

CHALLENGE

Northwood University, a college based in Midland, Mich., had built up a diverse fleet of printers over the years that became unreliable and a drain on IT staff time and resources. Front-line IT workers spent as much as 40 percent of their time responding to calls from across the college's campus, as well as from satellite locations, requesting help for malfunctioning printers.

SOLUTION

Northwood worked with Staples to implement the Staples Managed Print Services offering to handle printer service calls, review its printer fleet use and replace inefficient models, and automate the printer management processes.

BENEFITS

Since starting with Staples, printer downtime has been significantly reduced and front-line IT staff are able to focus on more value-added services.



The information technology organization at Northwood University has worked hard over the years to demonstrate a responsive, caring customer service culture for the 6,800 students and 1,000 faculty and staff who rely on them to support their computing needs. But as the university's aging printer fleet began to take up more and more of the IT staff's time, the team knew it needed to make a change.

Northwood's 25-person IT team takes pride in their ability to help students, faculty and staff manage and maintain their IT equipment, including laptop and desktop computer software updates and repairs. The IT help desk is the place to call for help with any and all computing needs — including printers serving offices and centers of student activity. Printer malfunction? Out of paper or toner? Call, or email, or send a message via Twitter to the help desk. A staff member will field the request, visit the location and determine a solution.

As Northwood's printer fleet grew and aged over the years, however, it became more challenging for the IT team to maintain its traditional service levels. For example, at the university's main campus in Midland, Michigan, printers ranged from machines that supported a single user to large printers serving Strosacker Library, a major student hub. Each service call required an IT support person to visit the printer location to assess the problem, a cross-campus walk that could take as much as 30 minutes. Though the underlying cause of a printer malfunction was often difficult to determine, IT staff learned to diagnose machine problems. They would order parts, wait for delivery and then educate themselves about repairing the units. As this process played out, faculty, staff and students often were left to find other printers for their jobs.

Eventually, printer-related calls climbed to a level where front-line IT staffers were spending as much as 40 percent of their time responding to them. The burden meant there was less time for IT staff to devote to its mission of helping colleagues and students make the most of their computing resources. And even devoted staff could not solve every problem as quickly as their customers wanted. As complaints from faculty, staff and students about out-of-service printers mounted and reached beyond the help desk to the university's top IT executive, Northwood decided to make a change.

THE FIRST ATTEMPT TO SOLVE NORTHWOOD'S PRINTER PROBLEM

Recognizing they had a problem, Northwood's first attempt to address its printer backlog included hiring a contractor to service the university's printers. The idea was straightforward: when a printer had a problem, the contractor would address it.

In practice, however, the situation actually created more work for the IT help desk. Calls (and emails and tweets) still arrived requesting service or alerting the help desk to a printer outage. Now, IT staff found themselves managing these customer service calls and then trying to figure out what the service company would do to fix the problems. The contractor proved slow to respond. It did not always inform the IT team about its actions. And when Northwood pushed for more communication, the contractor was not responsive.

It was not unusual for a printer to be out of service three to five days under this arrangement. The

147,488 Average number of pages the university prints per month.

132 Total number of networked printers on its campuses.

40% Amount of time some IT staff was spending addressing printer issues at Northwood.

customer complaints continued. It became clear to the IT customer service team that the burden of managing the printing function was hurting its ability to provide quality customer service for computer users. It was time for a new approach.

Then the Northwood IT team met the Staples account managers Mike Zinn and Joyce Duzan.

MAKING THE RIGHT MOVE

The meeting came about at the suggestion of the Staples team. The university's IT department was very familiar with Staples as a retailer of office supplies, and had purchased numerous items at the store for a variety of needs over the years. The IT professionals went into this meeting room with a positive impression of the company. But this conference room gathering was different than a trip to the store to pick up office supplies.

After months of frustration and fielding customer complaints, Eric Dinnan, a computer technologist at Northwood's Midland campus and a point person for printer maintenance, recalls feeling like he discovered something important during that first meeting.

"It was pretty clear even in the hour or so meeting that we had, that Staples offered a lot of benefits and a lot of features that we had never even seen before," he says.

The Staples team outlined a program that addressed more than the complaints the university community had about its malfunctioning printers. The proposed program would enable Northwood to evaluate its entire print function, identify opportunities to provide the same services for less cost, by:

- Evaluating the age and condition of existing printers to identify outdated models due for replacement
- Assess the locations of printers and their proximity to users, to identify the best spots for printers and reduce the number of redundant machines on campus
- Setting up a web-based communications system for maintenance and repairs



- Automating toner refill deliveries when printer ink levels are low

By rethinking the university's print function, and by taking advantage of newer equipment that is less costly to run and simpler to maintain, Northwood could work with Staples Managed Print Services to print the equivalent number of pages at a higher quality and for less money.

