

# Keep count of copies



Turning hidden costs into billable revenue, by **Eddy Winters**

**T**here are very good reasons why firms and companies of all sizes need to get to grips with the true cost of their various document generation activities, be this for copy, print, scanning or faxing.

On the one hand, it is simply sound business practice to know how this element of your total monthly overhead is being generated. On the other hand, once you can identify how costs are being generated, by whom and for what reason, you immediately open up the opportunity to recover what would otherwise come straight off the operating profit.

Until now, in many organisations the closest anyone generally got to recovering these lost costs was via the traditional "billing book" on the photocopier. This manual approach is the virtue of being simple, but it is enormously prone to errors and omissions, and whether these are the result of accident or intent, the end result can be costly.

Moreover, with the onward march of technology, even firms that have in the past made strenuous efforts to record manually each time anyone copied a document for a client, or faxed the client, are now losing revenue. The near ubiquitous use of multi-functional devices (MFDs), which combine the functions of copier, printer, scanner, and fax, means that those who are concentrating just on recovering the costs of copying and faxing are losing other recoverable revenue hand over fist.

The solution lies with automated software that can capture every copy, print, scanned item or fax, together with the reason for

the activity. One of the leading systems on the market offering this kind of activity capture and automatic cost allocation is Equitrac. At Capital Solutions we have been partnering with Equitrac for the past five years.

The simplest solution is called Rapid Assessment Key (RAK). This software runs from a memory stick that can go into any client PC on the network. It interrogates the counters on all the printers on the network, creating a list and a set of "start" points for a monitoring process.

By running the RAK again after a month or so and comparing the state of the two sets of counters, it is simple to see how many pages every printer on the network is producing.

This gives the client a full account of usage. What it does not show, of course, is what projects that usage is associated with. This is where Equitrac comes into its own. There are three flavours of Equitrac.

The first is Equitrac Office, for the general office environment and it has client billing and cost recovery options included. The second version is Equitrac Express, which is targeted at "pay for print" establishments, such as universities and libraries.

The third version is Equitrac Professional, which, to date, has

been targeted largely at the legal and accountancy markets. It very specifically targets cost recovery and also has a very popular feature, lock-up copying and secure printing.

This enables individuals in the organisation to be absolutely sure that the document they want to send to a printer on the office network is secure and confidential. When they hit the print key, the system stores the document and only releases it when they are standing at the printer of their choice and key in their unique PIN. When they do this the system prints the job at that printer and they take it away with them.

At the same time, the system allows the print job to be allocated not just to a user but to a particular department or client billing code.

Similarly, if a staff member has some photocopying to do, they can log in at the MFD unit and input the billing code. The system will then record the number of photocopies done and assign the appropriate cost to that billing code.

Equitrac Professional is the latest development in the Equitrac line. We have already implemented this system at one of the biggest legal practices in Scotland and there is tremendous interest in the system. ■

**"You can recover costs that would otherwise come off the operating profit"**

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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