Rugged managed print services: Defining a new market for the supply chain

The emerging 'rugged-MPS' market is set to become the new supply chain standard says Renovotec managing director Richard Gilliard

It is time to re-define managed print services (MPS) for supply chain users, who have specialist needs that arguably to date have not been met by standard, office-centred MPS.

There is industry demand for a managed print service that specialises in rugged supply chain environments for logistics and distribution, retail and manufacturing companies. Industry experience suggests that 75% of businesses are unaware of their print costs, which for supply chain users can account for up to 20% of their organisation's total expenditure. When efficiently deployed in a supply chain environment 'rugged-MPS' can cut print costs by more than a third and increase productivity by ensuring maximum printer uptime.

Rugged, industrial-strength printers in a manufacturing environment, for example on a production line are more mission-critical than their office equivalents. If one office printer goes down the user can simply print to another, whereas in manufacturing if a printer is at the end of a production line, often that is not possible and the line may have to be closed down, resulting in lost production and order fulfilment delays. One of the key printers in the operation of a major electrical retailer went down the day before Black Friday, with potentially severe consequences.

The biggest change in the rugged-MPS market is the built-in intelligence that allows the MPS provider to not only monitor rugged estate performance via the cloud but also anticipate problems before they arise, through intelligent surveillance (Zebra's asset visibility system is an example). Say for example a supply chain company has four printers: the rugged-MPS provider can view data revealing that one printer is producing far more labels than the other three and that it is necessary to split the print load more efficiently.

Pre-empting failures in a supply chain estate saves time and money by minimising downtime. Total visibility of assets, from barcode printers on the factory floor to electronic proof of delivery, in-vehicle EPOD devices allows the rugged-MPS provider to anticipate when print heads or scanner batteries need to be replaced. Real time health checks on printers and (optionally) scanners, handheld computers and other electronic assets ensure that the competitive performance of supply chain assets is optimised and customer service levels are maintained. Customers value reliability and, increasingly, expect an uninterrupted supply chain: remote monitoring helps to ensure both.

Depending on need Rugged-MPS can take many forms. An audit will measure the performance of a company's legacy printers, their estimated end-of-life, and the cost and the quality of the media they currently use. A rugged managed print service will advise on printer replacement (if needed, when needed, what model) and on media price-performance. Some companies choose to restructure or expand their rugged hardware estate using rental, which is viewed as an operational expense or OpEX rather than a capital expense (CapEx). Occasionally, businesses choose to outsource their entire rugged estate - hardware, related software and support.

Rugged-MPS is a specialist area. Industrial printers play a central role in the integrated supply chain and a wider knowledge of their environment is essential for rugged-MPS deployment. At a simpler but no less important level changing a print head on a high performance industrial printer is not a job for an amateur. Using experienced rugged-MPS engineers avoids costly errors.

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AXA unveils new forklift truck safety initiative

AXA Insurance has teamed up with CCTV and telematics firm VUE to launch a new safety initiative aimed at reducing forklift truck accidents.

As part of the scheme, AXA and VUE are offering companies video and telematics technology that allows them to monitor forklifts and driver behaviour much more closely.

Two cameras are placed on the forklift, one forward facing camera and one driver facing camera placed at the top of the driver cab. The cameras are hooked up to an online system so incidents can be reviewed immediately.

A black box records the speed, braking, location and other relevant data in order to rate the performance of forklift drivers.

Indigo WMS toasts success with new Loch Lomond Whiskies project

Loch Lomond Group, the company behind some of Scotland's most highly regarded artisan whisky brands, has appointed Indigo Software to implement Indigo WMS warehouse management software and more efficiently manage put away, picking and sales order processing within 5 of its bonded warehouses. Indigo commenced the project to transform Loch Lomond's paper-based warehouse processes with real-time warehouse management in May 2018.

Founded in 1814, Loch Lomond Whiskies can trace its roots back to the Littlemill distillery, which was established in 1772 and is thought to be one of the oldest in the world. Its current malt and grain distilleries, in Alexandria, Dunbartonshire on the banks of Loch Lomond, were built in the 1960s and are among only a few in the industry to maintain an onsite cooperage. The malt distillery at Alexandria also features a unique combination of traditional swan neck and distinctive straight-necked pot stills, enabling it to produce a diverse range of flavour profiles.

After experiencing a phase of sustained business growth and investment, following the company's acquisition in 2014 by private equity group Exponent, Loch Lomond has transformed the scale of its business. The recent partnership with The Open Golf Championship means the distiller's exciting range of single malts will become "The Spirit of The Open" raising the profile of this innovative business on the international stage.

