Case Study: Hamilton County, Indiana

PrinterLogic delivers simplified, streamlined printer driver management and eliminates print servers for Hamilton County.

Challenges

- The county government was faced with the prospect of replacing its aging print servers or finding a new print management solution.

- Driver deployment and printer installation were cumbersome tasks and rarely went smoothly.

- The organization lacked detailed insight into its print environment, including consumables usage and departmental printing trends.

Results

- The organization was able to eliminate its primary print server completely while gaining ease of management and functionality.

- Both administrators and end-users now enjoy greater ease of use and increased uptime.

- Through PrinterLogic's integrated reporting functionality, the county government intends to monitor print activity and identify cost-cutting opportunities.

The local government of Hamilton County, Indiana, located in the very heart of the Hoosier State, is responsible for more than 300,000 citizens who reside within an area of just over 400 square miles. Like many governmental bodies, this organization comprises a mix of elected officials and civil employees who are tasked with carrying out the intricate legislative, executive and judicial functions that provide fundamental services and infrastructure to the entire county—which, as it happens, was recently considered one of the fastest-growing in the United States.

Owing to its extensive purview, the organization is highly distributed and includes multiple departments dispersed throughout roughly ten locations countywide.

"Along with our main location, we cover buildings like the judicial center and the historic courthouse, which has the recorder, the assessor and the auditor. We also cover the outlying offices like the parks department and the highway department," says Tim Wuwert, who handles desktop support for the organization. "It's the whole county, so, of course, it's pretty diverse."

To meet its intensive printing needs, Hamilton County was operating two print servers—one primary, one auxiliary—that in turn serviced around 250 networked printers along with plotters and photocopiers. But ongoing problems such as driver conflicts, difficult printer installation and sudden downtime prompted the organization's network engineers to begin looking at alternatives when the time came to replace the aging print servers.

"The server was so hard to maintain," says Chris Mertens, Director of Information Technology for Hamilton County. "We had to really work to make sure it stayed up otherwise it impacted all of our users. That involved some big challenges. And because it kept going down unexpectedly, we had to do backups of it all the time too."

Mertens and his team first heard about PrinterLogic when one of their colleagues returned from a tradeshow. They installed a trial version of the print management solution, liked what they experienced, and then went looking for competing solutions.

"I went and tried to find something that did what PrinterLogic does. I contacted some of our vendors that we work with on the print side and none of them could provide me with anything that offered the same features—or features that worked as well."

Challenge #1—Print Server Replacement and Elimination

The Hamilton County government had more than 1,000 users and 250 printing devices tied to a central print server running Windows Server 2003. The server had never been entirely problem-free, but it was beginning to show its age through sudden outages, slow printing and driver incompatibilities.

"We had a lot of issues trying to accommodate the 32- and 64-bit drivers," Mertens says. "When we rolled out a new driver, we always had to see if it caused problems in case we had to roll back. And when the print server went down, we were totally in hot water because no one could print."

Solution

Rather than invest significant funds into replacing the print server hardware and software only to risk dealing with an updated version of the same issues, Mertens and his team wanted an alternative solution that would "work like a print server"—that is to say, a solution that would provide the same functionality but without the drawbacks.

"With PrinterLogic, we got all that functionality plus a lot of other benefits as a side product," he says, citing features like print job reporting, ease of use, stability and improved driver management. As a result, the organization was able to eliminate its primary print server and intends to eliminate its remote auxiliary print server as well. The Hamilton County print environment will then be serviced by a single instance of PrinterLogic.

> "PrinterLogic has made it easier not only for us but for the end-users as well. If they need a printer, they can just go in through the web browser and add it themselves without any intervention from us."

Challenge #2—Simplified, Streamlined Print Management

As just one of many aspects of print management, the protracted process of printer installation was representative of how complicated and inefficient the organization's print environment had become.

"To install a printer, you had to go onto a user's computer and put in the server name, then it would bring up the printer list. And even then, to locate a printer, you could say that it was in the prosecutor's office, but if you didn't know exactly where it was, you might have been left guessing or you'd have to walk over to it to see what the number was," says Wuwert.

Theoretically, end-users did have the ability to install their own printers, but "we usually did it for them," he says, to ensure it was done properly. That process ate up time and support resources that could have been directed elsewhere.

Solution

"PrinterLogic has made it easier not only for us but for the end-users as well," says Wuwert. "If they need a printer, they can just go in through the web browser and add it themselves without any intervention from us. I mean, people don't have to type in the server name anymore and then go through a list looking for a particular printer. All of the printers for that floor and that building are right there."

Aside from the obvious front-facing improvements, Wuwert notes that admins can now use PrinterLogic's centralized management console to update drivers from anywhere in the organization and have the changes applied instantly across the entire print environment.

"You can go right into the web interface and click to update a driver and have it update for everybody, even though it's a local [direct IP] connection. It's great."

Challenge #3—Print Auditing and Reporting

Mertens says that his IT staff "really wanted additional insight into our print environment that we weren't getting" with print servers. Unusually, this wasn't functionality that the organization actively sought in a new print management solution from the outset but rather a feature the team discovered to be useful after installing PrinterLogic.

Solution

"Once I saw how well PrinterLogic worked, that was enough to show me that there's obviously more value than how easy it is. There's additional insight we can gain into what's happening with our printers," Mertens says. As a result, Hamilton County will begin exploring and implementing PrinterLogic's print activity reporting with a view to optimization and efficiencies.

"From my perspective, the reports that we can pull from usage and sort it by printer, by department, that'll be useful information. Being able to push that usage data out to the departments—that can be a powerful thing if we see high or what we think might be excessive utilization. Pointing that out is going to be pretty significant for us."

Conclusion and Savings Summary

Mertens says that the ease of use has been a pleasure for admins as well as end-users, resulting in fewer service desk calls and far less time spent managing the print environment in an active, hands-on fashion. Soon all 1,100 users will be migrated to PrinterLogic and the second print server will be eliminated.

"I still can't get over how it works exactly the way they said it would," Wuwert adds.