

Product Review

From 

Secure pull printing from Altman Technologies

For many organisations network printing happens without much thought or planning. Some, like colleges and universities desperately need to reliably charge users for print and copy services. But as the regulatory and legislative grip hardens, many realise that left unmanaged, printing, scanning and copying is a substantial security risk. And, as if this isn't enough, there is the cost and environmental impact to manage.

A print job once submitted, can languish on the printer for hours, making a useful distraction for idle eyes. Secure pull printing releases jobs to the print device with local authentication. The solution augments the Altman Technologies Pcounter solution which was reviewed in the January/February 2009 issue of Network Computing.

While the basic solution provides users with secure printing, other features can be offered depending on individual print devices. Here we used a Sharp and Kyocera network attached multi-function printer. Both offer secure printing but each offers a slightly different user experience.

A normally submitted print job is redirected by the Pcounter server to a secure print queue. Depending on the options selected, the job is released in one of a number of ways, choosing from a PIN, a card (swipe or proximity) reader adjacent to the print device, or a separate Altman touchpad terminal offering the same options plus a biometric (fingerprint) option. You can use one authentication method or two e.g. PIN and card. If required, AD or other LDAP integration is possible.

Using configuration options, users can receive a variety of information at the point of submission, including which department is billed, remaining credit balance and other tailored messages. These are displayed either as a balloon in the system tray, or as an email. This of course indicates that departmental and per-user charging is an option. But as this is a security focused solution, device-point release is not the only feature.

Increasingly security and compliance solutions are required to provide forensic information in the event of a suspected problem or breach. Being able to prove exactly what an individual did and when is useful enough, but the ability to retain a copy as evidence is powerful. Depending on the print device, this extends not only to printing, but to scanning and copying as well. It can also monitor locally attached printers, leaving no place to hide. Using the report builder in Pcounter, custom reports can profile all activity.

In the case of the Sharp under test, Altman have used the Sharp Open System Architecture to embed some functionality. There is an extensive list of other manufacturers offering similar capability including Konica Minolta and Canon.

Back at the print face, another great feature called teamprint allows more than one person to authenticate the same print action; for example a PA and MD could be a team. In addition, it is possible to leave print jobs on a device so that they can be printed as required, without resubmission. Other efficiency measures allow a user to print all pending documents immediately, following successful authentication. The solution is flexible; most options can be set globally, by team, or by individual.

If a print device is out of service, rules established by user or globally, can automatically re-direct print jobs. Print options such as scan, copy, colour, black and white, duplex etc. can similarly be enforced. The impatient user is also defeated as queued duplicate copies of the same document can be automatically deleted. Administration is relatively easy and users can be left to register their own cards, for example, a door entry card they already possess.

As organisations reduce security gaps, improve statutory compliance and user efficiency, reduce operating costs, and raise their green credentials, the management of the print estate must be tackled. This solution from Altman sits neatly on top of an already highly effective product, adding another layer of capability. A layer that we suspect is currently scarce in most organisations...

Product: Secure pull printing
Supplier: Altman Technologies Ltd
Tel: 0113 273 0300
Web site: www.altman.co.uk
Email: solutions@altman.co.uk