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MFPs for Capture

Desktop scanners aren't the only option for distributed capture. Multifunction products also play a role.

By Bill DeStefanis

Distributed capture is undergoing an evolution. This shift began when scanning moved from a specialized, production focused operation that is centralized in a single area to creating greater access to capture capabilities at multiple points in an organization. But one important aspect did not change—typically capture still required dedicated scanning devices run by expert operators.

The evolution in distributed capture continues today and is a driving force in the adoption of multifunction peripherals (MFPs). The MFP has brought business scanning to the knowledge worker level, providing a publicly shared device that does not require a dedicated professional to operate it.

This change is transforming business because now the people closest to work processes can choose at what point paper-based information is added to workflows. It is enabling the best practice method to capture paper-based information at the point when it is most convenient to the knowledge worker.

Traditionally, most organizations used only a centralized scanning approach or outsourced service because of the training and scanner technology required. However, as MFPs replaced analog copiers and scanning technology became widespread within the enterprise, a tipping point occurred where dedicated scanners and specially trained personnel were no longer the only feasible method for distributed document capture.

With MFPs, any knowledge worker can add a paper-based document into the correct electronic workflow by simply "copying" it to an enterprise application. This capability is creating a fundamental shift in the options available in document capture.

Drivers Behind MFP Scanning

There are both business and technology drivers behind the rapid adoption of MFP-based capture.

From a business perspective, document capture is all about improving the speed and productivity of business workflows, pushing companies to convert paper-based information into secure digital documents so they can keep up with the pace of e-business processes.

According to Keith Kmetz, vice president, Hardcopy Peripherals Solutions and Services at IDC, "Too often, companies have two work processes tackling the same business task—one electronic workflow moving at Internet speed trailed by a paper-bound process that slows everything down. Organizations can remove this roadblock by converting paper to secure digital documents, and connecting them with the applications and digital workflows that run the business—so all the information needed to complete a task is readily available."

The MFP is ready and able to address these needs. It has been designed to require little or no formal training to operate. Knowledge workers are already comfortable using MFPs for printing, copying, and faxing. Additionally, by tapping MFPs for scanning, this increases the utilization of these multipurpose devices, improving total cost of ownership.

Another important factor is that the MFP is already connected to the corporate computing network. This means individuals can utilize scanning software to send documents to their desktops, fax servers, and business

applications (such as content management and email) right from the MFP. The ability to have real-time integration to business applications is important because it enables scanned information to be immediately available so users can fully participate in a business workflow by bringing in high-value documents at the point of their choosing. They do not have to wait for documents to be captured by someone else. This application integration also increases the number of documents retained for future sharing and long-term storage.

From a technology perspective, document capture software capabilities for MFPs have advanced to the point where they are equal to desktop scanners in providing all the image handling features that users need. These features include:

- Support for multiple file formats including PDF, JPG, and TIFF;
- Scanning at any resolution a user wants up to 600 dpi x 600 dpi;
- Ability to preview a scan job prior to executing it;
- OCR capabilities that convert images into editable text and searchable PDFs;
- Document capture operating environment available in multiple languages;
- Automatic color detection to support scanning of color and black & white pages in the same document; and
- Advanced file compression technologies that reduce file sizes and demands on the network.

Today's MFPs are priced and configured for a range of organizations, from a small business to a large enterprise, enabling companies to select a device appropriate for their business usage. They work with a number of document accounting/cost recovery systems to track scanning and allocate costs as needed throughout the company. This also enables companies to monitor usage trends and make system changes if scanning resources are not optimally deployed.

Best Practices for MFP-based Distributed Capture

MFP-based document scanning augments—not replaces—existing production scanning processes. It brings a strategic added value to scanning options—delivering business scanning capabilities to the document owners themselves.

There are four essential elements to achieving best practices in distributed scanning deployments. They revolve around ease of use, cross-platform scanning, document security, and information technology (IT) control.

Ease of use and productivity are critical factors. MFP scanning software should allow users to create one-step processes where repetitive tasks can be executed automatically, such as scanning a document to a specific repository location (scan-to-HR to manage resumes or scan-to-finance for invoice processing). IT administrators should be able to easily deploy these applications without having to write programs that require ongoing maintenance.

To enable users to complete their scan process quickly, an MFP must support concurrent printing and scanning. Also, users should be able to easily combine scanned documents with electronic documents, such as Web pages and Microsoft Word documents, into a single PDF document.

According to Tony DeLoera, chief technology officer at the law firm Ice Miller, "We deployed an MFP-based capture solution to bring document scanning closer to our users. Critical to success was ease-of-use. We needed a solution where attorneys can get a scanning job done easily, so that

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The Seven Deadly Sins of Copier Security

By Bill DeStefanis

The networked copier that all companies have in the hallway or backroom is no longer the "old school" device most IT managers still assume it to be. On the contrary, it's quickly evolved into a sophisticated computing platform that can grant access into the heart of the network.

