

An effective renewal

South Lakeland District Council has become vastly more efficient since renewing its printing software. *Insight* reports

In 2004, South Lakeland District Council (SLDC) set up the Digital Printing Project Board (DPPB), with the aim of reviewing all aspects of the printing operation and how it could run its processes more cheaply and efficiently.

The issues were:

1. SLDC outsourced all revenues and benefits data management and support requirements to a third party, all data was then transmitted back to SLDC to carry out the printing, which was performed in Genicom printers using pre-printed stationery;
2. The cost of running the revenues and benefits systems were increasing (because the mainframe operation was expensive and the number of councils sharing the cost was reducing); and
3. SLDC was keen to improve the quality of the output from its combination of pre-printed stationery and ageing printers, which was also a very expensive method of printing.

THE PRINTING SOLUTION

First, the revenues and benefits system moved in-house, which saved £200,000 per year, and then SDLC implemented Gandlake's LaserServe version 5.0, enabling a more flexible and low-cost approach to printing.

LaserServe is a print management and document engine solution, which enables customers to transform print centres into intelligent communication hubs, and to design 'bespoke' stationery and move away from the pre-printed kind. Cheque printing is now designed and printed straight away, and any change in signatory can be carried out in minutes with no need for secure disposal of old stock. This flexible approach to design saves up to £50,000 each year.

LaserServe's open architecture gives SLDC the freedom to use any package for designing forms. More importantly, SLDC has not been forced to buy an expensive package and go through the time-consuming process of learning how to use it, and have been given the option of switching to a new design package at any time. "Other available solutions required the use of their own design packages, which were expensive, complicated and limited when it came to functionality," says Stuart Henderson, Systems Administrator at SLDC.

Previously, cheques were printed on continuous stationery, with staff having to manually split each one before posting. Now SDLC can use cut sheet stock, making the task easier as well as faster.

With LaserServe's print queue facility, jobs can now be processed at 7am, providing staff with work when they arrive at 8am. Prior to this, managing the print queues alone was a fulltime job.

SDLC now has two Xerox printers on each floor, and, thanks to LaserServe, it is capable of duplex and variable data printing as well as separating files for stapling and redirecting print to Pdf. The product's alternative output capabilities mean that notifications for BACS payments can be made by email with a Pdf attachment, as an alternative to normal post.

Additional savings are also made when the council sends out purchase orders. Each order is marked, and LaserServe makes the decision as to whether it gets sent out as a Pdf file attachment to an email or printed and posted, resulting in an overall reduction in carbon footprint.

LaserServe gives SLDC the ability to add barcodes to bills enabling citizens to pay them more conveniently at PayPoint facilities, for example, the Post Office. This allows SLDC to move away from an "over the counter" service and saves the council 50p per transaction.

In the past, after producing the council tax (CT) bills and benefits letters, SLDC

staff had to go through the time-consuming process of manually stuffing each envelope to mail separately. They had the option of manually collating but although this saved money it was extremely time consuming. With the new functionality, the year-end CT, housing benefits and CT benefit letters could be batched and stapled in Walksort order to reduce postage, with an immediate saving in postage costs of £1,200. Together with reduced enquiries within the section, resources can be allocated to processing changes during the year-end period.

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

In addition to the above, SLDC recently implemented Midland Software's payroll/human resources package, and were keen to ensure the transition from the legacy system in terms of payslip production was executed as smoothly as possible.

THE FUTURE

SDLC is looking at quality and diversity issues, and currently investigating automating LaserServe to use a larger typeface and print on larger A3-sized bills for the partially sighted. These same bills could also be sent by Pdf, which could then take advantage of the industry standard "read out loud" facility. ■

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