Over the past few years the product range has quadrupled in size and the company now stocks over 850 different SKUs of product varieties, which are shipped globally. This represents a huge shift from its commercial position just a few years earlier. Export markets have now grown tenfold and over 250 pallets of finished goods leave the Ayrshire site each day, for onward distribution to customers.

Loch Lomond Group's investment in Indigo WMS is seen as an essential part of the company's transition to become a leading global whisky producer. Implementing a warehouse management system will allow the company to automate the management of incoming raw materials and finished goods, plus improve sales order processing.

"Our growth means we have effectively outgrown the original processes that served us so well for many years. It's a good problem to have because it demonstrates how we have progressed our brand visibility and volume" says Tony Brewerton, Plant Director at Loch Lomond Group.

"Implementing Indigo WMS will allow us to make finished goods put away much more efficient and ensure we are achieving a higher proportion of 'on time in full' (OTIF) shipped pallets, which is critical for customer satisfaction."

Traceability is another important consideration for Loch Lomond, to maintain accurate product records and guard against counterfeited goods. Each bottle produced has a unique lot code identifier denoting the line, date and time of production. Indigo WMS is supporting this process by capturing lot code information at the goods inwards stage and tracing it right through to the end customer. This enables Loch Lomond to verify product authenticity and demonstrate that the duty has been paid.

Due to the distribution of Loch Lomond's warehousing facilities across multiple warehouses, implementing a wi-fi network to support real-time warehouse management was deemed to be cost prohibitive. Instead, Indigo has specified mobile devices capable of using the GSM cellular network to enable the company to gain all the benefits of mobile working, at a reduced cost. Once implemented Indigo WMS will also be integrated with Loch Lomond's JD Edwards ERP solution.

"We frequently encounter situations where an artisan food and drinks manufacturer is migrating from paper based systems and introducing a WMS as their first level of automation. In these cases, adding wi-fi into a legacy site can be very expensive and it's not always a necessity as this project demonstrates," says Eric Carter, Solutions Architect at Indigo Software.

INDIGO
www.indigo.co.uk

SEMA Approved Installation companies pass scrutiny

SEMA Approved Installation Companies (SAICs) have followed in the footsteps of SEMA Distributor Companies (SDCs) in offering up their businesses to an in-depth quality audit. The programme commissioned by the Storage Equipment Manufacturers' Association (SEMA) was conducted by Wayne Wiggins, auditor for external quality assurance company QCS International.

The audit is a brand-new SEMA initiative and designed to inject further rigour into SEMA group membership criteria. Outcomes are very positive and it's encouraging to learn that 23% of companies achieved a Highly Commended score of 90% or above. The scores follow similar pattern to the SDCs who, in 2017, doubled their grades to 61% of Highly Commended scores by working towards a three-year programme of continuous improvement.

The SAIC audit is designed to be a measure of the company's ability to meet customer requirements and deliver a quality service. As such, SEMA asks QCS to look at the general business management such as policies, procedures, insurance and legal compliance as well as the internal processes for capturing the customers' requirements and how that information translates into service delivery by ensuring that installers have the appropriate competence (i.e. skills, qualifications, training, experience and operating licences etc). Other elements specific to Health & Safety are also examined such as accident reporting procedures, risk assessments and method statements (RAMS) and any records of toolbox talks.

The audit comprised 26 compulsory questions and three non-compulsory questions which whilst not considered as fundamental elements, still form part of the scored assessment and are included to add value and opportunity for improvement. Each member will re-audited after three years. The audit criteria are in the process of being refreshed in order to deliver greater rigour which will embrace more elements of the installation process.

Lionel Drage, Chairman of the SAIC group said: "SEMA is actively working to improve the professionalism of storage equipment installation companies through the SAIC group. These companies are regulated and were audited by SEMA to ensure that the correct installation standards are met.

"To be accepted into the scheme, SAIC companies must demonstrate a high level of commitment to SEMA quality and safety standards and the industry codes of practice. They must also demonstrate a firm commitment to the SEIRS safety initiatives, have at least one SEIRS registered supervisor on the team and all their permanent

staff must hold valid SEIRS ID cards.

"This QA standard is intended to demonstrate that these members are committed to first class performance in both safety and quality throughout the installation from planning through to completion. The audit proves that SAIC businesses should be your first choice when looking for a storage equipment installation company.

"Just by making this selection you could be reducing the risk of a potential racking collapse from poor installation or injury/fatality from inadequate safety standards."

There are currently 14 approved companies operating throughout the UK. A list of SAIC companies is available at sema.org.uk or call 0121 601 6359.

Video

Log on to http://bit.ly/1SAICfilm and watch a short video on the benefits of choosing a SEMA Approved Installation Company.

SEMA
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