronically. As a result office printing is becoming much more strategic with the ability to have greater control over print usage and output. There is the long-standing debate regarding the paperless office and it's fair to say that printing is not going away anytime soon. It's just that print is now being used in a much smarter way to avoid waste, with key business processes being automated and digital workflow being adopted.

So, how does print and cloud technology fit together to assist businesses in a competitive landscape and could it be a real game changer for UK businesses?

Paperless Office

48%

59%

- **48% believe paper remains very important to their daily business**
- **59% expect their print usage to increase**

Source: Quocirca MPS Market Trends, 2017

#Cost

Office print can be expensive and it's not untypical for costs to spiral. An organisation can soon lose a grip on what office printing is actually costing, especially if it's not properly controlled and managed.

A Managed Print Service (MPS) is a flexible and affordable way to purchase print equipment, typically across a 3-5 year contract that incorporates hardware, service, consumables, all in one monthly cost. For smaller SME businesses, procuring MPS may seem out of reach, with organisations often choosing to buy devices online and to procure consumables through petty cash, which is expensive and unsustainable.

Print servers and other IT infrastructure will often incur high capital outlay, but viable alternatives are now entering the market. Hardware-as-a Service (HaaS) is now emerging, whereby hardware is paid for per device, per month, rather than per user. It's a simplified business model, which achieves far higher return on investment (ROI) for the client.

Software-as-Service (SaaS) cloud based applications are surging in popularity, and are sold on a per user basis, and scalable as a business grows. Essential print tools, which have previously been perceived as too expensive by smaller business, could now be affordable thanks to these platforms.

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Although some decision makers may be apprehensive about the cloud and how it fits into their business model, there are several benefits of taking on cloud based applications. It can offer greater control over the network to manage documents effectively without high capital outlay and costly hardware costs, whilst also reducing longer term effort to maintain the environment. A win win for both the Finance and IT manager.

#Management

The IT team has a lot to juggle, managing the network, remote workers, managing IT assets, not to mention office printing, which can sometimes be a major headache. Tools and applications that make the IT support team's life easier are always going to be an added bonus.

Keeping devices operational is hugely important, but also sometimes a challenge, especially if it's a large fleet, dispersed across multiple sites. Cloud based monitoring applications enable the print fleet to be managed remotely and proactively supported.

Diagnostic tools enable MPS partners to review the network constantly and service teams can be alerted to any potential issues, so that an engineer can fix them before they escalate. Not only does this minimise costly downtime, it also reduces the burden on IT support teams so they can focus on other important areas.

This type of application enables proactive account management of the print fleet. Meter readings can be pulled automatically from the device, ensuring accurate and prompt billing and the ordering and delivering of consumables just as they are needed, which avoids stockpiling on-site inventory.

The added benefit to cloud based monitoring tools is the proactive management of the fleet from a cost perspective. Whereby, the network can be monitored in terms of print usage, to ensure that the right type of device is deployed to the right location and high-volume print jobs, for example, can be routed to a print room or high output device. Also, if there are differing print volumes across the fleet then devices can be redeployed, so the right departments have a device which is fit for purpose at all times, extending the lifespan of the fleet.

There is a huge bonus from adopting certain cloud pull print solutions too. This enables users to print securely, but they must authenticate themselves at the device via a proximity card or PIN code to claim their prints. This ensures documents remain in the right hands and reduces print waste. Multi-vendor networks are not uncommon in offices with a diverse mix of brands and devices. Quite often popular pull print software will be integrated such as Equitrac, Papercut or Safecom. This type of setup means each different manufacturer device needs a separate print queue set up and this would need to be duplicated across the entire fleet of devices. This leads to multiple servers and device licences, which can be extremely expensive and problematic to manage.

Vendor-independent cloud based print applications overcome this issue, providing a common platform that is easier to manage across a multi-vendor environment, which simplifies the network infrastructure and provides a lower total cost of ownership. Also, from an accessibility point of view this type of solution becomes affordable to smaller businesses too.

