How Much is Out-of-Control Printing Costing Your School?

Probably double what it should in extra paper, toner, ink, and printer maintenance costs. School administrators are saving thousands annually, freeing up staff, and earning ROI in just months with next generation, printer control software.

Reams of paper were disappearing at an alarming rate in the computer labs of Winthrop University, and the culprits weren't a mystery: students were abusing their printing privileges. Movie scripts and entire books were being printed off the Internet with dubious academic relevance, and neither the honor system nor lab supervision was stemming the tide.

"One girl was printing 300-400 pages per lab, per day, and going to multiple labs each day," says Craig Sauvigne, an IT Department system administrator for Winthrop University, a public university with over 6,000 students in Rock Hill, South Carolina.

"Costs for paper, ink, toner, and printer maintenance were mounting, and we discussed turning off the printers," says Sauvigne. "Of course, we couldn't because legitimate printing serves an academic need."

Like many budget-conscious schools and colleges worldwide, Winthrop University was caught in a conundrum -- how do you provide printing access for legitimate, academic needs while weeding out wasteful, costly printing abuse?

In contrast to labor-intensive oversight, expensive hardware, or piecemeal solutions, a new generation of software is enabling comprehensive print tracking and quotas across school networks. This is not only saving administrators about 50% of their total school-wide printing costs, expediting cost accounting, and earning a ROI in just months, but also enabling much needed lab/facility upgrades and freeing staff from "printer policing" to focus on teaching, IT planning, and other areas of specialty.

Out-of-Control Printing Costs
Few school or university administrators realize the extent that out-of-control printing costs are stressing the budget. Most administrators don't know how the school's printers are really being used and thus can't control printing costs.

But doing the math highlights the need to shrink the perennial budget drain of wasted printing resources. Multiply the number of school printers (black/white, color, and laser) by the number of students and staff printing on them; by the size, type, and number of daily print jobs -- and you get a massive figure. The average school of 1,000, or university department of equivalent size, in fact, spends about $3,000 to $4,000 a month on paper, ink, and toner, not counting printer wear-and-tear or technical support costs.

What makes costs grow exponentially, however, is the number of wasteful or non-academic print jobs -- from photos of pop stars and friends to entire books -- that should never be printed, or could be copied more economically.

The problem is that personally monitoring every student's print out for academic relevance in a busy computer lab or classroom is too labor intensive, and can disrupt more important teaching or administrative tasks. Moreover, teachers and staff can fall into wasteful printing habits, for instance, when printing worksheets on an expensive laser printer rather than running them off on a less expensive copier.

While hardware options to control print waste have been available, such as card readers, swipe cards, and print release stations, these have typically been prohibitively expensive and cumbersome.

Printer manufacturers, for their part, often build some control functions into their printers. But these controls are typically limited to their brand or an individual machine, and thus not effective in most school environments, which tend to use multiple printer brands across their networks. Because other software-based solutions aren't native to the Microsoft Windows Operating System commonly used on school print servers, they're also susceptible to software instability.

Both traditional hardware and software-based print control methods, in addition, have often required time-consuming training or the use of expensive outside consultants to fully implement in school settings.

What's been missing is a simple, comprehensive and cost-effective solution to identifying and controlling school printing waste.

Reining in printing waste for 50% annual savings
After ruling out an expensive card reading system that required a print release station at each computer lab, Winthrop University system administrator Craig Sauvigne turned to Print Manager Plus, next generation printer control software that tracks, quotas and reports print usage and costs across the school network.

Made by Software Shelf, a publisher of print and file recovery products used by thousands of schools and universities worldwide, Print Manager Plus not only allows school administrators to restrict printer users by dollar amount, job size, file type, or other specifiers, but also gives them an easy, centralized way to view essentially everything printed on the network, see how much it costs, who's doing it, which printers are used, and so on. After a unique identifier is assigned to each student or user, they're kept apprised of their print status, account balance, and other key information.

Unlike printer software that works on a single machine or just with a specific brand, Print Manager Plus can track, manage, control, and account for the cost

of printing on all printer brands across the school network. As the only purely native Windows printer control software solution, it offers greater stability than non-native Windows options. Because it's licensed by print server and academically priced, each license covers unlimited printers, users, and workstations across the school network.

Sauvigne found the software simple to install on a single print server, and so intuitive that there was virtually no need to train. He set up a $10 per semester printing allowance per student, after which they paid out of pocket for further printing. He assigned color printing a higher cost than black and white, and created custom messages to keep students informed of their printing account status.

