

**By-lined opinion piece**

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## **Integrated working**

*IT Directors have one of the world's hardest jobs; often lacking praise and recognition and always under pressure and facing complex challenges. One of their biggest headaches, certainly in recent times, has been ensuring that office technologies work seamlessly together and not as standalone solutions. Juggling the departmental need for systems such as CRM databases, invoicing and processing and back-office ordering as well as print and document management software, all of which place demands on the company network, is not easy. True integration of software and hardware can revolutionise the office environment and the way that we work. As well as the clear time saving and worker productivity benefits, IT integration can streamline business processes and enable greater collaboration between workers and workgroups.*

*One area where IT integration has progressed significantly in recent times is in print and document management. Companies no longer have to install software solutions on each individual computer or provide and maintain a separate server for print, which can be time consuming and expensive in terms of set-up, management and ongoing support. Adam Gillbe, European Strategic Marketing Manager, [Canon Europe](#), considers the impact of integrated solutions on the office environment and how the true integration of print and document management software and hardware can reap substantial rewards for businesses looking to emerge from the downturn in the strongest possible position.*

As business becomes increasingly global, organisations are starting to embrace more collaborative working practices and as a result, more integrated IT solutions. Most organisations are already aware of the benefits an integrated IT system. It enables employees to access files and documents from multiple locations, creating a genuinely virtual workforce. For IT managers it centralises maintenance, making it easier to manage the network and for finance directors and senior management, it costs less. However recent research from Vanson Bourne, commissioned by Canon, highlights that almost half of companies (48 percent) see [IT integration as the biggest challenge faced by their organisation](#) in 2010.<sup>1</sup> While senior management sees the need for IT integration and the benefits it can bring, they don't fully understand how to implement it in their workplace.

### ***Pragmatic approach to change***

Effective IT integration is a challenge for all organisations. This difficulty is compounded by the current economic climate. Despite optimism slowly returning to European businesses and many countries starting to recover from months of recession, organisations are understandably continuing to look for

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Research carried out by Vanson Bourne, based on a sample of 1,800 business leaders in 18 European Countries, commissioned by Canon Europe

ways to cut-costs across their business, which inevitably puts pressure on the IT budget. While this is not the time to be making sweeping changes, dramatically cutting IT spend isn't going to help in the long run. As Datamontor highlights in a recent whitepaper commissioned by Canon, organisations need to take a [pragmatic approach to change](#), which means making small but impactful improvements rather than overhauling entire IT systems. An economic downturn can actually help focus organisations, streamlining processes and making sure workforces are operating efficiently. As markets pick up, now is the perfect opportunity to put in place systems that provide a framework for future growth. Calculated and strategic investments that deliver a clear return on investment could ensure that organisations are in as strong a position as possible as Europe enters a period of economic growth. By integrating efficient, cost effective and scalable solutions into current IT systems, companies will be free to focus on growing their core operations as the economy picks and demand begins to grow.

Our experience with one of the world's largest professional services firms, Price Waterhouse Cooper, demonstrates the processes and impact of print integration. PWC consolidated 12 offices in Zurich with 1,200 staff and an established IT infrastructure into one main headquarters. Canon helped PWC reduce its expensive and inefficient fleet of more than 600 single-function desktop printers into two print hubs per floor. What made this consolidation possible was integrated software such as uniFLOW – Canon's output management software – which enabled employees to send print jobs to a central print queue rather than an individual printer. This means that they were able to go to any MFP at any of the print hubs and select and print their document. [Printer downtime no longer interferes with productivity](#). If one printer is unavailable for whatever reason, users can simply use another printer without having to return to their desks and resend the document. This was a huge leap forward from PWC's historic print infrastructure and was an important move for such a large organisation to make.

Print management is a relatively new area for many people who work in IT and there is the perception that any changes to the print network will require a complicated, time-consuming and costly upgrade of the IT network. However, this is not the case. Print technology can now be easily integrated into an existing IT network enabling the IT Manager to manage the print network centrally and administer it more easily. Crucially, new print solutions will integrate with existing technologies and with any future investments. IT managers need to see the management of the print function as less of an administrative burden and more as a real opportunity to contribute to the business's bottom line through more efficient processes and heightened staff productivity.

### ***Hot-desking and remote working***

The impact of cost-cutting measures are being felt beyond just the IT department. Changes are being made across the board as organisations seek to reduce costs. We are travelling less, for example, and certainly only when absolutely necessary. In many cases, job roles are being consolidated as organisations seek to get more value from their current employees. As individuals work more flexibly and take on wider responsibilities, working processes such as hot-desking come into play. One day a week an employee may need to sit with a different team within the office, or indeed in a different location all together, but still needs to access documents and files on the network, as well as the printer. Integrated software enables each user to log-on to any device with their own ID and password, so an

organisation's information essentially 'travels' with employees depending on their location and is kept secure.

As well as facilitating hot-desking and remote working, effective integration also allows employees to easily collaborate on projects. Documents can be saved on a central server in such a way that users who are logged-in to the corporate network can access those documents securely from any location. The next step is to look at integrating printers into the IT network so that they become part of the document workflow. 90 percent of office devices sold by Canon are networked, meaning they are able to integrate into current IT systems and be accessed from any computer logged-on the network. In the same way that documents and files can be saved on a central server, print jobs can also be held centrally. Documents are sent to a central 'print queue' rather than a specific printer, meaning users can access and print from any device on the network. This improves workforce efficiency as staff can be more flexible in their working, and do not have to return to one particular printer.

### ***Security matters***

Security is a principle concern for all businesses and especially those in industries that handle sensitive information such as finance or government sectors. Integrating new technologies invariably raises concerns about compromising security. In the case of PWC, the organisation had an individual printer on every desk as managers, understandably, didn't want confidential, sensitive information printed and left lying around the office. PWC employees already had RFID cards to access the building and Canon simply embedded the security technology onto these cards. Employees were able to use their current RFID cards to access their personal print queue and documents on any MFP and no one else could access their documents. This is a great example of IT integration in action; using what is already available rather than investing in additional, new, technology and delivering an impactful new solution.

Ultimately integration is about IT systems working seamlessly together without the end-user really even noticing. Integration is set to be a key IT buzzword in 2010 and should not be seen as a passive, one-way connection, but an interaction between systems; for example between the printer and the network. So users are sharing information in both directions, as well as changing that information and passing it on again. The effective integration of print and document management systems demonstrates how large national and international organisations can support their wide-spread and mobile workforce. It enables employees to do their job more efficiently and from almost any location, and it offers them the peace of mind that they are able to maintain the same high levels of security even when information can be accessed from outside the office.

IT integration need not be time-consuming, complex and costly. It doesn't have to be a question of overhauling the entire network and starting again but working within current IT frameworks. IT integration offers centralised maintenance, allows users to collaborate and streamlines working processes delivering a more efficient IT infrastructure and a more productive workforce - which if implemented correctly is something which IT directors deserve recognition for.