



ABOUT NORTHUMBRIA UNIVERSITY

The University has a student population of approximately 24,000, with over 2,000 staff. There are 67 IT Teaching Labs and 6 IT Open Access Areas available for the University's authorised users.

Academic Teaching Labs have a mixture of PCs and Macs, all with printing facilities. Open Access areas are available for use by all students and use thin client terminals with desktop applications delivered through Citrix. The University is made up of several different campuses, spread across a wide geographical area.

THE PROBLEM

Between the different Schools and Departments within the University, it became evident there was a need for a co-ordinated approach to student printing as, up to this point, printing policy in the Teaching Labs was determined by each individual School.

Some Labs had no printers, some Schools only provided printing during examination periods whereas others provided printing free of charge and completely unmeasured. Some Schools were charging for printing at varying costs with high administrative overheads.

Case Study

Northumbria University

Enterprise Print & Copy Management

THE SOLUTION

The University Executive subsequently decided to embark on the provision of a co-ordinated University-wide solution to the student printing problem. Joe Evans, Technical Services Manager at Northumbria University was tasked with managing this project. Pcounter was selected and recommended for implementation across the University.

"I decided on Pcounter – a decision based on Pcounter's scalability, affordability, and in no small measure, on the support I knew I could depend upon from the team at Altman Technologies," said Joe.

The University provided the infrastructure - IT Services provided A4 black and white laser printing to all 67 IT Teaching Labs across four sites - and the students were asked to pay for their printing. Each student is given £5 free credit at the start of the academic year - when this has been used students have to pay for additional print credit.

The University has one master print server, with student account information populated via a link to the main student computer system. The University uses a multiple Windows NT domain setup and Pcounter handled this with ease – there are separate print servers in each domain for ease of administration and printer management.

Management of printers and consumables is achieved at the click of a button - printing trends can be easily identified, with over - or under-utilised printers being managed more effectively.

THE BENEFITS & RESULTS



During the initial two-month evaluation of Pcounter, printing was monitored throughout the University. From the information gathered during this process, a print management policy was set up and implemented to control and reduce the growing print costs. "The evaluation enabled us to monitor printing levels – we were able to assess activity and this allowed us to formulate our print policy," said Joe.

Following the initial success of the project, various schools were keen to incorporate other printing formats as well. A4 colour and A3 black & white printing is now available in many areas, and there are also several large format plotters in the School of Built Environment.

Pcounter has enabled different areas to adopt different approaches for recovering print costs that suit the specific environment. Two different cost recovery systems are used - cash and card payment. These run in parallel, allowing the University to provide the most appropriate service for students in different areas.

The collection of cash is automated by value loader units which allow students to add credit to their Pcounter account with coins and/or notes, authenticating via keyboard or by using their University ID card. Cash deposits update the user's print credit balance in real-time. The University has several value loader units - one at each campus - and at busy times some units can take as much as £1400 in a week.

The University also uses Print Release in some student areas of the University. Print jobs are

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Technical Services Manager,
Northumbria University

queued but only printed when a user authorises the release from a print release station (PC running Pcounter Station) with a card reader attached, located next to a printer. The student logs on using their Mifare SmartCard, views and subsequently releases their print job from the printer.

In the library areas, photocopier accounting and charging is provided via external control terminals fitted to the copier, requiring authentication using the University ID card before copying can commence. All copies are then charged to the user's Pcounter account on the network in real-time.

In the staff areas, the fleet of multi-functional devices are also monitored and accounted for by Pcounter using embedded device software that enables the panel of the copier/printer to be used for copy accounting and secure print release, directly integrated with Pcounter's network accounting system.

COMMENTS

Joe Evans, Technical Services Manager at Northumbria University commented:

"Pcounter provides total accountability and accurate assessment of print volumes, crucial with the scale of printing we are now experiencing – on average we are processing over 2 million print jobs per year. Pcounter has various cost recovery options, so students are not limited by staff availability to update their print account. The Pcounter solution has been a critical element in the provision of an efficient printing service – the cash recovered is reinvested to ensure continued provision in the future."