PRINT 2025

The journey to digital reinvention

Global Market Insight Study

How collaboration, cloud and convergence will shape the future workplace

www.print2025.com

Report Excerpt

QUOCIRCA

Foreword

Welcome to the second edition of the Global Print 2025 study, the latest instalment in Quocirca's ongoing assessment of the convergence of print and digital technologies in the workplace.

The survey findings are based on the responses of 650 IT decision makers and 975 office workers in SMB and enterprise organisations across the US and Europe.

The office print industry is on a journey of digital reinvention, at an inflection point where the traditional hardware-led transactional models are no longer sustainable. While leading vendors are already developing their "as-a-service" offerings to drive service revenue opportunities and build longer-term customer relationships, more momentum is needed. Today, businesses of all sizes are making increasing demands of their suppliers, seeking IT-centric expertise and support for innovation. This is leading to traditional print vendors losing influence amongst both IT decision makers and lines-of-business.

Overall, the survey found that, while most organisations remain reliant on print today, the majority continue to accelerate their digitisation initiatives and prioritise investment in cloud and collaboration technologies. The study reveals a significant disconnect between IT decision makers and office workers on the role that print will play in the workplace of 2025. IT management's desire for control and security is at odds with employees' wish for freedom, flexibility and creativity. An IT workforce that is tied to traditional technologies is perhaps one of the greatest barriers to success. Ultimately a reliance on paper-based processes is hindering productivity in the digital workplace, and Quocirca's research suggests that office workers do not feel well-equipped with the technologies and tools required to boost productivity, collaboration and efficiency.

Traditional print vendors need to address this gap to remain relevant. They need to offer the right blend of secure digital services to enable their customers to transform the way they work. Those that succeed and become digital transformation partners are most likely to still be around by 2025. They must disrupt their traditional business models, drive innovation, in both culture and technology, and implement agile processes that allow them to respond flexibly to market changes.

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Sponsors

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Research notes

This research is an extended follow up to similar research carried out in 2017. In 2017, 575 interviews were carried out with IT decision makers across France, Germany, the Netherlands, the UK and the US, with a further 50 interviews with executive decision makers being carried out across these countries and Japan.

The 2019 research expanded upon the IT decision maker research to include those using print technologies. To gain insights into the perceptions of individuals and the organisations for which they work into what is happening in the print market, Quocirca undertook 1,625 interviews across a range of organisations across different verticals in France, Germany, Italy, the Nordics, Spain, the UK and the US.

975 of these interviews were with end users within the organisations – those who make use of print technologies. These are referred to throughout this report as Office Workers (OWs). The remaining 650 interviews were with those who had a degree of influence on the decision making on acquiring or purchasing print-related services within the organisation. Throughout the report, these are referred to as IT Decision Makers (ITDMs).

The industry verticals targeted were:

• Business and professional services

• Financial services

• Industrials

• Private healthcare

• Public healthcare

• Public sector

• Retail

Responses were also analysed by size of organisation, split as those with employees between 100-249 employees, those with 250-499 employees, those with 500-999 employees and those with 1,000 employees or greater.

Some data was also analysed by the age of the respondent to see if there was any impact from millennials entering the market.

Region

Industry

Organisation size

Respondent type
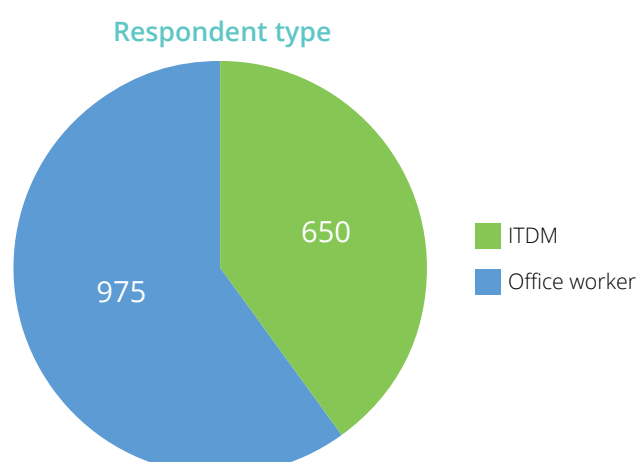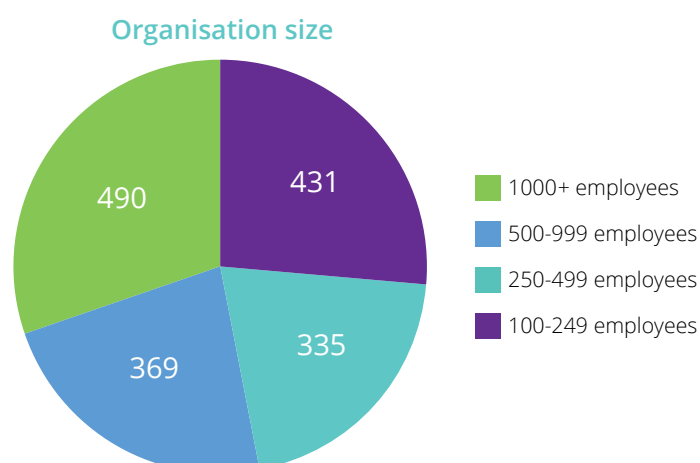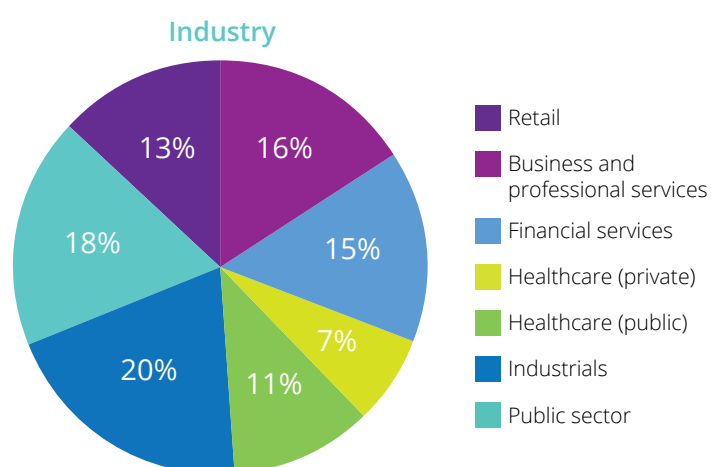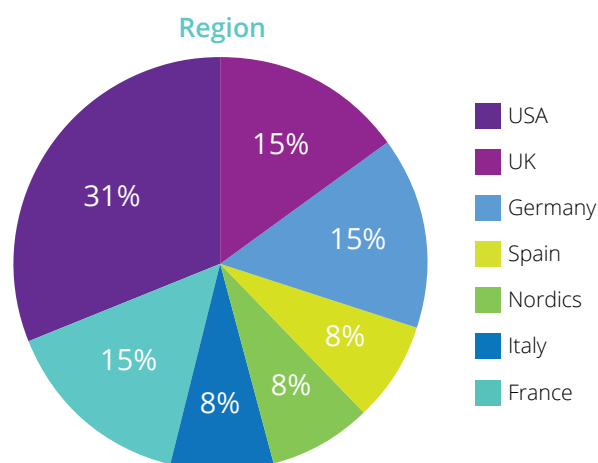
Executive summary

Evolving strategic imperatives and a rapidly changing workplace mean that organisations are re-evaluating how technology delivers business value and competitive advantage. Increased mobility means that organisations must enable a diverse and multi-generational workforce to operate efficiently in virtual teams where workers may be based in smart offices, home offices, or be on the move.

