

CASE STUDY

Julius Blum GmbH

World's leading manufacturer of fittings for high quality kitchens and furniture



Organization

Julius Blum GmbH (Blum) is an internationally known supplier of hinges, runners, and other hardware for the cabinet making and furniture industries. The private, family-owned company markets its products in over 120 countries and has annual revenues of 2.6 billion Euros.

Headquartered in the Austrian city of Höchst, near the southeastern shore of Lake Constance, the company employs nearly 7,000 workers in Austria and 9,500 employees worldwide. Blum has production facilities in Poland, China, Brazil, and the United States as well as affiliates around the world.

The importance of documents

As in all manufacturing environments, printed documents play a key role in critical business processes at Blum. According to Andreas Hagen, System Administrator at Blum, “We print between 1.2 and 1.8 million jobs per month, everything from shipping documents to barcode labels to regular office print. About half of our 1,800 printers are label printers, and the other half are regular laser printers or MFPs.”

Blum's IT environment includes a number of SAP® applications as well as an in-house developed system called

BBA. This application helps stakeholders visualize how various workflows and transactions interact during product manufacture and delivery. These applications generate output in PDF and ZPL (barcode) form. The latter of these is critical to business operations: “If barcode label printing stopped working, the whole company would come to a standstill,” says Hagen. “Nothing in the company could be produced or shipped.”

Problems with print servers

Due to the potential impact of document failures on Blum's business processes, the company is constantly looking for ways to improve print performance and reliability. As Blum prepared to implement their SAP system, the SAP BASIS team evaluated the SAP-certified VPSX/OutputManager® solution from LRS to replace the native SAP print functionality.

Blum's BASIS administrators sought to implement the VPSX® solution and move toward SAP GOF (Generic Output Format) instead of local print definitions. However, during this evaluation, Hagen and his colleagues realized that VPSX software could solve an important problem with their ZPL barcode label printing.

AT A GLANCE

The Company

Julius Blum is a large global manufacturer of furniture hardware with more than 9000 employees in 120 countries worldwide and an annual turnover of 2.6 billion Euros.

The Industry

Manufacturing and Distribution

The Requirements

The customer needed a scalable, output management system to ensure reliable delivery of critical documents and barcode labels.

The Solution

VPSX/Enterprise, VPSX/OutputManager, Virtual Session Printer Agent, Personal Print Manager, LRS Transforms, LRS Global Fonts, VPS, VPS/TCPIP, DRS

The Benefit

The company reduced document costs by eliminating unnecessary print servers and replacing an in-house developed system. They gained centralized control over a global printing network and reliable document delivery in a 24x7x365 environment — all managed with minimal IT staff effort.



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“We had been using an in-house developed solution built using many Windows® Print Servers. Each client machine had hundreds of printers defined. Keeping all of these servers updated and operating was complicated. We would regularly have three or more printer outages per week, and had to re-start the print servers to fix the problems each time.”

Originally brought in to simplify SAP printing, VPSX software from LRS dramatically improved the printing of ZPL barcode labels. “Since implementing the LRS® software, we haven’t had any barcode printing outages, which is a very good thing.”

A single point of control

One advantage of LRS software is its scalability; a single VPSX instance can manage document delivery to thousands of output devices. It can also eliminate the need for hundreds of Windows print servers.

1,800 printers. 9,500 employees on four continents. Approximately 1.5 million print jobs per month, any of which could cause serious business disruptions. So how many people are needed to manage VPSX?

“We manage it with two administrators, my colleague and I,” Hagen explains. “It’s nowhere near a full-time job; I spend between 20-25% of my time doing administrative tasks and solving any issues our first-level service desk cannot handle on their own. When I am not available, my colleague takes over.”

Previously, Blum’s print network included up to 15 servers distributed around the world. These have been reduced to three global VPSX instances, including LRS servers running in a high availability configuration behind a load balancer/application delivery controller. This configuration eliminated the company’s reliance on Microsoft Windows Clusters.

“From our view, the LRS solution is a lot more reliable than the alternative,” says Hagen. “For example, we weren’t affected by the recent PrintNightmare issues and we know that in case of a server problem, LRS’s AlertX utility can seamlessly switch over all printing to the VPSX Backup instance. We confirm this every weekend during our weekly server updates and in 2-3 years of testing, we’ve never had an issue.

Built for today; ready for tomorrow

As a fast-growing company, Blum’s worldwide operations are a picture of continual motion. “In general, you could say our business runs 7 days a week, 24 hours a day,” explains Andreas Hagen. “I really recommend VPSX, because since we implemented the product, everything related to print runs in a much more stable manner.”

Employees who work with basic office documents like spreadsheets and business correspondence often want the ability to control where, when, and how they print. Personal Print Manager software from LRS lets end users print, delete, re-route, and otherwise control their own print jobs, subject to rules established by the VPSX administration team. All print actions are tracked, allowing administrators to identify printing trends and/or potential security issues.

The future of print

While industry analysts have been projecting the end of hardcopy documents for years, printing may be with us well into the future. “With respect to our business, it’s likely that our print volumes will increase rather than decrease, at least when it comes to barcode labels,” says Hagen. “How else can you get a barcode on an inventory item or a shipping carton? I don’t see that kind of printing going away any time soon.”

Learn how LRS solutions can reduce cost and complexity in your print environment.

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