PrinterLogic

Case Study: Thompson Tractor

Thompson Tractor Company Eliminates Print Servers and Empowers End-Users

Challenges

• *The number of end users became too large for accurate and dependable printer deployment using group policy*
• *Employees were unable to install printers themselves due to the complexity of the print environment*
• *The company lacked a clear view into the status and usage of its hardware*

Results

• *PrinterLogic helped the company to begin eliminating print servers and ensure reliable printer deployment to the right users*
• *PrinterLogic's self-service portal has enabled employees to install printers without having to call the service desk*
• *The company gained increased real-time insight into its entire print environment*

Ever since it was founded by Hall W. Thompson in 1957, Thompson Tractor Company, Inc. has taken particular pride in the dedication and knowledge of its employees and the satisfaction of its customers. The family-owned company has built an enviable reputation on those two broad pillars, cultivating strong brand recognition and customer loyalty as a regional full-service dealer of Caterpillar heavy equipment.

Headquartered in Tarrant, Alabama, Thompson Tractor operates Caterpillar sales and service facilities throughout the entire state as well as northwest Florida, and it serves as the Caterpillar forklift dealer for nearly all of Georgia. Its sales portfolio includes diesel engines used for electric power generation, on-highway and marine propulsion applications as well as earthmoving, construction and material handling equipment—such as harvesters, articulated trucks, asphalt pavers, backhoes, loaders, excavators and telescopic handlers, to name only a few.

The company's service, sales and rental of equipment is carried out each day by more than 1,500 employees across 27 locations. That naturally generates considerable volumes of paperwork consisting of sales contracts, rental agreements, invoices and internal documents. As Thompson Tractor's print environment expanded to meet these day-to-day enterprise printing demands, the company deployed print servers—nine altogether—in an attempt to retain full administrative control over it.

Over time, however, the IT department came to discover that print servers aren't truly scalable. They address an immediate networking issue but introduce more complexity, which actually hinders manageability rather than helping it.

Bobby Morris, a network specialist at Thompson Tractor, says that PrinterLogic became their go-to choice when it became clear that print servers were untenable in the long term.

"I was doing some research trying to see if there was any other solution out there, because I was getting ready to redo everything," he says. "We were having deployment problems with group policies and it was just too much headache. Our web guy had run across PrinterLogic when doing some research of his own, and he mentioned it as a possible solution."

"After looking into PrinterLogic some more, we started to feel like it was definitely the right solution for our needs." Some enthusiastic personal recommendations and helpful discussions with the PrinterLogic team convinced Morris to write a detailed proposal to the company's executive team supporting the rollout of PrinterLogic across the enterprise.

Challenge #1—Easy, Reliable Deployment

"Before PrinterLogic, we had one group policy that was managing all our printers," Morris explains. "And the biggest problem for us was deployment when we were using that group policy. It got to the point where we were going to have to break it out into multiple policies because the one we had was getting too large. People that were in the proper OU and the proper print group wouldn't have the printers deployed to them that we had specified. It would just fail to deploy because that policy was too large."

The inability to easily and reliably deploy the right printers to the users who needed them was the driving force behind Morris and his team at Thompson Tractor looking for alternate solutions.

PrinterLogic

Solution

Since installing PrinterLogic and deploying it to five initial locations as part of a company-wide migration, Morris has seen the true scalability of PrinterLogic firsthand—and he's observed it all from a single pane of glass.

"Centralized management is just a huge, huge benefit," he says. "I don't have nine printer servers that I have to deal with any longer. Everything is in one place, and I can monitor it easily. That helps me keep an eye on deployments, even though we don't run into problems with GPOs anymore. Now when we deploy printers, if a user is in the group and that printer is designated for that group, the user gets the printer. Every time. It's that simple."

Challenge #2—Infallible Installation

Thompson Tractor's end users are much like end users everywhere— that is, their job entails a great deal of printing, but the daunting complexity of traditional print environments has forced them to rely on IT to perform tasks as basic as printer installation.

"With our end users who aren't using PrinterLogic, we probably average about 20 calls a week pertaining to printers. The majority are people saying, 'I need this printer' or 'I don't have this printer.'" Not that anyone can blame them. Even Morris and his team have had to resort to inelegant installation workarounds just to circumvent the limitations of print servers and keep things running smoothly for end users.

"In the past, to avoid complications with installation, we would have somebody set up to direct-IP print—not through the print servers," he says. "But that was far from ideal. At times they may have installed the wrong driver, and that would continually knock printers offline. It got to the point where we even had to change the IP address of that printer to keep whatever that device was from knocking it offline."

Solution

Empowering end users to perform routine printer installations themselves is a key feature of PrinterLogic, made possible through its intuitive, consistent self-service installation portal. They can also use optional floorplan maps to locate printers even faster. What's more, these installations are handled by the software in such a way that driver conflicts and incompatibilities are all but impossible.

"With PrinterLogic, our users are able to go and install the printers they need using the self-service portal. If they're on-site somewhere else and they don't have a printer in that branch, they're able to go get it," Morris says.

"Once we've deployed PrinterLogic company-wide, I would expect the number of calls we're getting to be reduced to five or less per week—not because of installation issues, but because there's an actual mechanical problem. And the insight PrinterLogic is giving us into our devices via SNMP monitoring is helping us be more proactive about that too."

"For our users who travel from location to location, PrinterLogic makes it easy for them too. Now they can simply select the printer and install it themselves."

"So far we're absolutely thrilled with PrinterLogic. It makes your job easier, no doubt about that."

Challenge #3—Increased Insight

At Thompson Tractor, getting a fix on any single aspect of the print environment was difficult prior to the installation of PrinterLogic. It was hard enough to pinpoint problems with print servers, let alone the individual devices under their control.

"Using the print servers, we really had no insight into when a queue was getting backed up. Or if somebody was set up to print directly to IP versus to the printer itself, they could get something backed up on their queue, which would knock the printer offline. We had no visibility into that," says Morris. "Any device-level problems were a big unknown, and we were just feeling around in the dark."

Solution

Thanks to PrinterLogic's robust auditing features and real-time status monitoring via Simple Network Management Protocol (SNMP), Morris and his team at Thompson Tractor can maintain a bird's eye view of the company's entire print environment, then zero in on specific issues as soon as they arise.

"Today we have such easy insight into the printer," says Morris. "If there's an issue with it, we can go into the admin site and see if there's an error. You just hit a hyperlink in the admin overview and get into the web portal for that printer."

"PrinterLogic's reporting is a big help, too, and we've barely even scratched the surface of that feature. We're looking to see who is actually printing to certain printers. We're able to identify people using printers that they probably shouldn't be using, that type of thing. We're able to see more of that and stay on top of it."

Conclusion and Savings Summary

Because it has been bundled into a larger enterprise-wide IT upgrade, Thompson Tractor's implementation of PrinterLogic has been gradual. As of this writing, the company has deployed PrinterLogic to five of its 27 sites and eliminated two print servers in the process. Yet Morris' team is already seeing advantages from the partial rollout.

"In the branches where we've already deployed PrinterLogic, it really did empower the users. If there's a printer that they need that they don't have deployed to them, they're able to go out there and find it and install it themselves without having to call us. And I'm sure that'll be more noticeable once we get it rolled out company-wide," says Morris.

"So far we're absolutely thrilled with PrinterLogic. It makes your job easier, no doubt about that. As far as ease of deployment, updating drivers, that kind of thing, it's great. I love it. With the reduction of servers needed for our print management solution, the overhead associated with managing them, and with the recovery of lost time of our users due to deployment issues alone, we expect to see a significant ROI."