Quocirca's research reveals that, on average, 49% of the workforce is mobile today, with this expected to rise to 66% by 2025. The intake of younger Generation Z employees brought up in the digital era brings opportunities through digital familiarity, alongside problems with less loyalty to a business and a desire to operate a different style of work/life balance.

Meanwhile, automation, cloud, and as-a-service technology models are taking root, streamlining and speeding IT delivery.

The broad acceptance of the cloud has seen a change in how IT is procured, provisioned, operated and maintained. Cyber resilience is also high on the agenda as organisations operate more and more connected smart IoT devices – including networked printers and smart multifunctional peripherals (MFPs), which extend the attack surface. Sustainability is now a key priority, as businesses look to boost their green credentials through improving energy efficiency and eliminating activities or processes with a high environmental impact.

This is creating opportunities for print vendors to deliver the products and services that can support the future workplace, enabling smart working and secure collaboration. Notably it is the office workers who place a higher value on areas such as collaboration and unified communications. This suggests a disconnect between employee expectations of the future workplace and what many organisations plan to deliver (Figure 1).

Figure 1.
Question: Which of the following will be the most important areas of investment from now to 2025?
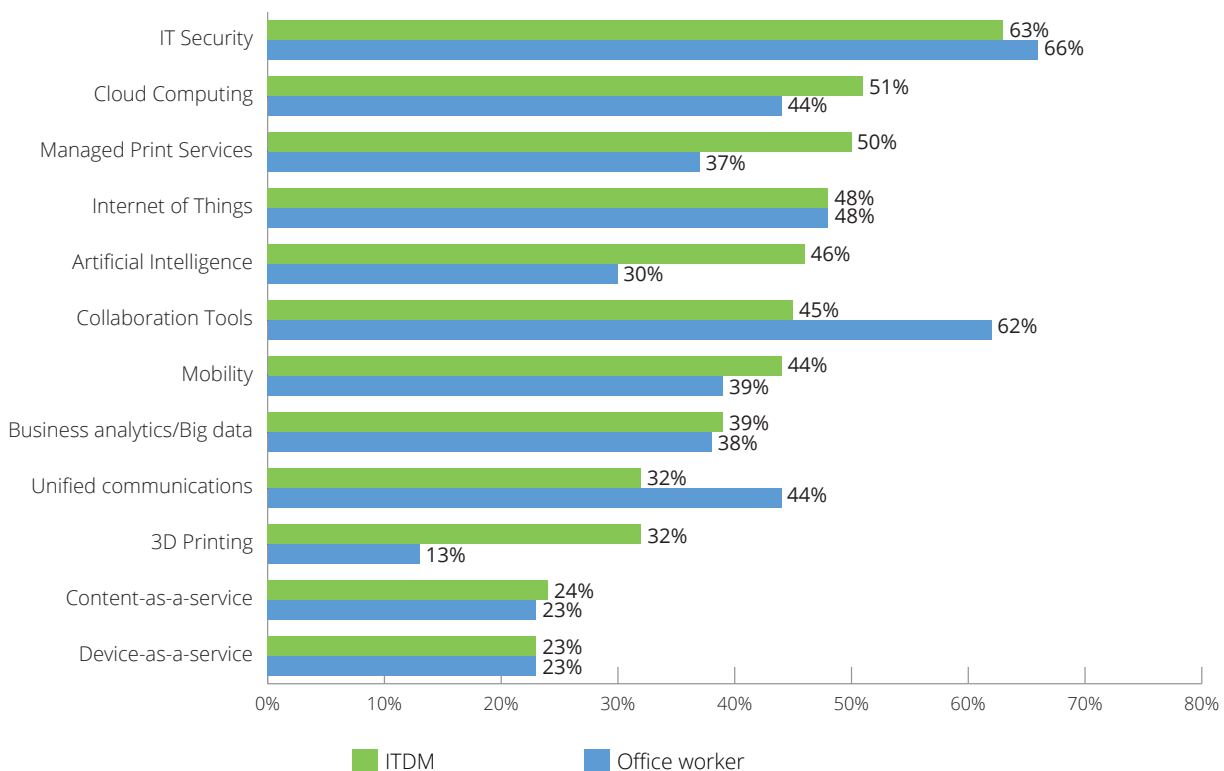
This report uncovers the perceptions of the role that print and digital technologies will play in the future. It reveals that organisations are rapidly shifting to a less-paper workplace and expect their suppliers to evolve to help with their digital transformation and provide the innovation their businesses crave.

Key findings

Print and digital convergence in the future mobile workplace will demand more effective collaboration and communication. By 2025, 66% of an organisation's workforce is expected to be mobile, up from 49% now. The convergence of distributed offices, remote and field workers and cross-team collaboration opens new opportunities for integrated communication and collaboration platforms. The importance of such solutions is evident, with 55% of respondents placing collaboration tools as the second most important technology investment (after security) between now and 2025. While most organisations are reliant on printing to some extent, this is diminishing as they look to better integrate paper and digital workflows. By 2025, almost half (49%) of all respondents expect digitisation of paper-based processes to be very important to their digital transformation initiatives, compared to 25% today.

IT decision makers and office workers disagree on the future of print and digital technologies. Although overall 71% of respondents believe that paper is quite or very important to their business today, this drops to 48% by 2025. Notably it is IT decision makers that are more positive – 65% believe paper will still be important by 2025 compared to just 36% of office workers. Increased mobility and a greater use of collaboration, document capture and workflow tools are cited as the top factors in reducing print usage between now and 2025. Office workers are most likely to want more investment in digital collaboration tools – 62% ranked it in the top 5 of required technology investments by 2025, compared to 45% of IT decision makers. This disconnect between IT decision makers and office workers suggests that the latter are not getting the digital solutions they believe they need to be productive.

Sustainability is climbing the corporate agenda, and printing is a key target. Overall, 76% of respondents expect sustainability to be a *highly important* credential for businesses by 2025. Most organisations have general sustainability measures in place such as paper and hardware recycling and improving energy efficiency. They also plan to increase investment in sustainability projects. This is an opportunity for print suppliers to enhance their sustainability messaging, particularly as lowering environmental impact is cited as a top print management challenge - 52% of IT decision makers in 2019 compared to 46% in 2017. This is undoubtedly due to the continued reliance on printing, with 46% of respondents indicating an increase in colour print volumes between now and 2025.

Cloud computing is driving momentum for cloud print services. The evolution of scalable cloud-based offerings means that businesses of all sizes now have access to affordable enterprise platforms. A shift to a cloud platform can enhance security, scalability and mobility by eliminating the need for organisations to maintain workplace platforms themselves. More organisations are taking advantage of cloud-based print management, with 73% expecting to increase their usage by 2025. This creates opportunities for suppliers who can deliver dedicated cloud print services, enabling organisations to minimise their use of on-premise print servers, reduce the burden on IT staff and improve the efficiency of their print environment. Such a move makes sense for the suppliers as well, providing more management and control options to enhance services across their customer base.

