

CASE STUDY

News publisher implements solution that's "Fit to Print"

A large German publishing group needed a way to ensure reliable delivery of internal and customer-facing business documents. Under pressure to replace their unsupported print management software, the company turned adversity into opportunity by establishing a VPSX®-based single point of control for SAP and other application output.



M. DUMONT SCHAUBERG

ORGANIZATION

Located near the Rhine River in the city of Cologne, M. DuMont Schauberg (MDS) is one of Germany's largest newspaper publishing houses. Boasting a 200 year heritage and a 3900 employee workforce, the publisher consistently posts revenues of more than 550 Million Euros per year. MDS prides itself in employing the latest technology, from its modern printing presses and innovative glass-covered headquarters building to its SAP-based IT infrastructure.

At the most basic level, publishers are in the information delivery business. Newspapers are extremely time-sensitive deliverables — fresh daily, these publications must be distributed to doorsteps and newsstands around the country within hours of being printed. But who delivers the critical documents that help MDS deliver the news?

MAKING IT HAPPEN

Like most large organizations, MDS has dozens of departments, each with their own particular technology needs. "These include printing systems, delivery tracking systems, billing software, and many more pieces of critical infrastructure," says Jörg Bartke, who leads a team of nine system administrators at M. DuMont Schauberg. "As a result, we have a large, heterogenous hardware environment with over 250 Windows servers, 60 UNIX servers of various types, and almost every imaginable type of Windows and Macintosh client."

Likewise, these systems generate and deliver documents bound for a variety of output devices — from simple office printers and multifunction devices to high-speed printers and barcode machines. Ensuring successful document printing and delivery in such an environment involves significant time and manpower.

In an effort to increase productivity and business responsiveness, MDS is deploying SAP application software across the entire enterprise. "Naturally, we also want a simple, efficient way to manage all the documents from our SAP applications and other systems," explains Bartke.

OUTPUT MANAGEMENT WOES

Along with its many computing platforms and printing devices, MDS had implemented several different software packages to manage print jobs. This resulted in a complicated environment, in which individual output devices were usually defined to multiple operating systems.

"We really wanted a single print spooler for all of our applications, in order to simplify things for both help desk staff and end users," says Bartke. "So we looked through all the solutions we already owned and picked the one that seemed to best fit our needs."

Unfortunately for MDS, the vendor of the chosen print system was announcing plans to drop support for the product. MDS reluctantly purchased the vendor's suggested replacement solution and began to deploy it in their production environment.

"The vendor was quite proud of the advanced features of their replacement system," Bartke remembers. "We bought it, we installed it, but we never really got the new software to work as well as the solution it was supposed to replace."

HEAD-TO-HEAD COMPETITION

Undaunted, Bartke's team began the search for a hardware-neutral print management solution. Their requirements read like an IT analyst's wish list:

- Support for multiple server platforms to protect their IT investment over time
- SAP certified interface to provide seamless integration with critical SAP applications
- Web-based control interface for simple, cost-effective deployment
- Proven customer service backed by real-world customer references



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The team identified two solutions that fit these criteria. The first was developed just across the border in a nearby city. The second was the VPSX solution from Levi, Ray & Shoup, Inc. Together, these solutions were subjected to a series of head-to-head tests.

The VPSX solution began to distinguish itself from the earliest phases of the test: "It was very straightforward to install, and we were able to begin defining printers almost instantly," said Jörg Bartke about the VPSX software. "By comparison, the other product seemed complicated and more difficult to customize."

Once configured, both systems were tested with actual MDS production documents in order to approximate real-world performance. "No question, VPSX was the more resource-efficient of the two," says Bartke. As a result, the LRS® solution would both save on computing cycles and provide a marked advantage with regard to scalability and overall reliability.

Next, each solution was tested with a series of documents that the previous vendor's solution had been unable to print correctly. Both solutions flawlessly handled German characters like Ä, Ü, and ß. Furthermore, these hardware-independent solutions worked with the publisher's Xerox printers and other existing hardware, thus eliminating the need for costly equipment outlays.

According to Herr Bartke, one of the most influential factors in their decision-making process was the human element:

Support staff from LRS' local German office are extraordinarily responsive compared to other providers. They know more than just their own products – they are experts in the many printers, servers, and networks found in a complicated environment like ours. When implementing a system that is so critical to our business, this human factor cannot be overlooked.

VPSX MAKES HEADLINES AT MDS

Today, MDS is still benefiting from its choice of VPSX software. Internal office documents are automatically converted to PDF files and sent via email instead of in paper form, thus saving on the cost of printing and physical delivery.

Further savings come from the ability to use electronic overlays instead of costly pre-printed forms. "VPSX 'filters' let us do all kinds of custom processes like merging application data with graphical overlays," explains Bartke.

"Elements like these are more than just clever technical features. This kind of power and flexibility enables us to solve real business problems – which will help us save time and money well into the future."

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