"We put up signs in the labs and got the lab techs ready to answer questions, but it really was self-explanatory," says Sauvigne. "The students can print what they want to, but now they have to be conscious of waste or they'll have to pay for it.

To control waste in graphic design areas, Sauvigne is considering using the plotter settings of Print Manager Plus, which would charge on a per inch basis for large format printing. This would motivate students to print photography, blueprints, and oversize art more judiciously.

"By making students accountable for their printing, we've saved about 50% overall in our paper, ink, toner, and printer maintenance costs," estimates Sauvigne. "The software paid for itself in less than a semester, and the savings have helped to offset the costs of opening additional computer labs."

Rowan Trollope, a Vice President at Symantec Corporation, a global leader in infrastructure software, appliances and services, says he isn't surprised by academia's interest in controlling printer waste.

"Just as administrators control a system's security to protect against threats, so should they protect their print environment against an abuse of printing resources," says Trollope, who has reviewed Print Manager Plus. "At Symantec, we've been fixing holes in the Windows operating system for years. In the printing field, Print Manager Plus does a similarly thorough job of extending print controls to networks using the Windows operating system."

Saving $22,000 a year
When teachers were responsible for monitoring students' printing at the King's Academy, a public secondary school in Middlesbrough, United Kingdom, they had difficulty doing so amid their other classroom duties. The results were spiraling printing costs of
24,000 pounds ($45,000) a year and unnecessary classroom distraction.

"The teachers were too busy dealing with students, who'd print on the sly and slip the print outs in their folders," explains Kevin Bowker, an administrator at the King's Academy. "The photos of Lamborghinis, Britney Spears, and other non-academic material printed were costly distractions that we wanted out of the classroom."

Having used Print Manager Plus at a previous school, Bowker brought the software to the King's Academy. "Installation was a matter of clicking a few buttons, and it was up and running," says Bowker. "An installation wizard brought up all my users, groups, and printers. I just set up costs and credits; it was as easy as that."

Among Bowker's favorite controls were the options to restrict printing by color, file type, and file name. "Students are only allowed to print files from the Microsoft Office suite and some CAD/CAM programs," explains Bowker. "We've eliminated the student option of printing JPEG photos, or printing in color. That alone eliminated 30% of our malicious printing overnight."

Though Print Manager Plus has the ability to provide over 80 reports on printing use, Bowker's favorites are history-by-user and most-active-printer. "Students know we have the ability to view what each of them has printed, and to hold them accountable for it," says Bowker. "One student thought it would be funny to send over 700 copies of a picture to one of our printers. Neither he nor his parents thought it was funny when they received the bill!"

"Within two weeks, Print Manager Plus paid for itself and we've been re-investing the savings back into our school," adds Bowker. "We're saving about 12,000 pounds ($22,000) a year, which has allowed us to upgrade our PCs, printers, and more."

As an added benefit, teachers can now focus on teaching rather than "policing the printers," which has improved classroom instruction.

According to Bowker, the printing software's cost accounting capability has also improved staff relations, since administrators no longer feel the need to guard departmental resources to prevent going over budget. "Using the software, school staff can print on any printer in the school, have the output billed to them and allocated to their departments," explains Bowker. "That makes printing more convenient and staff relations more collegial."

David Massaro, Technology Coordinator for Redlands Unified School District in Southern California implemented Print Manager Plus at an elementary school at the request of the principal. Massaro believes the print control technology would be even more useful at the middle and secondary levels, where students tend to overprint without discriminating. He would like to see the technology used district-wide.

"It's too easy to print an electronic document whether it's needed or not," says Massaro. "When schools are trying to stretch their resources, that doesn't make sense."

"Technologies like Print Manager Plus not only make it easy to save tangible resources like paper, ink and toner, but also intangible ones like printer maintenance and tech support," concludes Massaro. "It's a simple way for schools to fulfill their function by role-modeling ecology and social-responsibility."

Print Manager Plus is used by thousands of schools and universities worldwide to control their printing costs up to 50%, including Harvard, Yale, U.C. Berkley, the University of London, and the Los Angeles Unified School District. It is the only third-party software included in Microsoft's Learning Network Manager, and was granted Microsoft's "Solution of the Month" for the Eleventh straight month on the company's Public Sector Website.

For more info in North America or to try Print Manager Plus free for 30 days, go to www.softwareshelf.com and download a free trial version. Call 800-962-2290; fax 727-445-9223; email info@softwareshelf.com. Or write to Software Shelf International, Inc., 601 Cleveland St., Suite #710, Clearwater, FL 33755, United States

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