Security, print-to-digital integration platforms and energy monitoring top supplier requirements to 2025. Overall, 30% of respondents chose security products and services as one of the top 3 areas for future investment by print suppliers between now and 2025. This was followed by Platforms to integrate digital and print communications (28%) and Energy monitoring (27%). Security has remained a strong focus for ITDMs and OWs across Quocirca research - suppliers have a clear opportunity to capture further revenue streams by reinforcing and extending their security portfolios.

PaperCut: Smarter print management

PaperCut was born in 1998 out of a desire to solve the problem of waste print in the education sector. The company now aims to simplify printing by achieving five key ideals: empowering mobile and BYOD printing; embracing cloud technology; delivering feature-rich, future-relevant scanning; providing industry-leading security; reducing environmental impact.

These ideals are closely linked to the priorities of today's customers and recognise market shifts and imperatives such as the move to digital workflows, the role of security in an evolving regulatory landscape and the rising importance of sustainability. The company actively monitors customers' infrastructure purchasing decisions to ensure it is aligning its R&D with customer needs. Its focus includes flexibility on hosting between on-premise vs fully hosted; solutions to enhance digital workflows e.g. scan and capture solutions and document versioning control.

PaperCut understands that even a relatively young organisation, in print industry terms, must evolve with its market by striving to innovate. As such, it is focused on shifting the culture of software development to become more customer-centric. The company bases its approach to disruption on an outside-in and inside-out methodology that engages its wider ecosystem. It works closely with partners to integrate feedback into product development and promotes the creation of cross-functional and self-forming teams.

It also fosters employee development and idea generation through job swap programmes, hackathons and educational talks.

Cloud and IoT

PaperCut is adopting an IoT approach to print management and has developed edge node technology to significantly improve the speed, reliability and efficiency of print networks. Working in tandem with cloud computing, edge nodes move critical processing tasks to local hardware to achieve both cloud and on-premise benefits.

3D Printing

PaperCut has identified the growing challenges created by the increasing adoption of 3D printing: Customers have either invested in costly machines where only a select few users know how and where to use them, or huge interest has driven rapid adoption and businesses are finding it difficult to scale. PaperCut is focusing on developing management systems that overcome these challenges and make 3D printing facilities accessible and controllable.

Cybersecurity

PaperCut's focus is on internal security and compliance, which is a growing area of concern. Topics it is concentrating on include end-to-end encryption; data hosting locations (locally or cloud-based); data sovereignty (regional data hosting). To facilitate the anticipated growth in mobile printing, PaperCut is also developing new authentication methods such as smartphone authentication and release, as well as relevant applications of Security Assertion Markup Language (SAML).

Sustainability

Reducing environmental impact and waste is one of PaperCut's core principles. It is evident in product features such as print policies to reduce paper and toner waste, behavioural nudges via eco-dashboards and pop-up messages on user devices.

The company is focused on becoming carbon neutral and employees are supported to undertake voluntary sustainability activities.

Market Context

IT Decision Maker and Office Worker Disconnect

It is to be expected that those focusing on technology will have different views to those using the technology. However, the research shows that there are very marked differences when it comes to respondents' perceptions of the importance of print. Figure 2 shows perceptions across the different areas of job responsibility within the organisation, with ITDMs (79%) perceiving that paper is far more important to an organisation than OWs do (67%) now, with an even bigger discrepancy when looking out to 2025 (65% of ITDMs seeing paper as important with only 36% of OWs expecting this). The ITDM responses were in line with 2017 findings.

Figure 2.
Question: How important do you believe printed paper is to the daily running of your organisation? (ITDM N=650, OW N=975)
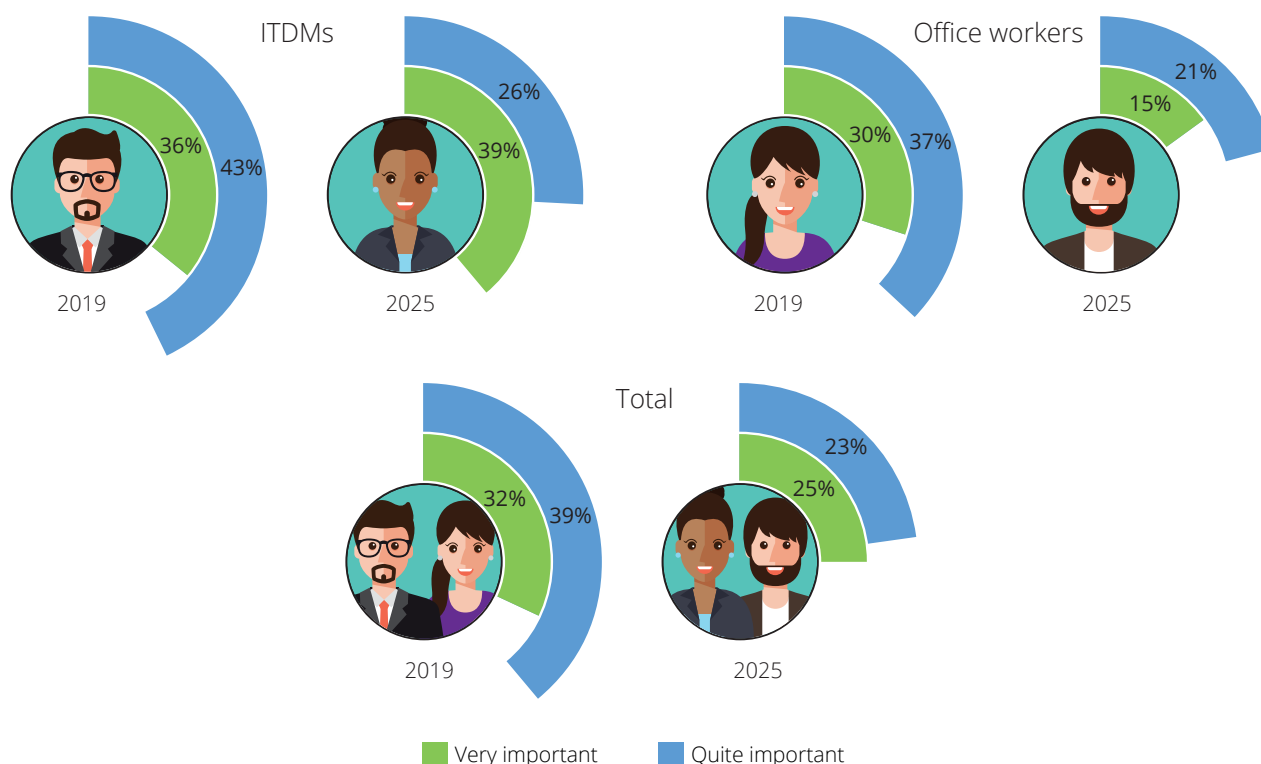
However, little difference is seen around how different ages see the importance of printed paper.

In fact, older workers tend to see less importance being applied to printed materials by 2025, with only 37% of those over 55 years old seeing paper as being Very or Quite Important by 2025, against 49% of 18-34 year olds – although there is general equivalence on how important paper is to the respondent's organisation now in 2019.

At a vertical level, retail sees paper as being most important now (86%), although financial services are the ones who see print as most important by 2025 (74%). At a country level, France and the US (84%) are the ones seeing paper as most important now, with the UK seeing it as most important by 2025 (74%). The importance of paper seems to be fairly level across different sizes of organisation, both now and for 2025.

