Integrated network faxing key to improved productivity and information security

Network faxing reduces labor costs and increases information security

With an integrated network faxing solution, you can save thousands of dollars in labor costs alone and improve your productivity. At the same time your faxes can be readily prepared, be more professional in appearance and add an air of professionalism to your organization's business communications. By leveraging existing word processing and messaging applications, you can expand your use of these applications at no additional software or training costs. Higher productivity and lower costs sound like attractive options? Read this white paper for more info!

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Introduction

This white paper describes the benefits of network integrated faxing in business communications and the resulting more cost-effective and efficient form of fax system when compared to traditional fax machines and email. It also explains why integrated network faxing is the best approach to take when dealing with issues of security, compliance with privacy regulations, reducing overhead and increasing productivity, all at no real cost. While ordinary fax machines and email messaging will remain important, they cannot match the benefits that integrated network faxing brings to the fax needs of an enterprise.

The state of the fax

It was not that long ago that faxes seemed to be destined to go the way of the dinosaur and the dodo bird. Faxes, the transmission of paper documents by electronic means in the twinkling of an eye, were an exceptional technology for their time, said the pundits. However, they continued, the growing ubiquitous email systems would soon make them passé, or at best reduce faxes to a small niche where email could not yet match the capabilities of a fax machine.

As so often happens, the pundits and doomsayers were wrong. Faxing did not go away and continues to be an important means of business communication. In fact, email did not really ever come close to supplanting faxes, and fax technology, it turns out, may be a better solution in an increasing number of situations.

Problems with email messaging

It was once thought that standalone fax machines would be replaced with email messaging which, in many instances, allows documents to be sent as attachments and can be printed locally, losing little of their integrity.

But, unless the right safeguards are deployed everywhere all the time, email quickly showed it was not as up to the task as hoped because it could not always guarantee to be as secure a form of communication as faxing (for example, an email message and its content might be stored on any number of servers). Email transmission of information also runs into problems with compliance agencies and regulations, such as HIPAA, that require greater security.

Besides, unlike emails, a fax cannot carry a virus; a fax cannot be used to phish and a fax cannot be used to harm your company's network security.

It is estimated that there are about 125 million fax machines in use in the world today, and close to six million new purchases each year. One of the reasons that fax machines have continued to be around is that they are simple to use and an easy way to receive documents quickly, safely and securely. While there are no exact numbers on it, many if not most, companies worldwide still continue to rely on traditional manual faxing from a dedicated fax machine. While this might be acceptable in a small office or where the ability to receive or send faxes is sporadic, sending faxes manually is clearly out of date, and costing you money.

Problems with manual faxing

One of the biggest problems with manual faxing is the time it takes to send one – time that could be put to better use elsewhere.

Let's look at the steps in sending off a fax manually. A process we will call the "Where's Sarah?" scenario. (Think of how many times you have asked "Where's Sarah?" and the answer comes back "She's sending a fax.") We will assume that the fax document, for example, a purchase order, has already been prepared on Sarah's workstation and needs to be faxed to a vendor. How does it get there?

1. Sarah prints the purchase order on a network printer.

2. Sarah gets up from the desk and walks to the network printer where she finds the printed document either alone or in a pile of other print jobs.

3. Sarah now brings the document to the dedicated fax machine.

4. Sarah prepares a cover page, and places it, along with the purchase order in the fax machine.

5. She then keys in the phone number of the receiving fax machine and presses send. If the number is busy, she may need to resend it.

