
To Centralize or Decentralize?

How to Manage Document
Output Costs Effectively

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Expert Laser Services, Inc.
An Employee-Owned Company

To Centralize or Decentralize? How to Manage Your Output Costs Effectively

The futuristic vision of “the paperless office” remains a myth. Corporate America is producing more copies and prints than ever before. Costs are rising, and the battle lines are drawn. How can companies manage their growing volumes of output?

Companies are facing a convergence in the office equipment industry. Both printer providers and longstanding copier distributors are vying to supply the imaging prints created in today’s offices. End users are torn between two diametrically opposed philosophies: to centralize their output on centrally-located multifunctional copiers or decentralize their output on a fleet of small cubicle-based laser printers.

Centralized Output vs. Decentralized Output

It’s a war out there. Copier dealers are trying to sell corporate America on a centralized approach to office imaging. They attack the idea of decentralized laser printer output because of perceived higher operating costs. Printer manufacturers and resellers are fighting back, noting that personnel costs and productivity suffer by forcing employees to use a centralized product and forego the ease and cost efficiencies of using their own dedicated printer.

Who’s Right?

At Expert Laser Services, we think both sides have a point. We believe that a properly deployed document output management program should include the strengths of both alternatives.

Of course, the manner in which a company uses equipment for proper document output really depends on the company’s size and particular layout.

Decentralized Output: Remember Black and White

To keep costs down, remember black and white. The only output capability that we believe should be decentralized is the basic ability to conveniently print everyday documents in black and white. In today’s web world, employees continually print out research or reference material off the Internet. Their screens display in color, and therefore they print in color. But most of this material is just as valuable in black and white, and far cheaper to produce.

Many companies already have a fleet of older black and white laser printers that they can deploy for this purpose. If not, there are many low-cost, refurbished black

and white printers available on the market to meet this need.

Centralized Output:

There is a role for centralized output, depending upon the size of a company. Tasks that we feel should be centralized include:

- **Large black and white output jobs** – any document output that would require many copies/prints – greater than two copies per original and more than 20 total prints.
- **Color** – Color should be centralized in an effort to encourage and reinforce its proper usage. The cost of color has drastically decreased over the past few years, yet not to such a level that would allow it for everyday use. Even when color is centrally deployed, it should be semi-controlled with user codes and profiles.
- **Finishing services** – Cost and reliability dictate that finishing services be centralized. Finishing services include: corner stapling; booklet making; two- and three-hole punching; tri-folding; etc. There is some inexpensive equipment on the market that could allow the decentralization of corner stapling, for example, but many times the tradeoff for price is reliability.

What's more, while shaping an output management solution, consideration could be given to a proper solution for the input side (scanning) of Document Management.

Decentralized Input:

One input task that can easily be decentralized is scanning. Sometimes referred to as “the ramp to the digital document highway,” scanning can help employees become more productive. Companies are conducting business digitally.

One noted benefit of bringing decentralized scanning capabilities into the office is the cost savings of employees scanning a document to an email address instead of faxing it. Not only does this save the cost of faxing but also provides the recipient an already digitized document for ease of use. With the constant drop in the cost of small, personal multifunctional laser machines, companies can add decentralized scanners very economically. There are units available for as low as \$40 a month.

CAVEAT: When considering a multifunction printer, we strongly suggest that inkjet deployment be avoided at all costs. Though they do provide multiple capabilities at low upfront costs, their color output drive operating costs up to 20 to 50 cents per print -- a silent profit killer in any business environment, no matter the volume.

Centralized Input:

This is where the experts come in. Establishing a centralized input area allows companies to undertake large scanning jobs that require detailed indexing and scanning knowledge. If a company regularly archives or "back-scans" many documents, a central input station makes sense.

Whether a company needs to digitize old files or manage the flow of new paperwork, centralized input becomes the modern-day version of a filing station. Today's file clerks expertly tag and index documents to ensure they go in the proper folders for easy access in the future. Just think about the variety of documents involved in a real estate transaction closing and central scanning starts to seem quite practical.

We recognize that no two companies face the same Document Management issues, but we hope this white paper has provided enough information to help guide your company through the initial decision-making process. At Expert Laser Services, we stand ready to answer your questions and share our experience with these issues.

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