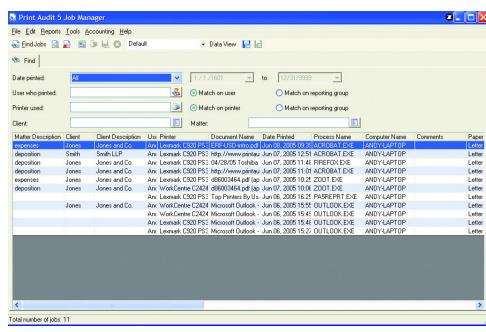# SoftSpot

Getting *Print Information* from the Source

There are two ways to gather printer inventory and usage statistics from network devices. One approach targets the printer/MFP device itself, collecting information stored in the on-board SNMP database. Armed with a laptop or perhaps a USB memory stick, network technicians vacuum up data across the enterprise LAN. Network queries — whether performed sequentially or through multi-casts — probe and then retrieve page count, color usage, job, and device setting data.

One major problem arises: the proverbially directly-connected, non-network desktop inkjet printers won't be detected. And one minor: non-standard, proprietary device databases may not be accessible.

With Print Audit 5, administrators track highly granular job information that's unavailable using SNMP-based methods.

But besides these caveats, there's some information that is simply impossible to capture: job specific fields, such as application name, document name, or host computer. The printer database is after all non-transactional: it is just tallying statistics, rather than logging each print job.

To track jobs at a greater level of detail, you'll have to use a technique based on going to the source, the printer driver on the sender's computer. In this architecture, a resident client application taps into the print stream generated by the application. That's the software model that Calgary-based Print Audit has built its business on. Developing print tracking and auditing software since 1998, Print Audit has experienced amazing growth in the last two years with its namesake product.

IT directors may squawk at having to install its direct monitoring client

software on individual PCs and perhaps voice other concerns about degrading desktop performance. But the Print Audit software has its own mass deployment module, and the passive client-side software won't affect PC productivity.

There's also a key side benefit to embedded monitoring. Through a pop-up on the desktop display, Print Audit has the option to feed back to users the cost of their print jobs. Print Audit's newest version 5 software has added the ability to detect job page lengths and, if need be, enforce page limit policies. IT managers can decide on how to phase in page limits: first a pop-up with a warning to get the message out, followed later by job cancellation. In any case, using its feedback mechanism, Print Audit has been successful in changing behavior of enterprise users and ultimately reducing the hard cost of printing.
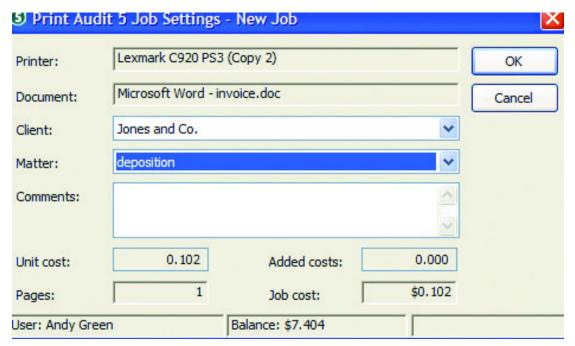
According to John MacInnes, Print Audit's CEO and president, his company started building traditional print auditing and tracking software for cost recovery. Admittedly, that's a well-trod path, with many software products already on the market to let law, financial, architectural, and other service firms bill-back printing costs. But with Print Audit's client-based monitoring approach, users can track document flow more deeply and across a larger range of printers than with competitive software.

The Print Audit 5 software that BERTL installed lived up to this product's claims. We found that we had the core features working within 20 minutes of loading the CD into our environment. As promised, the client-side embed was unobtrusive, showing up as an icon in the Windows notification area and only

iTchat

Print Audit's client pop-up can force entry of account codes for client chargeback. In non-cost recovery situations, the displayed print costs changes user behavior.

launching itself — if configured — after a job was printed. We were able to speedily customize the field data collection. For our test, we added new billing fields — up to five custom ones can be configured — thereby forcing users to enter charge-back codes. Report generation was equally straightforward, with many pre-existing templates, and new formats were easily managed with the software's wizard.

