Printing Activity Accounting Systems on a Computer Network

Implementation of accounting for printing activity on a computer network depends on the intended use.

Who is initiating the printing? Is that person trusted? Who or what is paying for the printing? Is the payment method real (actual money) or virtual (budgetary value)?

The purpose of this white paper is to define, at length, the various possible types of printing activity accounting systems, and to specify to which market sector each accounting system corresponds.

Overview

There are essentially three types of printing activity accounting systems, and three applicable market sectors.

The three accounting systems are: open, closed, and none. Closed accounting comes in two varieties: secure and non-secure. The term secure here refers to how the accounting is implemented, not whether a print job is "securely released", a different concept entirely.

The three market sectors are: legal, office and mixed. Office comes in two varieties: trusted (private) and anonymous (public).

Codes

Codes are alphanumeric strings that can be entered (in a pop up dialog at the job originating client) as part of an accounting process.

Codes can be used for billing, for identifying an account with value, or some other purpose.

Typically, an administrator decides whether codes will be used, and whether there will be one or two types of codes. An example of names for two types of billing codes would be "department" and "project".

Open Accounting

When billing codes of a particular type are not hidden from (and can be selected by) a user, _and_ new billing codes of that type can be created by a user at a client PC, you have open accounting.

In practice, a user chooses a previously entered code (or codes) from a drop down selection box, _or_ enters an entirely new code (or codes) at the client. Both methods of entering a code are made available.

Open accounting is the preferred accounting method for the legal profession, insofar as lawyers want to attribute printing activity to third parties (and their activities). For this market sector, the names of the two types of billing codes would probably be "clients" and "matters".

Closed Accounting

When new billing codes cannot be created by a user at a client PC, you have closed accounting. If pre-entered billing codes are made available via a drop down box, the closed accounting is non-secure. If a user must enter a code known only to him and administrative personnel, the closed accounting is secure.

Non-secure closed accounting is appropriate for use by staff in an office environment, where imaging activity is to be attributed to a department or project. In this case, the staff are trusted users.

Secure accounting is appropriate when users are billed after the fact for their imaging activity, but they are untrusted, or anonymous users. Real estate offices, and members of a student body are examples of untrusted users.

No Accounting

Some network environments actively use logons as a means of identifying users of a client PC. In these cases, it may not be necessary to enter billing codes to properly account for imaging activity. The logon itself is used as a field of attribution for the imaging activity. This logon (possibly in conjunction with a pre-entered billing code) can be used "in the background" to account for, and control, imaging activity.

Non-secure closed accounting is useful for organizations that want to cleanly attribute printing activity to budgetary sectors, like departments and their projects.

When using **_Print-Track_** [®] to track imaging (printing) activity, this kind of passive accounting method yields two outcomes:

1) it allows PC clients that do not have **_Print-Track Client_** installed on them to print to "monitor and print" printers, and

2) it allows for billing codes to be turned OFF entirely, with "No Job Review" (stealth mode).

These two outcomes have advantages and disadvantages.

For example, in stealth mode, the client PC may not have **_Print-Track Client_**
installed, and therefore cannot receive error messages (e.g., job deleted because
total number of pages exceeds a maximum number). In this case, "accept jobs
from non-reporting clients" would have to be checked.

On the other hand, it is very convenient in a large organization not to have to
install a large number of instances of **_Print-Track Client_**. This is possible in
stealth mode, provided you are not monitoring a printer local to the job originating
PC.