Again, when comparing ITDM responses between 2017 and 2019, the data are in line with each other.

The evolving "less-paper" workplace

The long-predicted 'paperless office' has eluded pretty much every organisation. Although some have minimised paper usage through extensive digitisation and complex workflow automation, the vast majority of organisations still have a strong dependency on printed paper. Quocirca's research continues to show how respondents expect to see the amount of paper printed by different types of document continue to drop – yet they also expect to see overall print volumes rise.

Respondents state that there will be large falls in the amount of a range of documents being printed (figure 3).

Figure 3.

Question: Which of the following documents are routinely printed now and will be printed in 2025? (N=1625)
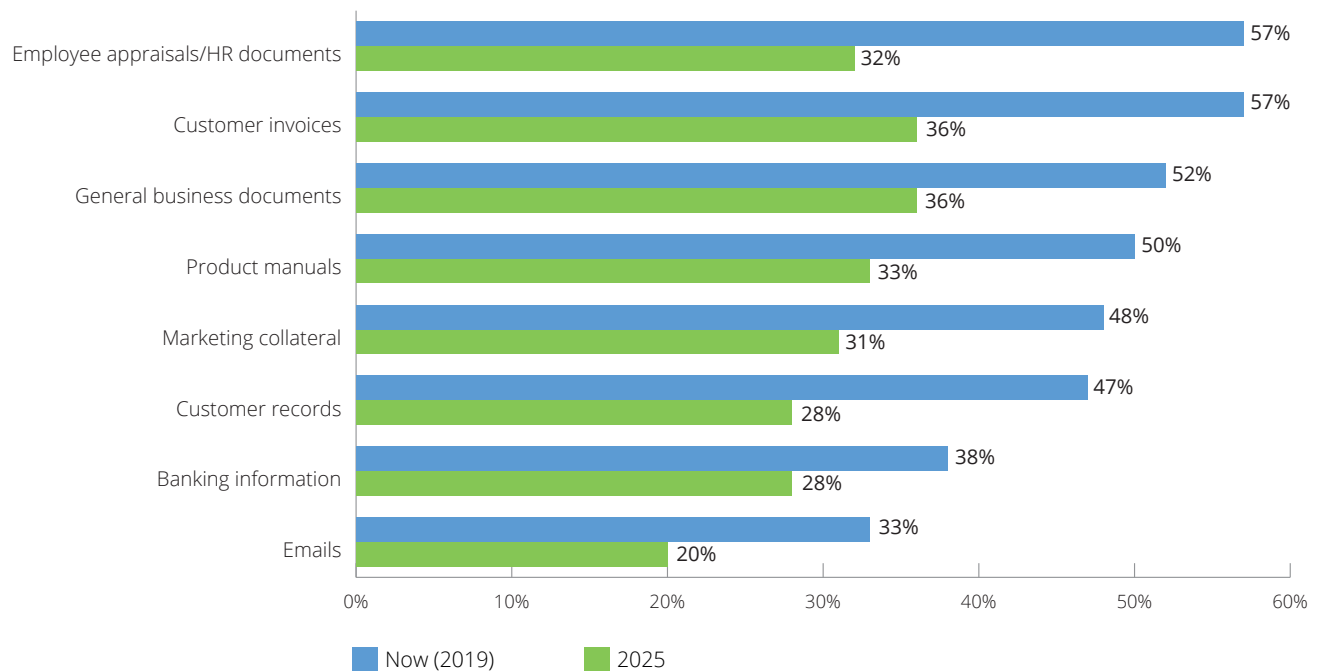
There is definitely an expectation that digitisation and the automated processing of documents will increasingly replace the act of physically printing the document itself. However, other findings point against this leading to an overall decrease in print volumes (figure 4).

Figure 4.

Question: How do you think your organisation's use of print will change between now (2019) and 2025? (ITDMs only, 2019 N=650, 2017 N=575)


8
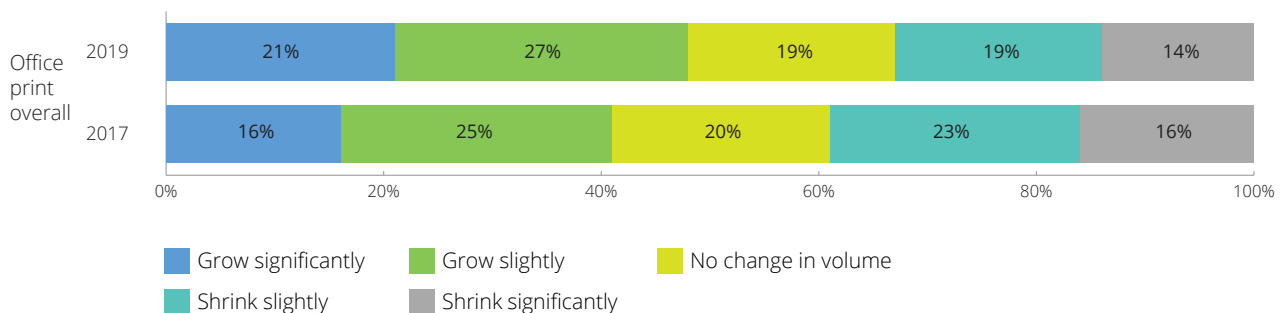
67% of 2019 respondents expect print volumes to stay the same or grow, with 21% expecting this to be a significant growth. This is markedly different to 2017, where 61% expected static volumes or growth, with only 16% expecting this to be significant growth. At a vertical level, business and professional services shows the highest overall expectations for static or a growth in volumes (74%) although public healthcare shows the strongest response to expectations of significant growth (27%). At a country level, the US is well out in front of the other regions, with 70% expecting static or growth in print volumes and 35% expecting significant growth. At the other end of the scale, the Nordics, although still showing an overall 54% expectation around static or growth in volumes, have only 8% expecting significant growth.

This raises the question of where such growth is likely to come from if expectations are that fewer numbers of documents will be physically printed? This can be explained by looking at how respondents view other aspects of technology around print itself. There is a marked interest in overall digitisation, leading to a large increase in the number of documents being held electronically in the first place. More organisations are implementing electronic value chains all the way through from a supplier's supplier through to a customer's customer. This then leads to a massive increase in information being held in electronic form – and even if a lower percentage of that information is being printed, it can (and the data shows that this is what is expected) lead to an overall increase in print volumes.

When the areas of expected print growth are broken down, more detail can be seen (figure 5). The growth is led by mobile print, with 79% of respondents expecting to see this stay static or increase. Indeed, respondents state an expected static or increase in volumes on every type of print device, although office inkjet printers see the lowest expectations, with 62% expecting static or growth in usage by 2025.