6. Once done Sarah returns to her desk.
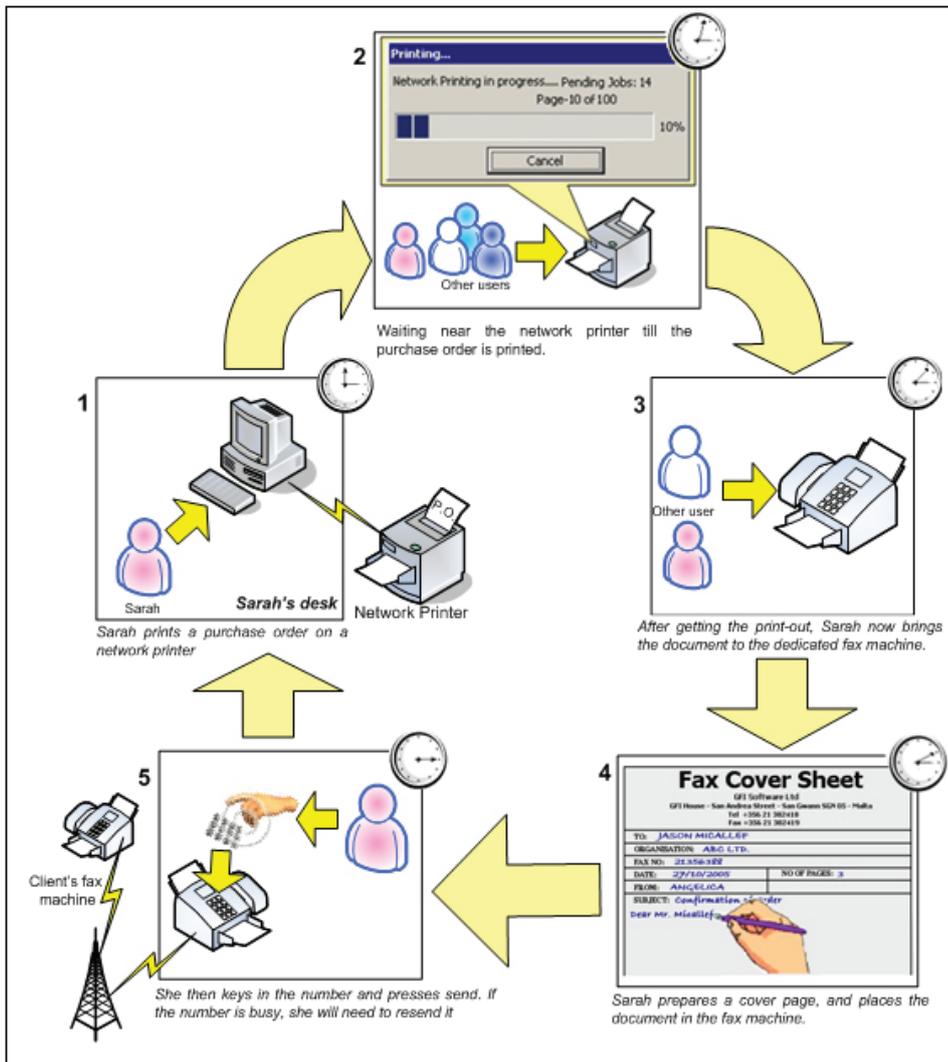
A conservative estimate is that the entire process, assuming no other distractions and no significant delays due to missing paper, jams, machine errors, getting a drink at the water dispenser or talking to co-workers, takes about ten minutes.

That's right – about ten minutes (or more) to send a fairly ordinary, undramatic document. What's more, the document will likely be received in poor quality with gray scales reduced to black, the document probably tilted slightly (or worse) and the whole end result being terribly unprofessional looking.

What happens to the fax at the receiver's end can be even less pleasant. Assuming it arrives at a communal fax machine, the chances of it becoming lost or misrouted increase with each passing moment. It's easy to imagine it being picked up as part of another person's fax and misfiled; or placed to the side then slipping to the floor or into a waste paper basket. Or, it might be misdirected to an entirely wrong department where it will languish, waiting for someone to come and retrieve it, which might never happen and as you would expect, confidentiality is problematic.

Suddenly, one of the fax's great advantages, timeliness, is lost. You have wasted time (and therefore money); sent a not very attractive document, which, if it avoids becoming part of the paper pileup around the fax machine and is actually delivered to the recipient, is of such poor quality that it makes your company look like it's stuck in the past, using antiquated technology, and, at that, not very effectively either.

Why integrated network faxing is the answer

So what is the solution to business communications? Email can be insecure and risky – plus it has a number of intrinsic problems of its own. Faxes solve many of these issues, but manual faxing is out of date and the problems it creates make it far less than ideal.

What is needed

In addition to security, the ideal method to finding a solution better than either manual faxing or emailing should also include the following on its wish list:

» Reduces fax associated costs

» Improves worker productivity

» Easy installation and deployment

» Leverage existing email and office suites

» Requires no change to the user's routine

» Archives faxes for later retrieval and record retention.

The most popular solution has been to replace standalone fax machines with integrated network fax servers that allow users to quickly and easily send, receive and manage fax communication right at their desktop.

In this type of a solution, users can compose faxes in their word processor (or another application) or create a new message in their email client (e.g., Outlook or Lotus Notes). Numbers can be selected from the mail clients' address list or entered manually. Traffic is managed through the Exchange/SMTP mail server which can receive and route faxes.

Top of the line integrated network fax servers also allow users to send and receive faxes via their handhelds or mobile devices like Blackberry and smartphones. With industry studies, such as that by UK-based Canalys, showing the doubling in overall sales of Smartphones and PDA/Phone hybrids, mobility is on the rise. Furthermore, the ability to receive information anywhere, especially faxes, is about to be, if not already, mission critical.

Saving money

One of the key benefits to integrated network faxing is the cost saving it provides. As we explained above, a single fax can take up to ten minutes to send. If the person responsible for sending the fax is paid a modest $12 an hour ($25,000 per year) then the manpower costs alone of sending one fax is $2 per fax. Multiply that by the number of faxes sent per day, per month or year and the labor costs could climb into thousands of dollars very quickly as shown in Table 1.

Faxes per day	Daily cost	Weekly cost	Annual cost
10	$20	$100	$5,200
25	$50	$250	$13,000
50	$100	$500	$26,000
100	$200	$1,000	$52,000

Table 1 – Costs incurred when sending faxes manually

These costs are actually low since they do not include other items such as paper, long distance charges or maintenance costs (such as toner cartridges).