#Security

Cybersecurity is a hot topic at the moment. Almost daily there is news coverage regarding data breaches from high profile brands and companies. As technology continues to evolve the risks MFDs pose is potentially even greater if the correct security measures are not in place.
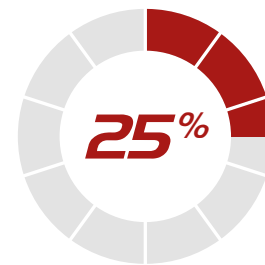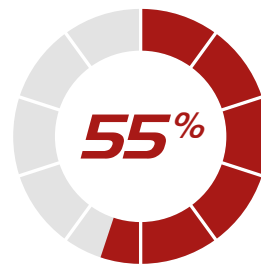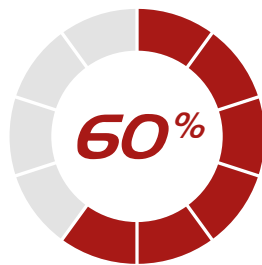
It's not surprising that 60% of businesses have suffered at least one data loss through unsecured printing in the past year. What's astonishing is that while 55% of those respondents viewed print security as important, only 25% are confident their print security is protected from threats. Businesses really need to mitigate these risks, especially in the face of the General Data Protection Regulation coming into force on the 25th May this year. In a recent survey done by international law firm Paul Hastings, more than half of respondents stated that their organisation is either not concerned about GDPR or is unaware of its relevance to their business, so it's imperative that UK businesses prepare now and ensure they are compliant.

Offering the flexibility to print is often top of the wish list for most users, but document security concerns may be holding some businesses back from adopting cloud technology. There are a wide range of cloud based print solutions available. Its adoption now means businesses need to rethink their approach, and despite perceptions, it can be a secure platform, providing the correct measures are in place.

Businesses need to consider additional security measures such as the implementation of encryption, private cloud and VPNs if they want to maximise the security of their documents whilst using the cloud, but it's achievable.

Cloud printing is a good option for organisations with distributed sites and a mobile workforce as it avoids the hassle of installing print drivers on each user's device, which saves time, hassle and increases the productivity of the workforce.

Print & Document Security

60% **55%** **25%**

- **60% of businesses have suffered at least one data loss through unsecured printing in the past year**
- **55% viewed print security as important**
- **25% are confident their print security is protected from threats**

Source: Quocirca MPS Market Trends, 2017

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#Mobility

Internet connectivity, higher broadband speeds, tablet and smartphone technology, along with the use of data, have transformed the way we work and live.

2014 saw an important change in UK government legislation to allow employees to reasonably request flexible working. An office no longer means being desk-bound 9-5 in a physical office, so technology needs to support these changes for staff to work productively, securely and flexibly. According to industry analysts IDC, 72% of the US workforce will work from a mobile location by 2020.
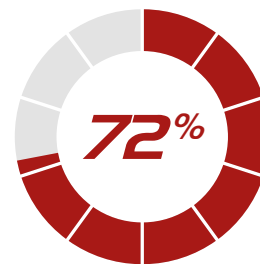
These changes in the modern office are driving demand for tools and applications which provide accessibility to their systems, processes and documents. The need to work collaboratively and productively, irrespective of location or distance is becoming essential. Cloud print technology provides the freedom to print-on-the-go and access vital information just as it's needed. This flexibility and scalability offered from cloud based technology make this much more accessible to organisations across the globe.

According to Quocirca, unsecured mobile printing can result in confidential information being left in output trays, exposed to prying eyes. This can be overcome through secure job release, or 'pull-printing', to authenticate print jobs and also maintain a full audit trail, so the organisation can still keep track of print costs and usage.

Gartner estimate that 50% of all employees will be using their own devices in the workplace by 2018. The emergence of Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) means organisations need to have strategies in place to cope with secure printing within the network from users on their own devices, which opens up a whole new chapter for IT security.