Figure 5.
Question: How do you think your organisation's use of print will change between now (2019) and 2025 (by print type)?
(ITDMs only, N=650)
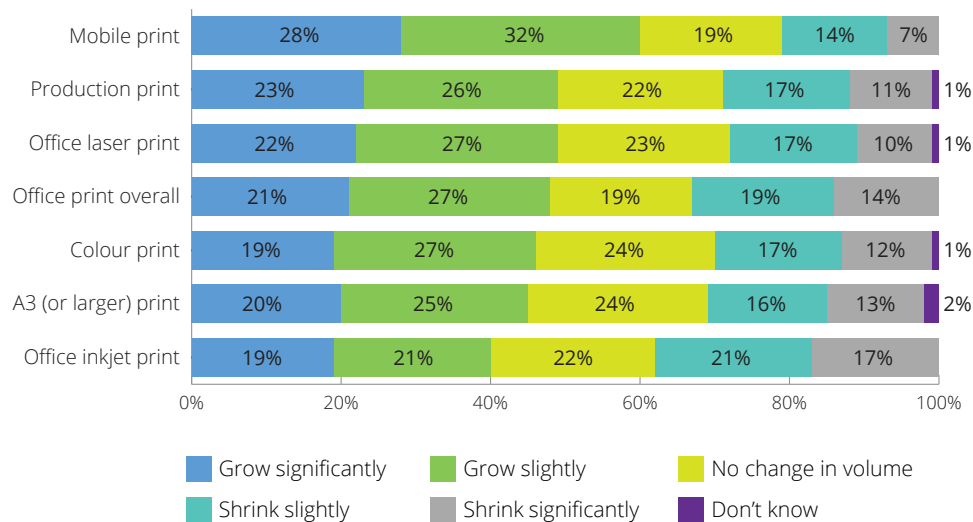
The research also teased out what respondents saw as preventing them from printing more documents (figure 6). Although respondents saw mobility as being a strong driver for increased volumes, they also see it as being a strong factor in decreasing print volumes.

Digitisation – the continued path to digital workflows

The act of creating and managing information as digital assets rather than as paper ones has increased as computer usage has grown and become cheaper and ubiquitous. For many, it is far more convenient and useful to create notes, forms and other data directly on a computer, tablet or other mobile device than to write it down and possibly transcribe it (with possible errors) at a later date. Indeed, as newer technologies such as voice recognition mature, not only does such digitisation become easier, but the events that take place after digitisation, such as workflow and authorisations, become far easier as well.
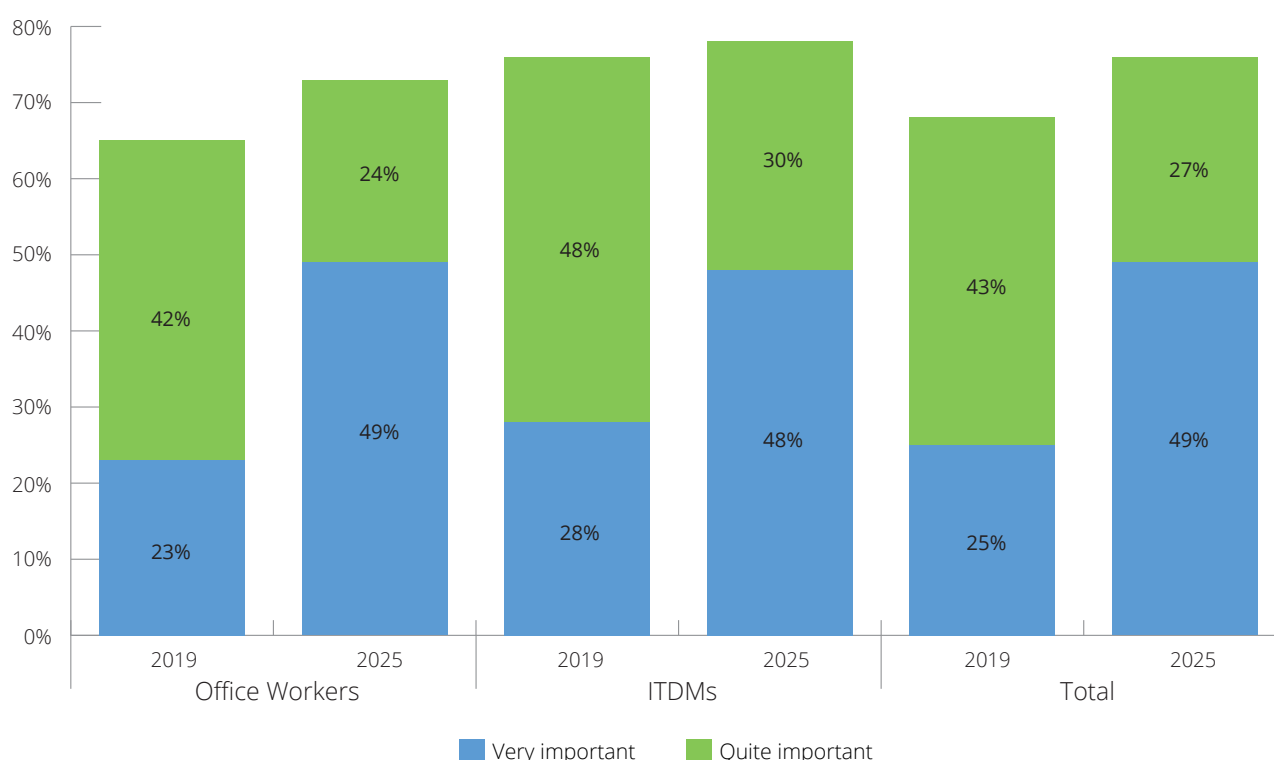
When it comes to digitisation, respondents show that there is a growing need for such services. By implementing digitisation, organisations are setting the foundations for increased automation and the possibility of more efficient and effective workflows. The research shows just how important respondents believe digitisation is to their organisations.

Figure 9 shows that 68% of organisations currently believe that digitisation is important to them, growing to 76% in 2025. There is a general level of agreement between ITDMs and OWs.

At a regional level, Spain has the strongest belief in the importance of digitisation, both now (82%) and for 2025 (90%), with the Nordics seeing the lowest importance (56% now and 62% in 2025). Business and professional services are the most focused on digitisation now (71%) with retail (83%) being the ones seeing digitisation being the most important by 2025.

Figure 9.
Question: How important is/would digitisation of paper processes be to your organisation between now (2019) and 2025?
(ITDM N=650, OW N=975)

Indeed, when it comes to investment priorities, digitisation comes out well. When offered a range of tools that are used in digitisation (figure 10), respondents showed that, apart from enterprise content management (ECM) systems, all areas were in place within over half of organisations. However, video conferencing (73%) and digital documents (72%) topped the responses. Although ECM is currently low in actual implementation, 38% of respondents state that they have plans to implement between now and 2025.

Such ubiquity in usage may lead to a perception that any attempt to move into such markets would be difficult. However, the responses show that between one fifth and one third of organisations have costed plans in place to implement such solutions between now and 2025.

Sustainability demands are increasing

As previously discussed, sustainability is back on the agenda. Not only does a real, demonstrable approach to sustainability allow an organisation to better position itself with increasingly aware customers and other stakeholders, but it also allows the organisation to save considerable amounts of money – if implemented correctly. Paper has long been seen as a wasteful area within organisations: large piles of incorrectly printed or not collected paper is an obvious area for the organisation and individuals to notice and complain about. Enabling an environment that better controls paper usage is an obvious first step – while controlling other aspects, ranging from how much packaging is used on devices and consumables to how much particulate and gaseous output comes from the devices, should also be a focus.