Let's assume that Sarah works in a company with an integrated network fax solution. Now when she completes the to-be-faxed document, she doesn't have to leave her desk, all she has to do is:

1. From the word processor, print to the fax application.

2. Select the recipient from the address book or enter the phone number.

3. Click send (the fax will continue to be resent without user intervention).

Total time? Not more than one minute – using the same figures, the cost of a single fax has dropped from $2 each to $0.20. Table 2 illustrates the savings made over one day, one week and one year if the organization sends an average of 50 faxes a day:

	Manual (Cost = $2 per fax)	Network (Cost = $0.20 per fax)	Savings
Day	100	$10	$90
Week	$500	$50	$450
Year	$26,000	$2,600	$23,400

Table 2 – Costs incurred and savings made through integrated network faxing

This gives Sarah additional time to devote to more productive tasks.

Production faxing

Production faxing is similar, but very different to broadcast faxing. A broadcast fax is essentially sending the same message, say a sales brochure, to multiple recipients. With production faxing, you send a unique document to multiple recipients.

Production faxing is a key requirement for any company whose day-to-day operations consist of delivering large numbers of paper documents to customers and partners. Production faxing allows enterprises to deliver business critical documents – such as purchase orders, invoices, order confirmations, bills of lading, financial reports and mortgage tables, without the need to print, mail or manually fax a document both electronically and automatically.

Mailing a document involves printing out the document, enclosing it into an envelope and mailing it out at a cost similar to manual faxing. If an organization's day-to-day operations involve sending out multiple documents per day, such as invoices, order confirmations and inventory ordering, then the cost per year can be a significant piece of a company's operational expenses. With production faxing, a company can reduce these costs by up to 90% by automating fax delivery and reducing costs to print, mail or fax a document.

Improved security

With network integrated faxing, end users can send, receive, view, print and save faxes from their PC or laptop computer, eliminating the pile of paper around a communal fax machine.

Automatic inbound routing through a process called Direct Inward Dial (DID) routing, (in which end users are assigned a personal secure fax number) sends faxes directly to the user's desktop. Because the fax is received in the user's account, faxes are not left out in public view, and are not prone to being discarded or misrouted.

Other advantages

In addition to the above, high performance integrated network faxing solutions have the following capabilities:

1. Incoming and outgoing fax queue sorting – i.e. you can view faxes by any number of variables, such as sender, status, destination, etc.

2. Improved fax quality, formatting capability and document legibility for a professional appearance

3. Ability to add attachments to the fax

4. Delivery to both email clients and standalone or network fax machines

5. Delivery to PDAs and mobile phones

6. Junk fax filters to eliminate unwanted documents

7. Fax broadcasting capabilities that allow you to send personalized fax messages to a large number of recipients

8. Archiving of faxes, thus eliminating the need to keep faxed copies of documents while still retaining key records

9. IT departments can consolidate fax server operations and standardize them

10. Integrated network faxing opens the possible use of real-time FAX over IP (FOIP).

Summary

The simple and relatively painless process of setting up an integrated network faxing solution can significantly increase a company's efficiency and productivity. With a network faxing solution, thousands of dollars can be saved in labor costs alone. In addition, faxes can be more secure, readily prepared and add an appearance of professionalism to the company's business communications. By leveraging existing technologies (such as word processing and messaging applications), other enterprises can derive greater benefit from existing applications with no additional cost in terms of software or additional training expenses.

The integrated network faxing solution is one of the most elegant and beneficial on the market. The return on investment is high and the benefits of executing the solution can be realized literally in minutes.

About GFI FaxMaker for Exchange/SMTP/Lotus

GFI FaxMaker™ is a leading fax server for small to medium-sized enterprises. It makes sending and receiving faxes an efficient, simple and cost effective process and solves the problems with manual faxing: printing out the document, walking to the fax machine, waiting for the fax to go through, not to mention the cost of fax machine supplies and repair. GFI FaxMaker allows users to send and receive faxes directly from their email client. For more info about this product and to download your free trial, please visit http://www.gfi.com/faxmaker.

About GFI

GFI Software provides web and mail security, archiving and fax, networking and security software and hosted IT solutions for small to medium-sized enterprises (SME) via an extensive global partner community. GFI products are available either as on-premise solutions, in the cloud or as a hybrid of both delivery models. With award-winning technology, a competitive pricing strategy, and a strong focus on the unique requirements of SMEs, GFI satisfies the IT needs of organizations on a global scale. The company has offices in the United States (North Carolina, California and Florida), UK (London and Dundee), Austria, Australia, Malta, Hong Kong, Philippines and Romania, which together support hundreds of thousands of installations worldwide. GFI is a channel-focused company with thousands of partners throughout the world and is also a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner.

More information about GFI can be found at http://www.gfi.com.

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