Print Mobility

72%

- **72% of the US workforce will work from a mobile location by 2020**

  Source: IDC

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#Accessibility

According to Spiceworks latest report it's good news in 2018 for IT managers, with budgets expected to stabilise, and in many cases, will grow. Whilst this is a very positive sign, there will be a shift in how budgets are spent, with a predicted surge of 69% spent on cloud, software and managed services and just 31% on hardware. With only a meagre 13% spent on servers, IT teams need to think 'cloud' if they are going to get the most from their IT spend and be favoured by their users.
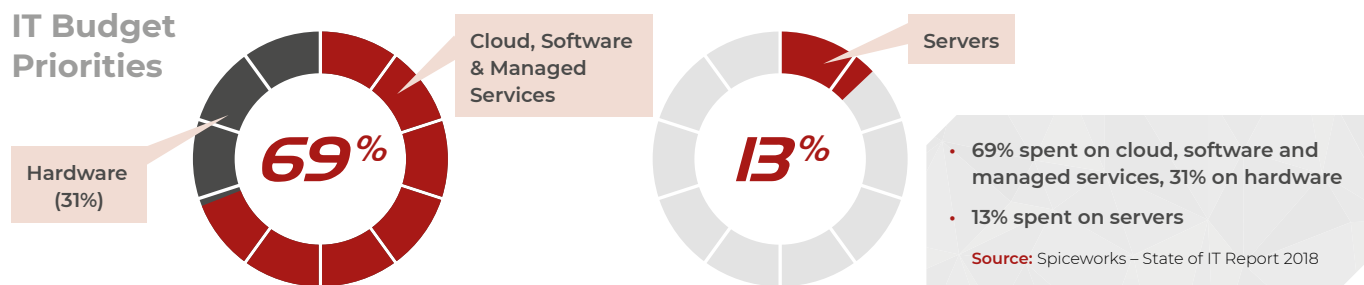
With capital investment in IT hardware decreasing, serverless printing adoption is set to increase. True serverless solutions are a myth, as one server is required, but it eliminates the need for 'local' print servers. This eases the management burden for IT staff and simplifies the print infrastructure.

An audit of the top drivers for IT professionals in 2018 identified that 42% required access to data anywhere, anytime, and 36% wanted to reduce the burden on IT staff.

Tools to manage the print environment are changing with a shift to using cloud based apps becoming commonplace. A range of third party apps are now available to assist with simplifying the management of the print network, which assists IT teams greatly.

'Follow Me Print', for example, has now become more accessible thanks to new solutions hosted in the cloud. It provides all the benefits without the complicated set up with a scalable and affordable cost model.

IT Budget Priorities

Cloud, Software & Managed Services

Hardware (31%)

69%

Servers

13%

- 69% spent on cloud, software and managed services, 31% on hardware
- 13% spent on servers

Source: Spiceworks – State of IT Report 2018

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Conclusion

There is no doubt that cloud platforms have revolutionised the technology available to all levels of business.

Businesses are feeling the pressure to become more productive, to do more with less. This doesn't just relate to staff, it also relates to systems and processes, and having the tools available that staff need to work effectively is vital. Network downtime means no one can print. It's imperative that print solutions improve print performance, reduce complexity and improve usability, empowering a business to become truly agile.

Taking labour intensive paper-based processes and applying automation to create electronic workflows is something most businesses are starting to adopt in some shape or form. 82% of businesses recognise that MPS plays an important role in digital transformation and over half of these have digitised several paper-based processes, so the shift is already happening.

Adopting cloud based applications that generate a higher ROI mean that businesses can focus their efforts and budgets where they are needed most. Plus, it provides the granular level of analysis in terms of print usage, and cost analysis for auditing purposes so constant changes can be applied to improve every area of the organisation.

UK businesses need to adopt stable and reliable solutions and so are turning to solutions which generate tangible returns and boost productivity.

Cloud technology takes us one step closer to a self-managing print fleet, where stretched IT resources can focus on key areas of the network, without office printing becoming a burden. Plus, it empowers the IT team and frees up their time so they can focus on what matters most.

So, is cloud technology a game changer? We think so! Cloud platforms and applications have opened up a world of possibilities. Previously complex office environments have the potential to become far easier to manage. Cloud based tools offer greater accessibility, especially for the smaller business that would have previously been unattainable. Organisations that embrace cloud technology will undoubtedly have the competitive edge over the long term.

About IT Document Solutions

IT Document Solutions is an award-winning, trusted provider of managed print and document solutions to businesses across the UK. We provide a structured and transparent approach to the printing and management of documents.

Our mission is to help clients achieve better value from their office technology and to improve their efficiency and productivity, by offering paper-less solutions that streamline and automate the workflow of documents.

IT Document Solutions provides a comprehensive portfolio of solutions and services which includes:

- Multi-functional devices and printers
- Managed Print Services
- Electronic document management
- Document storage
- Workflow solutions
- Document security
- Digital print solutions

To learn how we can help your business, please contact us:

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