Figure 11 shows that 73% of respondents believe that such issues are important now, growing to 83% by 2025. ITDMs and OWs are in broad agreement over this. There is also broad agreement at a regional level, with all regions falling in a range of 65% (Spain) to 81% (UK) as to importance now and 78% (the Nordics) to 86% (UK) by 2025. At a vertical level, public healthcare (69%), private healthcare (70%) and industrials (70%) are the lowest for importance now, with financial services (80%) and retail (79%) leading the way. For 2025, retail (89%) leads the way, with private healthcare (76%) attaching the lowest importance to sustainability. However, as can be seen, with over 80% of respondents seeing sustainability as important by 2025, it must be taken seriously.

Figure 11.
Question: How important are environmental issues/sustainability in general to your organisation now (2019) and in 2025?
(ITDM N=650, OW N=975)
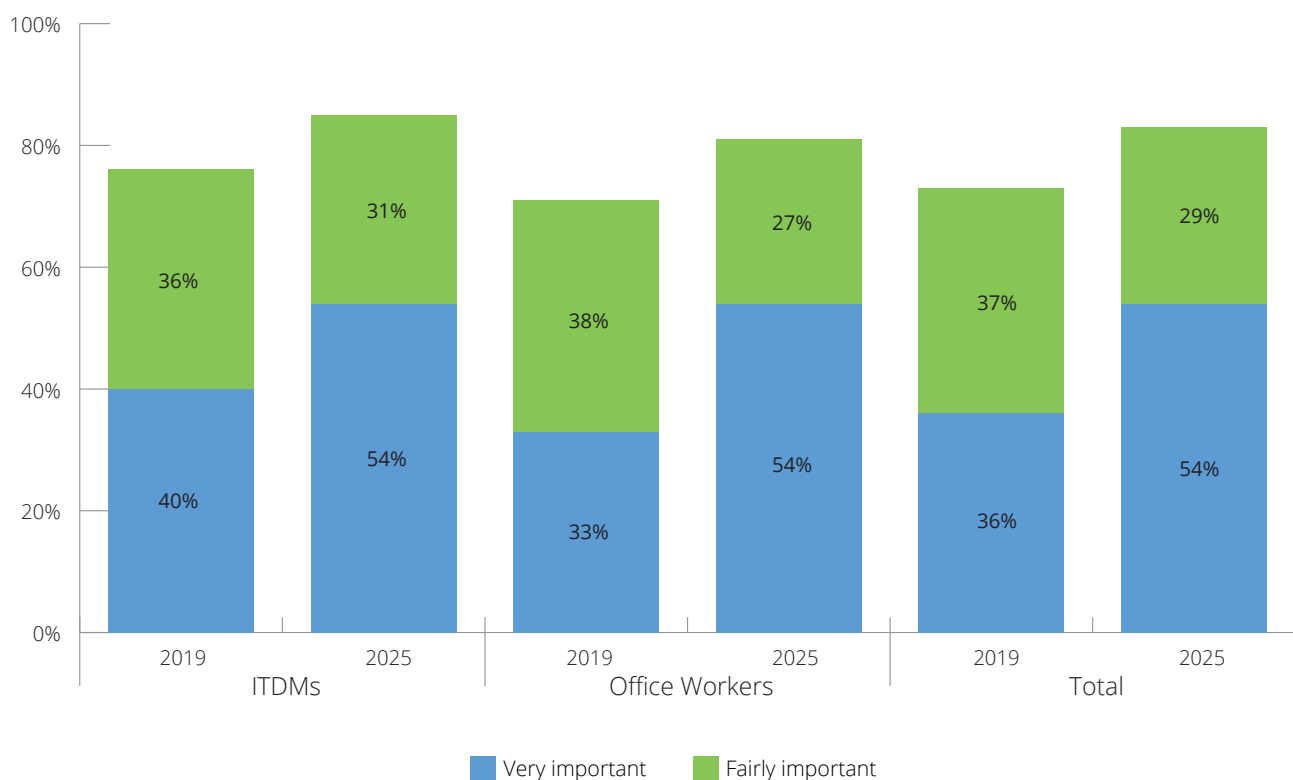
Organisations are already investing heavily in sustainability projects. Although the low-hanging fruit may seem to have gone, with examples such as recycling paper already being carried out by 64% of companies, opportunities remain through the next 12 months. Across the range of options offered to respondents, over one fifth were looking to implement projects in nearly all areas across the coming 12 months. Energy efficient IT (23%), environment and energy monitoring (22%), increasing energy efficiency (21%) and reducing carbon footprint (21%) lead the way here. Print manufacturers can play to these markets by both pushing high efficiency deep sleep modes; eco print modes; pull printing to reduce paper wastage; and show how print devices can act as a peer system within the internet of things platform of the organisation. Examples here are through making temperature and humidity readings available to IoT platforms: trends noted within print devices can help in pointing to changes in the surrounding environment.

Cloud MPS will be the new frontier

Cloud computing is changing the way that organisations procure, provision and operate their IT platforms. There is a strong move to the use of public cloud platforms such as AWS, Google Cloud Platform and Microsoft Azure as platform as a service (PaaS) infrastructures. Organisations no longer have to worry about the upfront capital costs of hardware, licensing of operating systems, the cost and worries around patching and upgrading the basic platform, and in many cases gain much higher levels of systems availability by moving to a public cloud. According to Flexera's RightScale State of the Cloud Report for 2019, 94% of enterprises now utilise cloud (91% using public cloud and 72% using private cloud)[2]. Forbes predicts that the public cloud services market will reach $206.2 billion by the end of 2019[3].

The case for cloud is becoming unstoppable – the costs of implementing and managing a less flexible, fully-owned, one-company platform can be crippling: the benefits of sharing costs across hundreds, thousands or tens of thousands of organisations using a shared platform are inescapable.

However, the use of cloud to provide managed print services is still in its infancy. Although most vendors provide some means of managing print jobs through a hosted model, acceptance and usage has not, as yet, been high.

Figure 15 shows that 81% of respondents still manage more than 50% of their print jobs using on-premise print servers. Only 6% of respondents have more than 75% of print jobs managed in the cloud. At a regional level, France leads cloud usage with 29% having more than 50% of its print jobs being managed in the cloud, with Italy only having 10% so managed. Private healthcare leads in the verticals with 23%, with the public sector lagging at 8%. Larger organisations tend to be more cloud-oriented, with a marked split between the fewer than 499 employees and those with over 500 employees.

