

The VAR Guy's Guide To Managed Printer Services

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Imagine if you were a small business solutions provider that enjoyed national reach. Perhaps you're headquartered in Virginia, but your staff manages customer networks and multifunction printers located across the United States.

Even better, you earned a recurring monthly fee for those services. That certainly sounds like a pretty sweet business to The VAR Guy.

But is this really possible? And are customers really ready for Hardware as a Service (Haas)? In most cases, the answer is "absolutely yes."

The fact is, managed services and so-called HaaS can eliminate much of the physical distance between you and your customers. It can also save you from those shrinking

hardware margins. Although there's no magic formula for success, progressive managed printer service providers share several key points of expertise.

Steps for success include:

- Shifting to a managed services model, offering customers "pay per click" services for a flat monthly fee.
- Leveraging administration and workflow software to unlock the full power of MFPs (multi-function printers).
- Focusing on highly targeted opportunities, including custom application development for MFPs.

Follow this guide and you'll adapt to the new realities of HaaS, or you can risk fading into hardware history with other break-fix resellers.



So, how can you get started with managed print services? The VAR Guy isn't ready to endorse any particular vendors.

But he has taken a close look at managed print services from Do IT Smarter (www.doitsmarter.com) and Xerox.

Do IT Smarter is a so-called Master MSP. The company offers a range of managed services options to VARs. And VARs, in turn, can brand those services as their own and offer them to small and midsize businesses.

One of Do IT Smarter's offerings is Xerox PagePack, an all-inclusive service agreement that shows customers how much they're paying for every page they print.

In addition to covering ink and toner, the PagePack program includes parts and service.

In theory, this could deliver a win-win scenario to VARs and their customers. VARs gain ongoing revenue, and customers have peace of mind that they won't receive any surprise bills for printer maintenance costs and upgrades.

The program also has price ranges for high, medium and low-usage customers—ensuring that cus-

SIX STEPS TO SELLING MANAGED PRINT SERVICES

Still not sure how to promote and sell hardware as a service (HaaS) to your customers? First, cut right to the chase and ask the customer if they have a handle on their annual print costs (hardware, consumables, etc.).

Most customers won't, which opens the door for you to provide a "printer cost assessment" to the customer. (Major printer suppliers now offer these assessment tools to their customers). Next, ask your customer these questions:

- 1. How are you handling** scanning, workflow and doc management?
- 2. Are multifunction printers** (MFPs) or traditional printers on your network?
- 3. Are you confident and pleased** with the supplier of the devices and cost of the related supplies/services?
- 4. Would you be interested** in our product line for those printer solutions?
- 5. If we offered a print solution** customized to your operation that bundles supplies and service, would you be interested?
- 6. Do you have an interest** in discussing your print and document management needs in the next six months, nine months, 12 months or more?

As you walk customers through these somewhat loaded questions, you'll be leading them right to HaaS and managed printer services.

Sources: Xerox, Do IT Smarter, The VAR Guy



tomers have predictable, cost-effective solutions tailored for their businesses.

Those are the bits-and-bytes of managed printer services from Xerox, but that certainly isn't the only game in town. Other key players include Oki Data (www.okidata.com/mkt/html/nf/ManagedServices.html).

Sales and Training

But how do you actually sell managed print services to customers? Check out our "Six Steps to Selling Managed Print Services" (far left) and check in with so-called Master MSPs.

Master MSPs provide hosted managed services that VARs can re-brand and resell to their customers. Sample Master MSPs include Ingram Micro and Do IT Smarter.

Both organizations—and dozens of others—offer training to VARs that want to offer managed print services.

Another great resource for help is The VAR Guy's sister Web site, called MSPmentor (www.mspmentor.net). And

The VAR Guy also reads MSP University's Web site regularly for guidance and training.

Fortunately, you don't have to be a big VAR to succeed with HaaS. In fact, many managed print service providers have about \$1 million in revenue, The VAR Guy has found.

And even the smallest VARs can offer 24x7 managed print services. While MFPs are more reliable than ever, VARs must provide ongoing monitoring to ensure 99.99 percent or even 99.999 percent reliability.

The so-called four-nines reliability equates to 53 minutes of downtime per year; five-nines reliability dramatically raises the bar, further reducing downtime to a stunning 5 minutes and 35 seconds of downtime per year.

Smart Minds

Through managed services, it's frequently possible to approach—and even achieve—such levels of reliability.

The reason: intelligent network devices—including printers—

have built-in Web servers and SNMP (simple network management protocol) capabilities that allow VARs to perform preventive maintenance in a matter of seconds.

Software Solutions

Many VARs focused on HaaS also offer managed services platforms such as those from Kaseya, Level Platforms, N-able and Zenith Infotech.

Other VARs are adding value through software. Some MFPs, for instance, now include basic workflow and document management software.

Searchable workflow solutions allow customers to scan documents, transform them into PDFs and store them in an on-line archive.

Over time, the archive can become a data warehouse that a small or midsize company uses to store, search and retrieve information very quickly.

Everyone from shipping departments to purchasing departments to a controller's office wants to automate their



forms management, one savvy solutions provider recently told The VAR Guy.

Next up, some managed service providers are focusing on dynamic document management, where the application and network infrastructure must track document revisions and maintain version control.

This type of solution can involve revising a contract, updating shared calendars or editing business plans. Regardless of the document type, customers need a way to capture, track and revise information.

What's Up Doc?

Some hospitals, for instance, leverage document templates and Xerox's DocuShare software for content management that adheres to the HIPAA privacy act.

Other MSPs and VARs are developing applications that provide single sign-on between printers, SAP AG portal servers and document management applications.

Sounds cool. But complex. You can always start small with

HaaS. Work with a Master MSP (Do IT Smarter, Ingram, etc.) or a printer manufacturer to find a managed services platform that requires little or no up-front

financial investment. Also, ask for sales tools because business training—rather than tech training—is the biggest hurdle to MSP success.

SIX PLACES TO FIND MORE INFO

Looking for info or a potential partner in the managed printer services industry? Here are six online destinations to find more info about Hardware as a Service (HaaS).

1. MSPmentor (www.mspmentor.net): Forgive The VAR Guy for this shameless plug. MSPmentor is one of his sites. But it is the most timely managed services blog on the Web.

2. Do IT Smarter (www.doitsmarter.com): A so-called Master MSP, Do IT Smarter offers training to help VARs quickly master Xerox's PagePack managed services program for VARs.

3. HP Managed Print Services: Alas, HP's URLs are too darn long for The VAR Guy to print here. Simply Google "HP Managed Print Services" and you'll get the relevant links.

4. Oki Data (www.okidata.com/mkt/html/nf/ManagedServices.html): Offers online tools and bundles workflow capabilities with its multi-function printers.

5. Xerox PagePack (<http://pagepack.net/>): This third-party web site does a solid job explaining PagePack.

6. Ask a Mentor: (www.mspmentor.net/ask-a-mentor): Still looking for more help? Visit the Ask a Mentor service and pose your question about managed print services. Submitted questions are typically answered within 24 hours. And there's no charge for the service.

Source: The VAR Guy (www.thevarguy.com)