Print Audit Facilities Manager:
The Difference Between Print and Device Management

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For printer, MFP, and copier dealers who charge customers for the number of pages they print, getting an accurate page count every month can be a challenge. So can the responsibility of maintaining the machines – from making sure they don't run out of toner to knowing when a paper feed problem needs fixing. Print Audit Facilities Manager, now in its second version, can make both jobs much easier.

Print Audit is probably best known for its Print Audit suite, a print management system that aims to reduce costs by analyzing and managing print workflow. So it's not surprising that the company is careful to draw the distinction between print management and device management, which is what Facilities Manager offers.

As a remote device management tool, Facilities Manager focuses on individual devices. Dealers can use a Web browser to check the status of any device. They can also define alerts to automatically send as emails when it's time to order more toner, for example, or to replace a fuser kit.

This broad brushstroke description makes Facilities Manager sound much like HP's Web Jetadmin and similar programs. And, indeed, it competes with those programs to some degree. However, it also differs from them in significant ways, and to the extent that it overlaps with them, it offers some important advantages.

Print Audit Attracts OEMs

Historically, most of Print Audit's customers have been office equipment dealers and original equipment manufactures (OEMs). Facilities Manager was designed to solve two key problems for that universe of users: meter reading (getting the right page count) and supplies fulfillment. It's designed primarily to let dealers read status information remotely; generate reports for billing without having to laboriously enter each number into a spreadsheet or accounting program; and also keep track of supplies status so dealers can replenish toner or other supplies as needed.

Because of the focus on dealers rather than IT professionals, Facilities Manager was designed for ease of use. The options are largely self-explanatory, and the screens offer a consistent structure throughout. It takes only a few minutes working with the program to begin to feel comfortable with it and know where to find choices on screen.

Set up is straightforward, although it could be time consuming for a dealer who has a large number of customer sites to track. Dealers don't have to install anything on their own systems. The program runs entirely on Print Audit's server, which also stores the data for each printer. According to Print Audit, the site is fully secure, protected by the same security features that online banking sites use.

Setting Up

Dealers can register on the Print Audit Web site for a 90-day free trial. Print Audit then sets up an account and sends an email with a link to the Facilities Manager site, login information, and set up instructions.

Set up starts with choosing the Administration tab on screen, choosing the Customers menu choice, and then choosing the Create New Customer button and entering contact information for the customer the dealer is setting up. There's
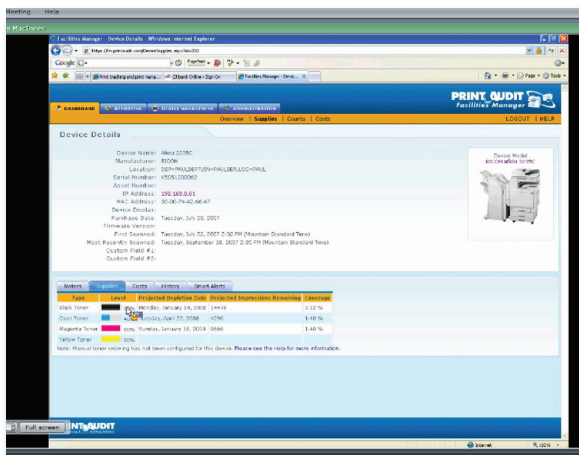

Users can check the status of devices with Print Audit's Facilities Manager.

also a Create New Site button for customers with multiple sites.

The next step is to install the Information Collection Engine (ICE) utility on one computer at each customer site. The computer should be one that's on all the time, so it can continually report back to the Facilities Manager server. Dealers can install ICE themselves, or let Facilities Manager send an email with instructions and an activation code directly to the customer. The actual installation involves running a fully automated installation program and then entering the code.

Once ICE is installed at a given site, it will automatically find all the devices on the network and send the list to the Facilities Manager server. The next time the dealer logs on, he or she will see a message that the there are new devices, and can pick which one to track. After installing ICE on a computer at BERTL, for example, I was able to
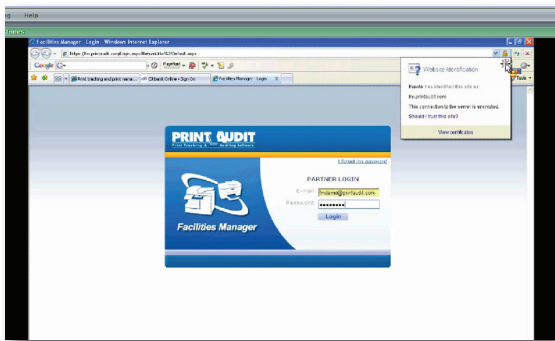
Dealers can register for a free 90-day trial of Print Audit.

log onto the Web site, choose the devices to track, and see all the information for those devices, including, for example, the lifetime count of all pages printed for each printer and MFP. The same information is immediately available for including in the menu driven reports.

Additional Features

Additional set up steps include defining cost profiles (base price, monthly allowance, and cost per page for additional pages) and alerts for each device. Here again, the process is straightforward and relies on reasonably self-explanatory on-screen choices. The program includes features to help speed up the process, like letting dealers define an alert profile and then apply it to more than one printer.

Dealers also have the flexibility to set some alerts, like a low toner warning, to come to them, but set others, like a paper jam, to go to a support person at the customer's site. One unusual feature worth mention predicts when the toner will run out. The more usual alternative – which dealers can use instead – sends a low toner warning for an arbitrary percentage of toner that may last only days at one company but weeks at another.

One key issue for remote management programs is whether they can retrieve all the data available. As anyone who has ever used a program like Web Jetadmin knows, programs from any manufacturer retrieve a lot more details from that manufacturer's own devices than from devices built by some one else.

The reason for the difference is that each manufacturer knows where to find the information in their own printers' management information base (MIB). But, they don't know where to find the same data in MIBs from other companies. Print Audit says that its relationships with individual manufacturers have lead to contractual arrangements for getting MIB information from all the major players in the business arena.

This gives Facilities Manager a tremendous advantage, since it can report the maximum amount of information for all the devices a dealer's customers have, regardless of manufacturer. These contractual arrangements are also the basis for Print Audit's guarentee that any information Facility Manager reports will be correct.

One last area that demands mention is Print Audit's emphasis on support – both for dealers and their customers. (Dealers have the option of giving customers access to their own information.) Print Audit doesn't use voice mail and says it always has someone available to answer the phone during business hours (10:15 AM to 7 PM ET). Although it's not a statistically valid sampling, I can vouch for the quality of support for the one problem I ran into. Tech support answered the phone immediately, understood the problem the first time I explained it, and solved it quickly.

Pricing for Facility Manager depends on the tracking level a dealer chooses for each device, at $1 per month for each device set to track the least amount of data, $2 per month for the middle level, and $3 per month for the highest level. Even at the highest price, dealers should see a significant savings over other choices for tracking the information. That in itself would make Facilities Manager worth looking at, even if it weren't so easy to use. And given the 90-day free trial period, any dealer or VAR who needs to track the status of customers' devices has no good excuse for not checking out the program.
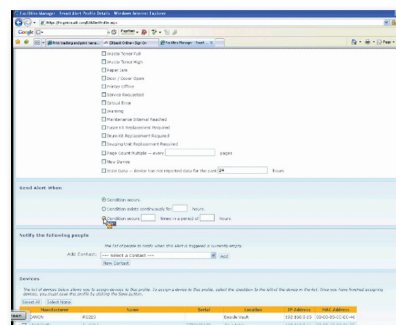
With Print Audit, users can set up email alerts to notify them of device changes such as low toner.