Case Study: Physician Partners of America

PrinterLogic's serverless print solution enables highly distributed, rapidly expanding healthcare provider to continue offering first-rate patient care atop a scalable printing platform for acquisition-based growth.

Challenges

- The print environment's consolidated, server-based infrastructure compounded the impact of rogue drivers, leading to a "Wild West" printing landscape.

- Enterprise-wide changes to the computing infrastructure posed the same hurdles as any large-scale migration.

- The company's steady expansion through acquisitions necessitates ongoing assimilation of varied remote locations into the IT infrastructure.

Results

- PrinterLogic's common driver repository and centralized management turned disorder into standardization and increased systemwide stability.

- Migrations to a terminal-server RDS environment and later a Parallels VDI solution have been smoother owing to their seamless integration with PrinterLogic.

- Multiple PrinterLogic features (e.g., self-service installation portal, effortless profile management) have created the ideal printing platform for acquisition-based growth.

Physician Partners of America (PPOA) was established in 2013 by a physician turned entrepreneur with a view to providing patients with a safe, supportive healthcare experience. The organization offers care including pain management, orthopedics and minimally invasive laser spine surgery along with AAAHC-accredited ambulatory surgery centers and a full complement of laboratory services.

The company also has a genuine desire to help combat the national crisis of opioid addiction. By offering interventional solutions, PPOA has succeeded in guiding patients who suffer from chronic pain toward alternatives to long-term opioid medication, such as interventional pain management and surgery.

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This approach to care has resonated with patients across Texas, Florida and California. In just six years, PPOA grew from one clinic with three employees in 2013 to a multi-state company with 35 locations and more than 600 employees.

As an ambitious and future-oriented organization, Physician Partners of America recognized that at least one legacy technology was holding it back: print servers.

"We are a technologically progressive company, but we're still not off paper," says Justin Beebe, a systems analyst for PPOA. "We can't get away from it in the medical world. It's very difficult to do. We're still dealing with paper charts, particularly at our surgery centers. We're dealing with patient records all on paper. Then you look around our corporate office, and we've got our internal billing department, which uses paper to print paper claims."

To provide these essential print capabilities to its medical, billing and administrative staff, PPOA started out using a single consolidated print server. But as the company expanded and became more geographically distributed, the limitations of server-based printing quickly became apparent. Printer provisioning, driver management, EMR compatibility and print availability all suffered.

When IT staff who had prior experience with PrinterLogic joined PPOA, they recommended eliminating the central print server and migrating to PrinterLogic's next-generation serverless printing infrastructure. The organization implemented PrinterLogic in 2017 as an immediate solution to PPOA's printer-deployment and print-management issues, as well as a scalable platform for future evolution and growth.

"Currently we have a farm of terminal servers that a lot of our staff use for the bulk of their daily work. Everything they do, they log into this RDP session of a remote desktop, and they're handling everything through there. We've got their printers all set up on there, and PrinterLogic was definitely a lifesaver in setting that up," Beebe says.

Since migrating to PrinterLogic, there is almost no area of PPOA's print environment that it has not changed for the better—from end-user installation and automated IP-based printer deployments to limiting unnecessary color printing and enforcing driver standardization across its 260-printer fleet.

Challenge #1—Standardizing Drivers to Increase System-Wide Stability

Beebe compares PPOA's pre-PrinterLogic period to the "Wild West."

"We just had drivers everywhere," he says. "If somebody had a new printer that they'd brought in—maybe it was in a clinic we had just acquired or somebody had this one printer from home that they really wanted to use—you'd just end up with that printer in the environment. To get them working, somebody would pop in an install disc, and then you end up with a rogue driver out there, an unsupported driver that's just not playing well."

Issues with rogue drivers didn't just amount to general untidiness. At least one of these drivers caused ongoing problems with the EMR software that extended beyond printing. In its most severe form, physicians and other medical staff were unable to log or even view patient notes. As a remedy, if only a temporary one, the entire terminal server would have to be rebooted.

"Everyone from our front-desk staff all the way to the CEO of our company were experiencing this. We had doctors and medical assistants basically trying to pull up patients' records just so they could provide healthcare, and the EMR software would just freeze with no real indication what was wrong."

Solution

Because PrinterLogic provides a unique combination of direct-IP printing with centralized management, admins are able to monitor and control the entire print environment from a single pane of glass. Drivers in particular are stored in a common repository and can easily be disabled to troubleshoot incompatibilities.

In PPOA's case, PrinterLogic's simplified driver management was able to help them address this serious, productivity-sapping issue and restore not just print availability but uninterrupted EMR availability to their entire organization.

"PrinterLogic made troubleshooting a lot easier, and now the problem has all but vanished," he says. "For the rogue drivers specifically, it was easy to eliminate them from our system. Once we identify a driver that's causing problems, we can go through our entire list of printers in PrinterLogic and make sure that driver's no longer in use anywhere. We can remove it from the repository and eliminate the problem at the source."

Now that the unexplained freezing is fixed, help-desk call volume has dropped. End-user attitudes toward IT, where Beebe notes that "perception is reality," are likewise much more favorable.