Recovering costs through charge back is still important to Print Audit's business. "It is a very large part of our sales," MacInnes said. Print Audit, though has moved beyond just cost recovery applications. The other pieces that they focus on are "reduce", as in cost reduction, and volume analysis. MacInnes said copier dealers in particular have been heavy users of the analysis function. As a sales tool, Print Audit lets them come to a customer site to understand inefficiencies in document processing and

secondarily, to learn who their competitors are.

PrintAudit has a special package, called the Reseller Assessment Program (RAP), that lets dealers use Print Audit 5 on a temporary basis, between 30 and 60 days. RAP tracks 25 fields of print data, which can then be used to perform in-depth analysis of print volumes and work flow, and to create custom reports and graphs for variety of uses. Backed up by the job detail reports, which shows the transactional fields not available from the device's own database, dealers can propose better document polices, and, of course, open the discussion to sell customers on more devices. According to MacInnes, dealers use this detailed transaction information to "become more intimate with their customer's business."

For example, one critical piece of data that is tracked by Print Audit is the number of copies. With Print

Audit's reports, dealers can drill into a high-volume printer's job distribution. If most of the volume is made up of single copy jobs generated by many users, a second machine can be justified to reduce user waiting time, rather than replacing the existing device with a faster one.

It's the who-what-where of document workflow that is truly critical for both dealers and their enterprise customers. MacInnes was surprised to learn that information captured can even lead to suggestions not directly related to printers. Talking to customers, MacInnes discovered that businesses were looking at the application name generating the document—a field that is always captured by Print Audit—to decide whether to cancel licenses for software that is infrequently used. That's a result he hadn't anticipated. Print Audit also tracks the document name. "It's fantastic for banks and for security — Sarbanes-Oxley and HIPAA," MacInnes said.

MacInnes is very excited about the cost reduction enhancements in Print Audit 5: "It's the piece that's really getting a lot of attention and that's new for the copier dealers." Cost reduction or "rules-based" printing, as it is sometimes called, uses software to migrate print jobs to more efficient devices. With Print Audit, dealers or users can configure Print Audit 5 to monitor

color or page volumes, presenting a pop-up message when limit condition is triggered. They also can script a prompt to recommend printing the longer length job to their more efficient MFP, rather than the default, which in many cases is a store-bought inkjet with higher operational costs.

Dealers make out by capturing more page volume and enterprises pay out less in toner for their inkjet bandits. It's a win all around. ■

Print Audit 5 lets dealers or users configure rules to track page length. The rule is triggered when users decide to print to high-cost desktop printers rather than low-cost (and higher revenue) MFPs.

Success Story:

Lowering Health Costs

Florida-based AvMed Health Plans provides Employer Group HMO, Point-of-Service, and Medicare HMO. With over 200 output devices — mostly HP — and offices spread out over six cities, AvMed knew they had a problem tracking printing costs. But they didn't see an effective way to monitor printer usage in its geographically-dispersed document environment.

Then along came solutions integrator DocuManagement Consulting Services. DocuManagement deployed Print Audit 4 and its client-based probes onto all of AvMed's computers. The software's integrated network install utility made quick work of the rollout. DocuManagement then performed a 30-day silent analysis on approximately 700 employees. By collecting data on a transactional basis, this analysis would answer the nitty gritty details of who is doing the printing and what kinds of documents are being turned into hard-copy

Ten days into the analysis, Bob Hagen, a DCS managing partner, started to look at the results. "The volumes

were so much greater than expected that AvMed insisted the program must be mistaken," Hagan noted. "But we double-checked the Print tracking software and continued to gather data." After another 10 days, Hagan came back with similar results. Hagan found that AvMed was still highly skeptical, but "they began to accept that if this was what they were printing, then they really didn't know what their costs were."

Examining the reports produced by Print Audit, DCS discovered several workflow issues with AvMed's printing, copying and faxing policies. Their solution was to replace most of AvMed's old printers and copiers with 26 new devices, greatly increasing AvMed's overall document output efficiency. "By implementing the solution developed by DCS, AvMed Health Plans is going to save over $500,000 in hard dollar expenses," said Scott Cantin, Director of Support Services for AvMed Health Plans. And with more efficient usage of resources, Print Audit also lowered supply expenses by over 40 percent. ■

iTchat