Figure 15.
Question: What is your current approach to managing print jobs across your organisation? (ITDMs only – N=650)

- All our print jobs are managed by internal physical print servers
- Less than 25% of print jobs are managed by cloud services
- Between 25% and 49% of print jobs are managed by cloud services
- Between 50% and 74% of print jobs are managed by cloud services
- More than 75% of print jobs are managed by cloud services
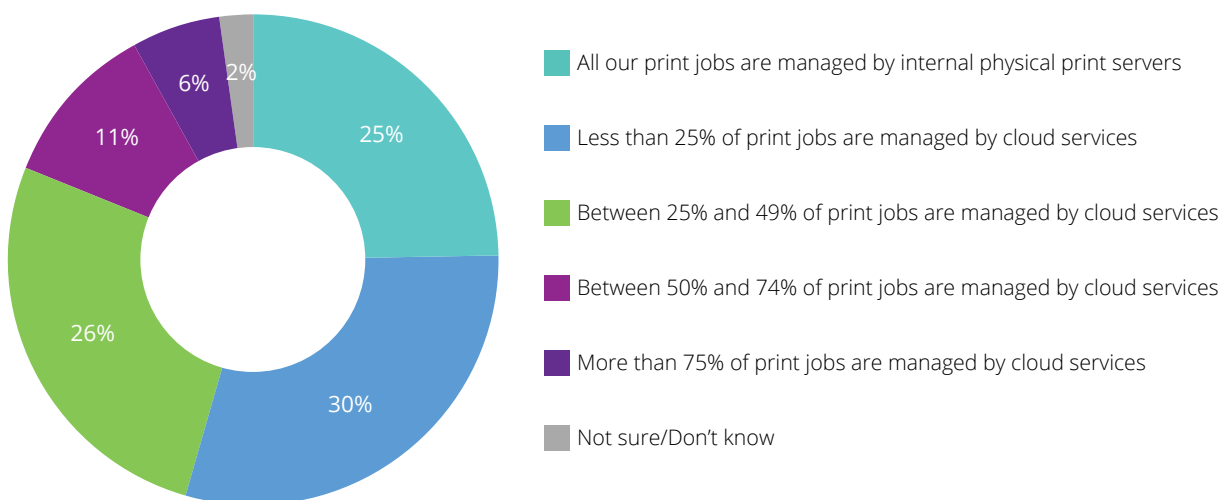- Not sure/Don't know

Figure 16 shows respondents' expectations for growth in cloud usage for print management. 73% expect to see growth in usage, with 8% planning to move over completely to cloud-based systems.

For print manufacturers and the channel, Quocirca believes that this percentage can be moved rapidly to a greater number, as long as a compelling reason to move to cloud is provided. This works well for the vendor as well – instead of supporting a multitude of print servers installed on customer sites which may well be at different patch and version levels and built on different types of hardware with different levels of operating system installed, customers will be on a fully controlled platform where the vendor has control.

New functionality can be more easily added; security issues can be more rapidly patched. Data created by such a shared platform can be anonymised and analysed to provide further value-add services to customers and to provide insights into what is needed to progress the platform.

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[2] https://media.flexera.com/documents/rightscale-2019-state-of-the-cloud-report-from-flexera.
pdf?elqTrackId=372b6798c7294392833def6ec8f62c5c&elqaid=4588&elqat=2&_ga=2.75255952.381106268.1556868633-1445624021.1556868633

[3] https://www.forbes.com/sites/louiscolumbus/2018/09/23/roundup-of-cloud-computing-forecasts-and-market-estimates-2018/#3667fd66507b

The move to cloud-based print services

The print infrastructure is traditionally a complex environment encompassing driver installation, device configuration and compliance, device tracking and reporting, device monitoring and management, print management software, server and queue management, firmware updates and MFP workflow and app deployment. Traditionally all of these elements are managed on-premise and can lead to escalating costs, not least in the need for multiple print servers and the on-going IT burden of in-house print management.

However, the demands from the customer base are changing, and this is pressurising vendors to come up with new approaches to providing print services. As examples of changing customer demands, consider:

- **The move from centralised major office environments to more distributed local offices and home working,** requiring a more flexible printing capability covering devices from home inkjet printers to corporate print room systems.

- **The continued growth in the mobile worker community,** that has moved from being the typical 'road warrior' of the sales and field support workers to include executives and an increasing number of what have historically been desk-bound workers.

- **The move to a different computing paradigm.** Organisations are moving from 100% owned computing platforms to a more nuanced hybrid platform of private and public cloud services integrated to provide greater flexibility of functionality and optimised resource utilisation.

- **Greater understanding of the risks of poor security.** Combined with the move to a more hybrid platform, users are realising that security is becoming too hard for them to manage directly. They are looking for their suppliers to provide basic security to be built-in to the provided services, and for additional flexible security services to be provided as extra offerings.

Vendors now need to change their own offerings to meet these needs – and this will generally require a move to cloud-based services. However, each vendor must realise that they cannot just operate independently – the customer's environment will be a hybrid multi-cloud platform: the vendor's offering must be capable of integrating and working across a broad range of platforms.

Moving to a cloud-based print infrastructure can eliminate on-premise print servers, multiple print drivers and queue management while reducing the administrative burden on IT staff. In addition, cloud-based print management solutions can offer stronger access controls, security and compliance. Cloud-based print services are appealing as there is no longer a requirement for on-site print management as tasks such as firmware updates, fleet management and reporting can be outsourced to a third-party provider.

This not only reduces the IT burden but can also reduce the costs of print server management, or at least make the costs more predictable when such services are hosted in the cloud. To maximise these benefits, cloud print services are generally based on a subscription model so that customers are only paying for features that are being used.

Hybrid options are also attractive for organisations or groups that may wish to retain printing tasks on their own side of the firewall. A hybrid cloud configuration provides a flexible solution which combines cloud-based print management with networked servers to suit different user groups and employees.
The past year has seen a number of manufacturers launch their own versions of cloud or virtualised print management services. However, it is early days for all these services – Lexmark's Cloud Services was launched in October 2018, Xerox has only released initial details of its Virtual Print Management offering which has not yet been formally launched.

Future success for suppliers relies on IT-centric services

The markets are changing and the upstream constituents of the value chain must adapt to address these changes. Print vendors and the channel must look at what is happening across their markets and bring in new services to increase the perception of value that can be gained by their customers.

However, this may not be possible by just moving to a 'next-generation' managed print services (MPS) model. It is more likely that the print value chain will have to become more of an integrated part of the overall IT platform.

This can be done – but is not recommended – by the channel trying to bring a vast portfolio of services to market that carry out the sort of services a customer is looking for. The preferred method should instead be through forging new alliances with companies that already play in certain areas and riding on their coat tails into the enterprise. Such areas should include looking to providers of deep analytics, AI, workflow and integration engines.

Areas for investment

Quocirca's research asked respondents about where they would like to see print vendors and the channel invest to bring new functions and services to market.

Figure 18 shows what users are looking for from vendors when it comes to new technologies used in printing.