> "Before working with PrinterLogic, I'd never seen such a holistic, all-in-one management system for printing. Until you've seen it and used it, you don't know what you're missing."

Challenge #2—Establishing a Future-Proof Print Environment

It's no exaggeration to say that every organization wants to have the optimal computing environment in place for its end users. Much of that involves being able to migrate to a new solution in response to internal and industry-wide changes.

What organizations often find, however, is that certain components of their IT infrastructure—such as their printing and print-management solution—are preventing them from migrating smoothly and efficiently to more suitable, up-to-date solutions.

Beebe says that PPOA recently began transitioning from its datacenter-based terminal-server environment to Parallels RAS, a process that has naturally raised the kinds of questions about the changes that any large-scale migration might entail.

"It's very similar to Citrix, so it's another VDI or thin-client deployment, but it makes it look more like the programs are running on your local workstation. When it comes to printers, we haven't been leveraging printer redirection on our terminal servers, so this transition is kind of making us tackle things from a different angle. Our ultimate goal is to get rid of our current VDI environment entirely."

Solution

PrinterLogic's seamless integration with any environment, including tricky VDI and RDP setups, has enabled PPOA to make fundamental changes to its IT infrastructure while providing its end users with highly available print capabilities. In many ways, the end-users' printing experience is largely unchanged, even as the computing environment around them is transformed.

"PrinterLogic was pretty instrumental in our transition over to the thin-client Parallels system that we have now. Now it's a more seamless thin-client deployment where it's only the application we're deploying, not the full desktop environment," he says.

The serverless printing solution's direct-IP paradigm has brought additional benefits. By keeping print jobs between the clients and the printers, PrinterLogic reduces the data-heavy print traffic that can tax a WAN connection, and it's even helped PPOA derive additional value from its client-side infrastructure.

"We're doing full printer redirection with the Parallels environment, and it's working out really well. It means that we're distributing all the work of printing among the local workstations. I feel like we're actually getting what we're paying for now, because before they were really just dummy terminals. We're finally leveraging the full potential of the hardware that we bought."

Challenge #3—Creating a Platform for Acquisition-Based Growth

"One of the problems that we face as an organization is with the acquisition of new printers," says Beebe. "Because of the nature of our business, we're constantly acquiring more and more clinics, or we're buying these independent sources and then making them part of our systems, and they all have their own legacy software suites."

And when he says "legacy," he means it. One newly acquired clinic was using EMR software that has since entered the Smithsonian Museum as one of the first of its kind.

Integrating and standardizing new, distant locations can be a complex process under any circumstances, but assimilating the print environment has typically been one of its tougher aspects. If that location has a mix of printer makes and models tightly interwoven with existing applications and workflows, it can complicate the process even further, hindering end users' productivity and their ability to provide a high level of customer service in the meantime.

Solution

Multiple PrinterLogic features make the post-acquisition integration of new locations a more seamless process.

Its self-service printer installation portal, for example, empowers users who might be unfamiliar with newly configured infrastructure to identify and install nearby printers with a single click. Its common driver repository enables the swift standardization of printer drivers. Its centralized admin console allows admins to easily create and replicate profile settings across the entire environment. And PrinterLogic's serverless solution works alongside everything from cutting-edge to legacy software.

PPOA has made use of all of these features along with PrinterLogic's advanced printer deployments. Using this mechanism, admins can automatically deploy specific printers to end users based on highly configurable criteria (e.g., IP address, location within a building)—and without having to rely on GPOs or scripts.

"As soon as we get a new facility, we're able to go in there, forklift a business off of their old hardware and put our own in. It's so much easier with PrinterLogic. We can pull up the admin page, and just say, 'Here, you've got your clinic's printers now.' We don't need to go around to each computer and install those printers one by one," says Beebe.

"That's where the acquisition and deployment model really becomes a win for us, because we've already got these driver profiles created. It's 'automagic.'"

Conclusion and Savings Summary

From an ROI standpoint, the most obvious gain for Physician Partners of America has been time. Whether it stems from its efficiency in the acquisition process, the increase in overall print availability or the ease of printer installation for admins and end users alike, PrinterLogic has saved countless hours that would otherwise have been spent on print management.

"Our volume now for printer problems is pretty low. Super low, in fact," says Beebe. "And we've probably turned what used to be a three-or four-minute phone call for setting up a printer into a twenty-second phone call. I walk end users through one time using the portal, and after that they're pretty much self-sufficient to add a new or a different printer. It makes things super easy for us."

The hours recouped through PrinterLogic have given Beebe and the IT team the luxury of focusing on other areas of the print environment that have the potential to save even more time and costs in the long run.

"In conjunction with the new Parallels roll-out, one thing that we're able to get a finer grasp on is color versus black-and-white printing. The ability to spin up two profiles in PrinterLogic—one black and white, one color—is something we're starting to leverage more and more, so we can deploy those to two different people [using] the same printer," he says, adding that PPOA is also now looking into leveraging PrinterLogic for the added security of badge printing.

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