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13 Questions to Ask a Managed Print Services Provider

Finding a managed print services provider might be on your list for 2022, whether the goal is to launch a new MPS program or rethink the one you have.

It's important to closely look at what different MPS programs offer, and it helps to be armed with the right questions. Not everyone does managed print at the same level, and not every business needs the full suite of possible solutions.

Conversation Guide for Evaluating Managed Print Services Providers

When you're ready for digital transformation at the device level, use these important questions to have a well-rounded conversation.

1 - How can you help with my remote and WFH teams?

The way many businesses print today doesn't resemble what they did several years ago. As the pandemic accelerated remote and work-from-home set ups, print was unavoidably affected.

Some managed print services providers have figured it out, from delivery and setup to consumables and service. Turns out, it's quite doable.

A Quocirca report finds that 54% of organizations already using full-service MPS are more likely to provide printers to remote employees. While some firms obtained home printers through their MPS providers, others turned to transactional online procurement, resulting in gaps in security and device management. There's no unified model for how to do hybrid or fully remote home/office printing today, but you can still find out a lot with the right questions.

Ask your MPS candidate about:

- Automated replenishment
- Cloud-based device monitoring
- Depot service vs in-home
- Forecastable budget

2 - What if my print fleet involves a mix of brands and models?

What's holding you back from a fresh start with an MPS program? Is it that you've got a lot of this brand, a few of those old things and that big copier in the break room? You don't have to buy a new fleet of mono-branded

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printers to take advantage of managed print services. You just need a **partner who is device-agnostic.**

Many businesses find that a partner who can do both a hardware refresh and support devices you already have brings the best results. Ask your managed print services provider if they can refresh hardware and support your current printer fleet as you go. Ask if they're limited to certain brands, or are they brand-agnostic?

3 - Does the MPS provider have good relationships with leading printer OEMs?

It's to **your advantage if your partner has excellent relationships** with top OEMs - the printer manufacturers. When you work with leading brands, the hardware will generally be compatible and reliable in most office environments. A managed print services provider who has earned premier status with a leading brand like HP is ranked among the highest in the industry.

Premier partners participate in programs that offer original OEM brands, supplies and parts. You know their MPS team has gone through training, and their credentials are legitimate. They have the ability to pick up the phone and call for help, which is somewhat unique. That's **why this question needs to be on your list.**

4 - What devices can you support? What if I have a mix of brands?

There are reasons top printer brands have earned their reputations, but the reality is **many office environments have a mix of devices to deal with.** While we have strong relationships with preferred printer brands, we can offer our program agnostically to almost any laser printer on the market. Ask any MPS provider you're considering about their ability to do this. A good MPS partner can get parts and provide service for the less popular printer brands at your locations, too.

5 - Can the managed print services provider handle large fleets for nationwide or multi-location businesses?

Organizations with bigger printer and copier fleets can be quite problematic, with larger issues than maintaining devices or fixing printer jams. Keeping the fleet operational across a complex footprint requires a good track record in several areas, including:

- Agnostic device support and supplies
- Automation for diagnostics and maintenance
- Nationwide service and support
- Endpoint security
- Strong OEM relationships

Have a conversation with your potential managed print services provider about their ability to serve large or scattered printer populations.

6 - How versatile are the customized solutions for MPS?

No business is the same, and no MPS program should be either. But MPS-embracing organizations generally fall into two categories at the beginning of a partner relationship:

MPS Veteran - Already have a program, but having challenges or growth pains with current provider. It could be related to supply constraints. It could be invoice challenges. It could be that the service execution isn't there.

MPS Newbie - No Managed Print yet. Many unmanaged devices with typical pain points like:

- No support strategy for their printers
- Ignorant of true printing costs
- Lean or untrained IT department
- No long-term roadmap

Truly customized solutions for Managed Print can be designed around your fleet composition and geographical footprint today, with the ability to scale and grow as you do. Ask a print partner how they assess and recommend solutions.

7 - Do I need a full MPS program or can I just do my consumables?

