Organizations of all sizes are struggling with rising IT acquisition, support and maintenance expenses. Topics like cloud computing and mobility dominate business discussions. It is a constant cycle of doing more with less and trying to keep up with the latest technology advancements.

One area that often seems to fall between the cracks is printer and copier management. Many company networks have strung together independent copiers, fax machines, network printers, wireless printers and even personal printers. With IT departments already overtaxed keeping the data center running, integrating and supporting every mobile device under the sun and securing it all, they often fail to track and properly service all of their printing machines.

Simply put: It is an environment wrought with inefficiency, downtime and waste. That was the situation at the YMCA in Philadelphia & Vicinity—until a managed print services solution was implemented.

Getting Started

The YMCA of Philadelphia & Vicinity is a community service organization that promotes positive values through programs that help to build strong kids, strong families and strong communities.

Over the years, the YMCA of Philadelphia & Vicinity has grown to include a central office, 10 branches and 55 program sites throughout the Greater Philadelphia area. It is the largest provider of childcare in Pennsylvania, serving 5,000 each day in quality childcare programs; as well as serving:

• 9,000 teens;
• providing swim instruction and water safety programs to more than 28,000 men, women and children; and
• offering adult education programs to more than 1,300 individuals.

No Handle On Printing Costs

What the YMCA of Philadelphia & Vicinity didn't have was a handle on its printing costs, usage or inventory, which was spread across all of its locations, according to IT Director Mark Morrison.

"We have 11 different locations—one central office and 10 other branches with pools and fitness clubs through the community," Morrison said. "Each location is connected to the network and all our services were centralized including applications, networking, printing and all the voice communications and telecommunications."

The not-for-profit organization has about 2,100 employees; those employees are supported by just three full-time IT staffers, who also provide helpdesk and operations support.

"Our IT staff has a lot of competing priorities," Morrison said. "We couldn't get a handle on our overall printing costs. We knew approximately what we were spending on a monthly basis on office supplies by a number of different vendors but we didn't have an accurate inventory of all our printers," he said. "We didn't know how many printers we had. We didn't know how many pages we printed, and our IT staff was spending a lot of time responding to broken printers."

Morrison admits that they just "weren't doing a very good job in this area." At times, some printers would be offline and unavailable for a week or more, awaiting troubleshooting, repair or new supplies. "It just wasn't going to be a top priority from our IT group," Morrison said, because of more pressing priorities.

Indeed, the IT team focused mainly on networking and server infrastructure services, making sure the network was always up and the servers were running applications efficiently, and providing helpdesk support. "We just couldn't catch up with all of those other pieces so it was highly unlikely we were going to catch up on the printing side," he said.

Time for Managed Print Services

Realizing the inefficiencies and waste, Morrison decided to look into the benefits of bringing in a solution provider with specific expertise in managed print services. He first got the idea at his previous job at a hospital.

While working for the hospital, Morrison was approached by Allied Document Solution and Services (ADS-S), an IT service provider in Swedesboro, N.J. ADS-S had offered a managed print services proposal to that hospital. Morrison fully supported the concept but couldn't get the various groups within the hospital to agree on the project so it was ultimately never implemented. When the YMCA hired Morrison, he decided to reach out to ADS-S owner and founder Rob Richardson.

The YMCA of Philadelphia & Vicinity had familiar issues that plague many sprawling organizations, according to Richardson. "They had multiple model types and brands including Dell, HP, Brother and Lexmark. They also had different brands of copiers such as Panasonic and Kyocera. We did a complete assessment, established what they had in the field and their current costs. They also had a lot of desktop printers. It [that existing, unmanaged infrastructure] was very expensive for them and they didn't really know it," he said.

After an extensive vetting process that began in January of 2011, the YMCA rewarded a managed print services contract to ADS-S in July of the same year. The agreement term covers 36 months. Initially ADS-S

replaced seven machines and over the course of the past 11 months installed an additional 13 printers. "The company is currently managing and supporting 110 printers for YMCA of Philadelphia & Vicinity and will be adding additional units throughout the balance of the agreement," according to Richardson.

Value of Managed Print Services

"In addition to the equipment upgrades, the real value ADS-S is providing is managing the repairs, maintenance and product lifecycle management of all of these machines," said Morrison.

"The initial piece was just for our monthly lease costs around lease equipment. We were able to cut our monthly lease expenses by half. That is a big savings off the bat," Morrison said. "The second piece was to eliminate our soft costs of IT and the time it took for our own folks at each location that had to get page counts from the equipment. The measurement on this is a little tougher but based on our initial survey of how much time people were spending on this and the time logged through IT, we are saving about 20 hours of staff time per week. And with an IT staff of three, that is big as well."

Another benefit is having total transparency into its printing costs, allowing the organization to manage its expenses better and give its branch leaders more insight into their monthly spending, according to Morrison. ADS-S has automated and consolidated purchasing and the YMCA receives just one bill a month now, he said adding that they also receive a quarterly report of all activity to share with each location.

"Initially, they didn't know what the cost was from all these different sites. We have been able to give them an overall picture of everything they are doing," Richardson said. "We also provide them a report every quarter to show what is going on at each location and their budget

for each of these sites. They just didn't know their true costs to support all those devices," he said.

Added Morrison, "We have moved to a fairly predictable cost model on a monthly basis and have the data to make more informed decisions."

Corey Simpson, director of member communities at CompTIA said many organizations are facing the same challenges experienced by YMCA of Philadelphia & Vicinity. Hence, there's growing interest in managed print services across the IT channel.

Indeed, roughly 30 percent of the world's top managed services providers (MSPs) now offer managed print services, up from about 20 percent in 2010, according to MSPmentor, a web site that tracks managed services.

CompTIA has created a managed print education website to get more users interested and motivated in managed print services. The CompTIA Managed Print Services Community focuses on the creation of standards and initiatives specific to the managed print services industry. The group was created to provide networking opportunities among industry thought leaders, as well as to create beneficial tools and programs for managed print services providers. For more information on the CompTIA Managed Print Services Community, please contact us at communities@comptia.org.