After learning about the program, how it works and its potential benefits, Northwood decided to go ahead and sign on during the summer of 2014.

IMPLEMENTING MANAGED PRINT SERVICES AT NORTHWOOD

The process to activate Staples Managed Print Services is straightforward. For starters, a Staples print expert takes inventory of the existing printer fleet to identify inefficient and redundant machines and reduce the overall number of printers. From there, the process focuses on identifying optimal locations and replacing obsolete models with more efficient and simpler-to-manage machines. Lastly, the printers are connected to the network for remote monitoring and management.

Throughout the process, it was important for the IT department to communicate with its internal customers about the changes and benefits of Staples Managed Print Services. Users develop work habits tied to their printers so any major change requires detailed explanation so the users will buy in to the program.

"No one likes IT walking into their office building and removing a printer without them being told why," Dinnan notes.

Staples worked with Northwood to replace some of the older printers in its fleet with new more efficient models from HP. Print experts helped identify optimal sites within office buildings and other campus locations for printers by analyzing staff and student workflows. And with the newly configured printer fleet installed, Northwood and Staples connected the university's 132 Internet-enabled machines to the Staples Printuition™ system for monitoring printer status, including toner levels, that triggers automatic shipment of replacement ink packages when levels in a machine get low.

"The whole Staples team has been unbelievably gracious and helpful. Never once have I had a bad experience with Staples. They were always there to help. And the response time is unbelievable."

*-Eric Dinnan,
a computer technologist and
Northwood University's point person
for dealing with printer maintenance*

AT A GLANCE

NORTHWOOD UNIVERSITY

- Founded in 1959
- Main campus in Midland, Michigan
- 22 satellite locations in Michigan and five other states
- 6,800 students, including undergraduate and graduate, from 74 countries
- 1,000 faculty and staff
- 35,000 alumni
- 25 member IT staff

REAPING THE BENEFITS OF MANAGED PRINT

Today, Northwood uses fewer printers at both its main Midland campus as well as at its satellite locations. And while demand for printed pages has remained constant, the university's cost per page has declined.

Among the long list of improvements since the university began working with Staples:

- Printer service downtime has been dramatically reduced.
- With improved service levels and a refreshed printer fleet, customer calls to the help desk for printer problems have decreased.

- A streamlined printer maintenance process has lifted the customer service burden for the university's IT team. Toner levels of 20 percent on a networked printer triggers an automatic replacement order. The IT team receives an alert that toner has been ordered. Delivery occurs within 24 hours.
- The automated delivery of toner enables faculty and staff to replace toner themselves. (Help desk staff can tend to printers if needed.)
- When there is a problem reported, Staples manages printer service repairs and maintenance. The Northwood IT team fills out a service order. A Staples representative responds, usually within two hours, and repairs occur the same day or within 24 hours. (As opposed to three to five days of service outage under the old system.) And while an IT staff member may visit the printer to confirm its smooth operation, the time spent on the task is minutes compared to hours under the old way of doing business.
- The quality of printing has improved with the use of new models.
- Satisfied customers. Faculty, staff and students' help desk calls for printers have dropped. Two new printers installed in Strosacker Library in January 2015 for students have virtually eliminated the routine litany of help desk calls from the busiest center of student activity. And IT managers, who once heard complaints about out-of-service machines from various departments, no longer receive such calls.
- The IT team can focus on its job. Instead of spending more than a third of their time handling printer service requests, frontline workers at the help desk can focus on helping users keep their computers running well and updated with the latest software.

“The whole Staples team has been unbelievably gracious and helpful,” says Dinnan. Never once have I had a bad experience with Staples. They were always there to help. And the response time is unbelievable.”

HOW STAPLES MANAGED PRINT SERVICES WORKS.

Companies with 1,000 employees on average dedicate the equivalent of two full-time help desk employees to serve their printer fleet every year, according to an InfoTrends market research study. Staples Managed Print Services makes it possible for those IT professionals to focus on helping their customers' computing needs while Staples handles the printer fleet.

Staples applies a proven four-step process to ensure that an organization's printing requirements meet business objectives.

1. **Assessment.** Staples analyzes printing activity to identify where the organization can increase efficiency and reduce costs. We will map your devices and print networks, collect information on your printing workflow and determine total cost of ownership based on hardware, supplies, energy and support.
2. **Implementation.** Staples works with the organization to put a customized print management plan into action. We are brand neutral and can select and deploy the equipment that best meets your needs. During the implementation process, we provide a continuously updated view of the print environment.
3. **Management.** Staples helps an organization maximize its return on investment by applying expert technical support to ensure print devices are working properly and automating the replenishment of supplies.
4. **Optimization.** Staples makes recommendations to improve the effectiveness of an organization's printing function. This may include reducing the number of printers to lower total cost of ownership, using automated toner replenishment to reduce printer cartridge inventory and improving printer performance by reallocating or redeploying some devices.