

Choosing the RIGHT DEVICE Management Solution

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If you are a dealer or VAR and you haven't heard by now that remote meter reading and supplies management solutions can benefit your business, then don't bother reading any further.

Most dealers and VARs are aware that remote meter reading and supplies management solutions can benefit their business and provide a value-add for their customers.

However, there seem to be dozens of these solutions available today and many appear to perform the same functions.

How does one decide which device management solution is right for them?

Despite the similarities on the surface, the accuracy, reliability and power of device management solutions will vary greatly from vendor to vendor. Choosing the wrong solution can result in lost customers. So let's examine the different types of device management tools that are available and the steps that can be taken to ensure that the best solution is chosen.

OEM VS. THIRD-PARTY SOLUTIONS

Most of the major OEMs have their own device management solutions, some of which are available for free. For example, Ricoh has @Remote, Canon offers its dealers imageWARE Enterprise Management Console (EMC) and of course, just about everyone has heard of HP's WebJet Admin. OEM solutions can perform many useful functions: firmware upgrades, device configuration, and driver installations. However, their meter reading and supplies management capabilities can be limited – particularly in mixed device environments. OEM device management solutions cannot collect detailed meter readings and toner levels from their competitor's devices. Some OEM solutions are also limited to specific device models and therefore will only be suitable in a limited number of client sites. Given that there are some limitations, it is recommended that they are used in conjunction with a third-party solution, which will offer a broader feature set and support a wider range of print devices. ➔

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CHOOSING A THIRD-PARTY SOLUTION

Most third-party device management systems will offer similar core functions such as meter reads, service alerts and reporting. However, these solutions were not created equal and their features should be examined closely before a decision is made.

◆ METER READS

Accuracy is critical

While device management solutions are able to gather meter reads to some extent, how accurately they perform this task is critical to the success of your cost per copy program. Remember, the fastest way to lose credibility with your customers is to charge them incorrectly.

Again, there are very few device management systems that can accurately capture data from all of the major OEM's devices. While most vendors can capture life counts, they may not be able to consistently distinguish between color and black & white prints. This is due to the fact that the information required to read these meters is proprietary and kept in a database within the devices. The data can only be dependably accessed if the OEM has given the software vendor this private information.

There are two ways that you can confirm that a device management vendor has extensive device support: First, ask them if they have established relationships with all of the OEMs, and second, be sure to try before you buy.

◆ SERVICE ALERTS

Must be highly filterable

Service alerts are designed to notify dealers of critical issues that can affect device usability. They can also inform you of less critical issues that can be indicative of a potential problem. For example, an email notification can automatically be sent out when a paper jam occurs.

The device management system you choose should have advanced filtering options that let you limit notifications to those which are

Type	Level	Projected Run-down Date	Projected Impressions Remaining	Coverage
Black Toner	20%	July 15, 2007	1,017	9.68%
Cyan Toner	80%	September 24, 2007	12,642	3.43%
Magenta Toner	60%	September 3, 2007	5,489	5.17%
Yellow Toner	40%	August 12, 2007	2,821	7.39%



A device management system should have highly customizable reports, such as Facilities Manager.

most relevant to your business. Without the ability to filter, a user may be emailed repeatedly whenever a paper jam is detected on a machine – this can quickly become a hassle rather than a convenience.

Advanced filtering options allow users to be much more specific with the notifications they receive. For example, one could choose to be notified only if a machine jams a certain number of times within a day. This can help dealers pinpoint serious issues that are costing them money without burying their service personnel in alert notifications.

◆ TONER LEVELS

Needs depletion times & online ordering

Device management systems should have graphical representation of toner levels to let the user see at a glance which devices are in need of supplies. The toner level indicators make “just in time” delivery possible by sending an email when devices are running low on toner.

A quality system will estimate the toner depletion time based on a company's historical print data. If only percentage values are shown for the toner levels, the system will not be reliable for that “just-in-time” delivery. Toner usage varies heavily from organization to organization, so a Time to Depletion Report is preferable to simply reporting the percentage of toner remaining.

Lastly, dealers and VARs will benefit greatly from a device management solution with online toner ordering capabilities that allow their customers to order toner with the click of a button. ➔