Look for a vendor who thrives on customizing the best fit for you, not locking you into a one-and-done arrangement, and that includes consumables. You have multiple choices here, too. Print management can start simply with consumables like toner.

Ask what options they have for you. Do you have to go with a cost-per-click fee model or something based just on flat-rate supplies provision? Will the vendor provide a program that just covers your consumables headaches, with automated replenishment and service included? Can they take over supplies chores for your existing assets, without pressuring you into a full-blown MPS program?

Just looking at your consumables data could be eye-opening. Who's ordering the toner? Where do they order it from? Is it the most cost-effective solution and a quality product? Good MPS providers have different ways of meeting you where you are. Just ask.

8 - If we start small, how can the relationship grow?

Can they keep up with your business, or is the vendor limited? Do they offer complementary services that might benefit your organization or take some of the load off your team? Or will you at some point need to bring in yet another vendor to handle yet another challenge in your busy office?

What if you could find a vendor capable of delivering MPS excellence, and they can **scale those skills to other areas like managed IT or cloud or security.** There's something to be said for having one consolidated vendor relationship that doesn't hold you back in any direction. What would a roadmap look like? Ask for examples of how your MPS provider has handled these situations in the past.

9 - How can I be sure my MPS program delivers what I expected?

"I think I'm getting poor performance from my current program. How can I be sure?" Our response would be: How often does your vendor meet with you? Not service calls, but strategic sit-downs. Strong MPS providers build **strategic technology reviews** into the roadmap for every single customer. Maybe it's four times a year. Maybe it's when something pops up on the network unexpectedly and triggers an alert, or when the vendor finds a stash of unmanaged printers. The review schedule can be flexible, but it needs to happen.

In a strategic review, a data-driven MPS vendor takes all the various data sources and turns it into bits of "game film" to share with the customer. The vendor should come prepared with **informed ideas to help your business technology run better,** including your devices. Ask your vendor how they continually improve print management processes and communication through strategic technology reviews.

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10 - How do you use automation in managed print services?

What sets some managed print services providers apart from others is the automation they build into their tools. Best-practice vendors use recognized, industry-standard tools, and build automation and processes to run them to maximum advantage.

An MPS vendor with solid automation chops will **continually shave manual steps out of print management,** while improving data capture and analysis.

11 - Do you deliver supplies using auto-fulfillment for uninterrupted performance?

What would automated consumables fulfillment look like, say in a healthcare environment? A process-driven model would automatically deliver toner cartridges with highly visible yellow routing labels. When the consumables get to the big hospital, staff know exactly where that toner is supposed to go, and it arrives in plenty of time to get it to the right department. This is an example of a refined auto-fulfillment process, and it's easy to see how this could help any business that depends on printed documents.

The main goal with auto-fulfillment is **devices that replenish themselves.** It's an area some managed print vendors don't do as well as others, but a few have nailed automated fulfillment processes, so your business isn't interrupted due to consumables delay.

12 - What does your tech stack and solutions portfolio cover?

This question ties in with the ones above, because none of these services and data-driven performance happen without solid technology and solutions behind them. You'll know you have a positive partner when they get excited about this conversation.

Forward-looking partners bring curiosity and enthusiasm about applying their different technologies to customers' locations and needs. A vendor who's limited to just selling one software package, or one piece of hardware, or one type of service inside your company can't take you very far. (And they're probably pretty bored.)

13 - What refresh strategy do you recommend for my situation?

Whatever your current office situation, **your print fleet is not a static asset.** If anything, devices depreciate every year, and the software decays along with them.

Smart businesses think about a refresh strategy for their devices so they're not reactive but forward-thinking. With compliance and security strongly positioned at the top of every business checklist, **neglecting vulnerable print fleets isn't optional.** A refresh strategy keeps everything up to speed. Ask your MPS provider to plan a roadmap with you.

So what's your next step? Armed with these questions, you're ready to have deeper conversations that will bring you closer to your best MPS solution. Have a look at this article for more insights and best practices: MSP 101: Best Practices For Choosing a Managed Service Provider.