Figure 18.
Question: Which of the following do you think print vendors should be investing in to increase their relevance in the digital workplace by 2025? (Based on all making a selection based on top three responses, ITDM N=650, OW N=975)
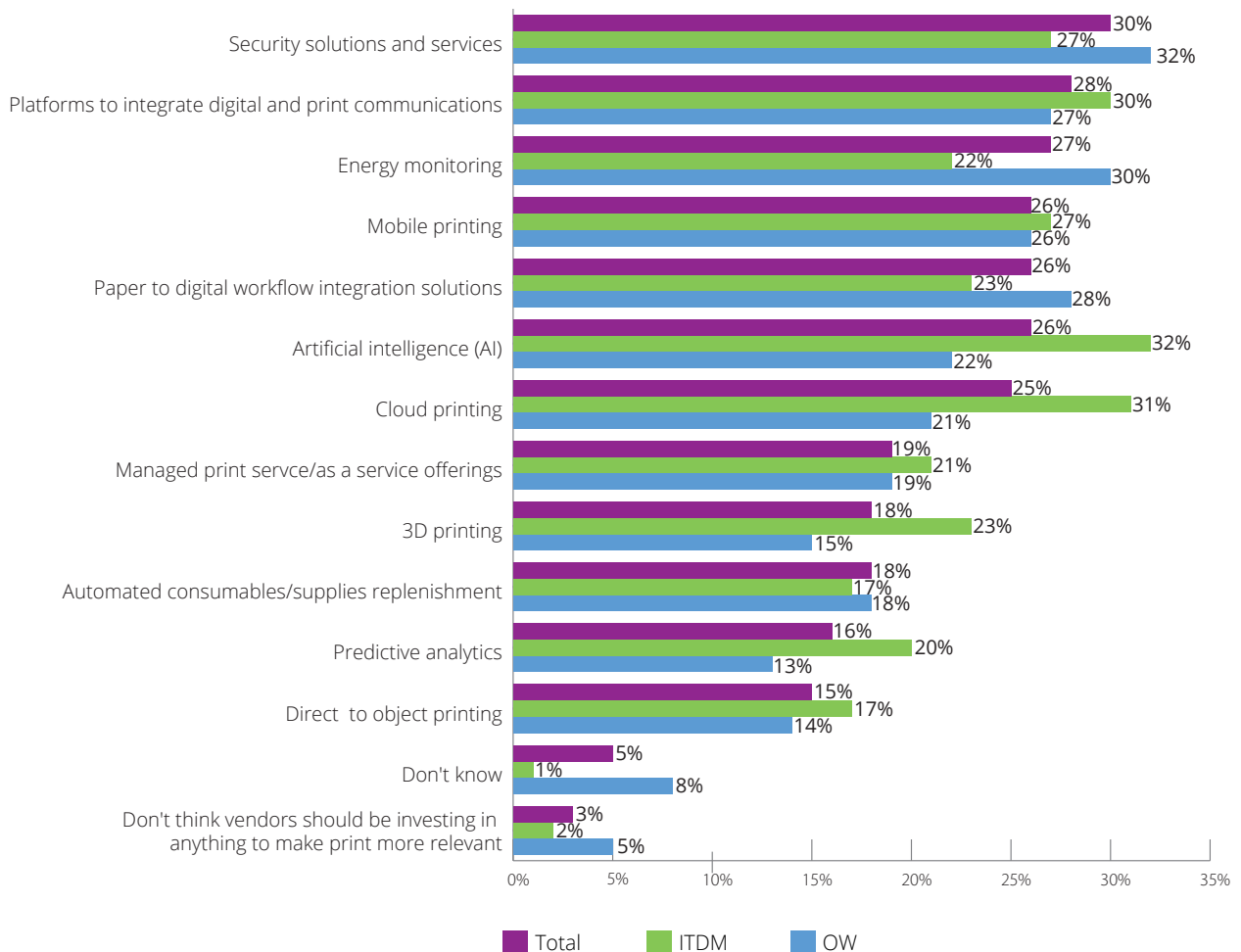
Increasing the strategic role of the print vendor through innovation

This falling perception of the importance of the print OEM should be a wake up call for print manufacturers and their channel partners. If the perception continues, the customer may well see print as something that can be simply hived off to a third party to acquire, provision and manage, as print is seen as merely a function.

To avoid this, the print vendor/channel must consider other areas that are out of their current comfort zone.

This may mean doing much more around sustainability, for example through tying in promises on carbon emissions and maybe even agreeing with a customer about how to work together to meet carbon emissions targets across a larger part of their business. This can be done through, for example, the use of AI to better advise on when components may fail and so extend the life of components, negating the need to replace them. This reduces the carbon footprint generated by manufacture, packaging, transport, recycling and so on. Advanced services around such offerings could be in using AI to calculate exactly when an old device is no longer carbon-efficient and when it should be swapped out for a newer, more efficient model.

Continued monitoring of a customer's print environment can bring forth insights into how you can help them in optimising how they are using their print environment. For example, if they are seen to be using large print jobs occasionally, then capturing this and offering to print such jobs via an external bureau may be far more economic and sustainable for them.

Take it further and use the knowledge gained to advise on digitisation and process flows: a customer can avoid printing on paper at all by introducing more efficient and effective electronic workflows. Being able to understand the type of information that is involved means that information security can be applied closer to source and that users do not have to worry so much about security themselves. Tying this into the rest of the IT platform and picking up other sources of data and information flows, such as reports coming from the enterprise ERP, CRM and other systems means that you are positioning yourself more centrally into the customer's business and becoming a fully strategic partner.

It is becoming increasingly difficult for print vendors and their channel to innovate what is happening only in the print environment. Much of what is now happening is far more incremental: the move from on-premise to cloud-based print management is attractive to customers, as it removes cost and management issues from them. However, it does not inherently change how the individual or organisation works. Faster devices with enhanced document feeds, scanning, security and so on are likewise not innovative – trying to compete on such a level is resulting in diminishing returns.

Now is the time to dig deeper and look to real innovation across a broader environment because, as print vendors have known for a long time, it is information on which an organisation lives or dies. Capturing that information close to source, applying the requisite security to it and expediting the process flows to the right destination in the best manner possible is the way to ensure future market relevance.

Another aspect of this is in opening up the print platform itself to be a peer part of the internet of things (IoT) environment. As previously mentioned, print devices are already IoT hubs in themselves: the information held by these devices, and also the data and information created through their use can be made available to other systems so that they can also operate more effectively.

Not-invented-here syndrome has to be quashed: tomorrow's technology winners are already coming through as those vendors who are as open as possible, using open APIs and open standards in order to maximise their value to the customer.

Conclusions

It is clear that mobility, cloud, sustainability, AI and digitisation are the main areas where the print vendor and its channel should be aiming. Not only are these subjects high on the respondents' agendas, but there is also money already set aside to support projects across these areas.

Print vendors and their channel do need to rapidly adapt to what has changed: fighting over page print speed, incremental additional functionality or other device-based features is not going to stop customers from moving to other groups, such as ISVs or IT service providers for what they see as increasingly low-value print management services. Instead, now is the time to innovate to take the print vendor outside of the safety zone of the print device and dedicated software to an environment where information as a whole is embraced through cross-system digitisation and workflows enabled and managed through artificial intelligence and advanced business process management capabilities.

The good news is that this does not have to be done by the print vendor or channel on their own. Today's open IT platform of hybrid cloud means that functional services can be more easily obtained and utilised from third parties. As such, a print vendor can build AI into their systems without actually owning, operating or maintaining the AI engine itself. Likewise, other opportunities are there for print vendors who open up their platforms to others, enabling the print devices and associated systems to be seen as peer systems across a modern internet of things enterprise environment – and beyond.

The print market is primed for disruption – and there is every opportunity for the innovative vendor to come up with new offerings that move them into being major players within their customer's technological arsenal.

About the research

This research is the second edition of Quocirca's Print 2025 market insight study, which examines the drivers, opportunities and challenges facing the print industry. It explores changing buyer requirements, user demands and the place of print in the evolving digital workplace.

The 2019 research expanded upon the IT decision maker research undertaken in 2017 to include those using print technologies. To gain insights into the perceptions of individuals and the organisations for which they work into what is happening in the print market, Quocirca undertook 1,625 interviews across a range of organisations across different verticals in France, Germany, Italy, the Nordics, Spain, the UK and the US.

975 interviews were with end users within the organisations – those who make use of print technologies. 650 interviews were with those who had a degree of influence on the decision making on acquiring or purchasing print-related services with the organisation.
The research took place in May 2019.

Results for individual countries are available on request.

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