Copiers have been reborn as document distribution centers, enabling users to scan paper and send images via email or to, for example, document management, financial, or human resources systems. Integration with business applications allows for efficient distribution, editing, and storage of what was traditionally paper-based information.

However, most networked copiers have not been secured in the same rigorous way as other end points, such as mobile devices and office workstations. In many companies, network-attached copiers could be used to distribute unauthorized documents or even distribute documents using identities that impersonate company executives. IT managers can address this security problem in several ways:

1) *User Authentication:* Set copiers to require network passwords. This basic level of access control prevents non-employees from using the copier and helps ensure corporate control of this asset.
2) *Permissions Authentication:* While password authentication is the first step of security at the copier, it can also be configured to require users to enter passwords to gain access to specific enterprise applications or specific areas within applications, just as if they were entering an application from their network-attached PC.
3) *Document Encryption:* A critical aspect of many government regulations is the process of ensuring data integrity. Document encryption at the copier helps safeguard confidential information before it is transmitted across the network.
4) *Secure Deletion of Temporary Files:* Most copiers automatically keep a record of files that have recently been scanned. If these temporary files are left on the copier, sensitive information can be accessed by unauthorized users. Copiers should be configured to delete these files.
5) *Activity Tracking:* Copiers can be set up to create audit trails to identify who sent what document where and at what time.
6) *Timed Log Out:* Just like a door held open for others after using a passcard, the copier should be set to quickly log a user out when there has been no activity. This helps guard against one user following another and sending or storing documents over the network using the first individual's identity.
7) *Native Integration:* Native integration of enterprise applications with the networked copier makes the device a true client on the network by removing the need for intermediate steps that are often required when organizations use copiers to scan paper-based information directly to enterprise applications. For example, some companies have cobbled together a process allowing them to designate which application a document will be scanned into by using a barcode on a cover sheet. This approach, while nominally effective, allows anyone in the office to pick up a piece of paper carrying a discarded bar code and be granted access to its corresponding application. Native integration, in contrast, allows authorized users to designate where in the application the information should be sent.

With companies spending billions of dollars each year trying to secure networks and applications, they should also consider these simple and inexpensive steps to help close what could be a gaping hole in their information security infrastructures.

they can quickly get on with their business."

Another essential element in facilitating ease-of-use is cross-platform support where the same scanning software is available at all MFPs in the enterprise. This approach enables office workers to use common scanning procedures at any of an organization's networked MFPs regardless of vendor brand. A common scanning software approach also makes it easier for IT personnel to manage multiple devices from different manufacturers.

Looking at document security, even though document scanning capabilities are distributed throughout the organization, the best practice is to extend existing centralized security capabilities to safeguard intellectual capital and conform to government and corporate compliance programs. With MFPs, the business can leverage network connectivity to require user authentication so access destinations and other security rights are all enforced at an individual user level. This allows companies to maintain document audit trails—logging which documents were scanned, when they were scanned, who scanned them, and to whom they were distributed.

At the document level, scanning software can support Adobe PDF permissions that allow organizations to set and apply policies to electronic documents to maintain confidentiality, privacy, and accountability inside and outside the firewall. These capabilities help users manage document policies and prevent unauthorized viewing and tampering by restricting who can open, edit, print, and copy the contents of individual documents.

Network-connect capabilities of MFPs also enable IT system administration best practices. For example, IT administrators can centrally manage scanning capabilities to make available only the features and settings they want users to access—on an individual basis. Also, administrators can centrally maintain the corporate email address book. This way, users can utilize any MFP in the enterprise for scanning and email distribution of documents without delay.

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When Production Scanning Is the Best Option

As previously mentioned, distributed scanning is one option in a complete document capture strategy. It will never replace production scanning.

For example, production scanning is more appropriate for lengthy, high-volume capture jobs that would tie up a device. About 30 people share an MFP in an office, meeting their printing, scanning, copying, and faxing requirements. Ideally, a document scan job at an MFP should take two to three minutes, ensuring that individuals aren't waiting for the resource. Typically, MFP scanning jobs range between one to thirty-five pages with occasional jobs that require more pages. Consistently higher volumes are usually handled through production scanning. Additionally, applications that require extensive document processing, such as content recognition services like check remittance, are best suited for production scanning operations.

MFPs also have physical limitations on the document types they can handle. They work best with standard office documents such as letter, legal, and A4 size pages. Engineering and drafting documents are more appropriately handled by specialized capture devices. Also, high volumes of smaller documents, such as credit card slips, that are processed using a feeder should be addressed with production scanning.

MFP Scanning Drives Improved Productivity

There is a new era today in distributed capture where MFPs have firmly established their place in corporate scanning strategies. Organizations are no longer dependent on dedicated equipment or specialist workers for distributed scanning. A shared MFP device publicly available in the enterprise brings document scanning closer to business processes. This enables knowledge workers to participate fully in workflow processes by sharing vital paper-based information—speeding up those processes and improving productivity by ensuring all the information that is needed is available and can be shared electronically.

Bill DeStefanis is director, Product Management for eCopy, Inc. (www.ecopy.com), a provider of solutions for scan-enabling MFPs.