Datastream Conversion, Connectivity, and Print Management

General Nutrition Centers

General Nutrition Centers (GNC) of Pittsburgh, PA, is the largest corporation in the United States solely dedicated to vitamins and nutritional supplements. When this health food giant had trouble orchestrating internal document printing and distribution, they turned to the IS experts at IKON Office Solutions for an answer that offered speed and flexibility in an easy to use package. Only one solution met GNC's requirements: the Solimar® Print/Director.

Originally, with print volumes of 1.5 million pages per month, GNC was printing from an IBM mainframe online to two Xerox 4850 LPS production printers. However, vigorous growth precipitated the introduction of additional operating systems and platforms, creating a compatibility problem with their mainframe printing system. That's when IKON Office Solutions was called upon to help GNC find an answer. Rich Latshaw, IKON Digital Systems Specialist, says, "We wanted a seamless transition from the mainframe format to a new imageRunner 110 printer and the backup HP D640 printer we installed. Solimar offers a transparent solution in converting the Xerox resources to either PostScript or PCL, so the customer doesn't have to tweak their data or reprogram. With Solimar, we were printing mainframe applications within one day of installation."

The Solimar Print/Director is a modular, Windows-based print server that provides connectivity from mainframes, midrange hosts and networks to print common applications on high-speed production printers and distributed network printers. In addition, this system provides datastream conversion by emulating the Xerox LPS Metacode printers as well as PCL, PostScript, and IPDS printers. GNC uses these emulation modules within Solimar to convert mainframe and network data (Xerox LCDS/ Metacode) into PostScript and PCL printstreams for use on the Hewlett Packard and imageRunner 110 printer. This Solimar configuration accepts input through a BUS/TAG channel and TCP/IP lpr connections, and outputs PCL and PostScript via TCP/IP to the distributed printers.

Initially attracted by the integrated channel connection capability of the Solimar Print/Director, Latshaw soon realized the power of this print server. "Not only can GNC convert from the BUS/TAG mainframe connection, but they can now print on the imageRunner 110 from all of their operating systems and

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IKON Office Solutions

Business Profile

General Nutrition Centers
Large nutritional supplement manufacturer and retailer streamlined their internal document production through multiple platform printing and flexible print queue management.

Industry
Retail

Geography
Pittsburgh, PA

Business Solution
- Output Management
- Device Connectivity
- Data Stream Conversion

Solimar Products
- Solimar Print/Director
  - Base system with XIMAGE™
  - BUS/TAG Input and Output
  - TCP/IP Input
  - XCHANGE::PostScript

Benefits
- Provided printer load balancing and eliminated backlogged jobs

- Seamless printing from mainframe Metacode legacy applications to either PostScript or PCL without programming changes

- Enabled flexible printer access to all networked employees

- Increased control and management of print output

networks: mainframe, Novell, Windows NT, Unix, and the IBM AS/400. From one terminal they can run everything!" Solimar's modular design and open architecture also allowed IKON to customize the configuration to meet GNC's specific needs. "Flexibility is the key function of Solimar," adds Latshaw.

The results? Gary Edmondson, Operations Analyst for GNC says, "We have about 600 users . . . who are able to have their jobs printed on our 40 and 60 page per minute printers. By using Solimar, we are able to print from all of the formats we weren't before. Everything feeds into the Solimar server, and from there we decide where we want to print it."

The Solimar Print/Director's print queue management offers a significant improvement over GNC's previous configuration. "Drag-and-drop, that's the key here," says Edmondson. "If we get one printer backed up, we can grab the job and drag it to another printer. If that printer should go down for any reason, we're able to take the job and move it somewhere else. We have the flexibility of simply moving jobs to where we need them." GNC is also saving time and costs on print job recovery with the Solimar Print/Director. Jobs are retained in Solimar's print queue during the print process, allowing immediate restart if there is an interruption. This invaluable restart feature economizes Edmondson's programming time.

"Before we had a problem recovering jobs. If we had a job running on a printer, and that printer goes down, we would lose the job.
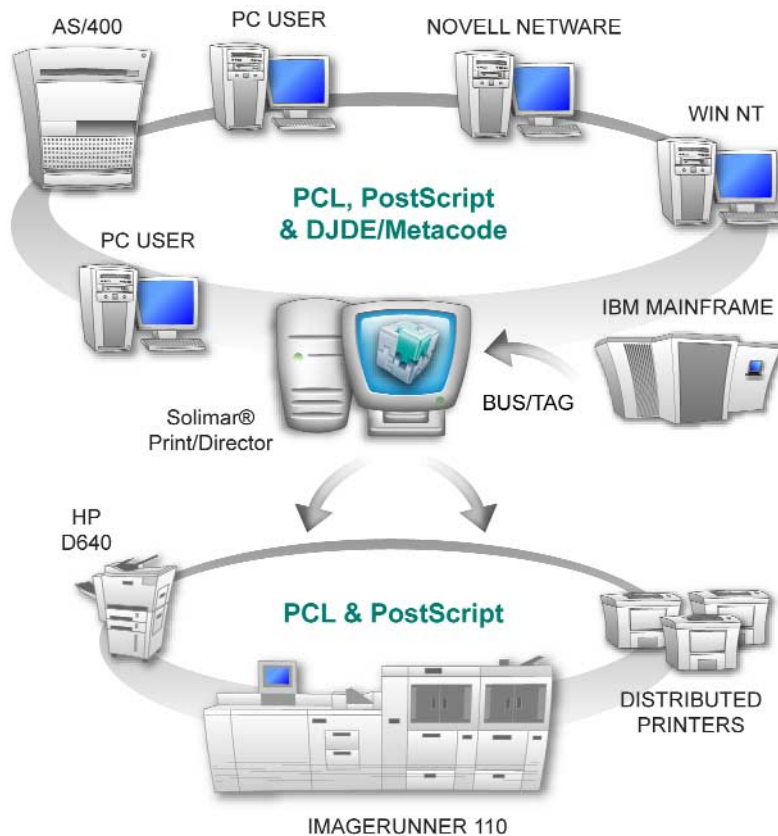
That means going back to the analysts and programmers to recreate the print. Now with our completed print queue it's still there, we can just assign it to another printer. The recovery is instant," states Edmondson.

Solimar's expert Technical Support has also provided Edmondson and his staff with quick and accurate answers to their printing questions. "Results and turnaround were really quick," Edmondson notes. "They solved every one of our problems." IKON's Latshaw agrees: "I worked very closely with Solimar's Tech Support on the installation. We worked through our issues, and it turned out to be a seamless install."

The Solimar Print/Director offers multiple platform compatibility, open architecture, drag-and-drop print queue management, instant job recovery and strong technical support, which furnishes GNC with the print solution that will help them prepare for planned expansion to 5,000 stores by 2002. Increased flexibility and worry-free printing will facilitate GNC's growth into the 21st century. Edmondson's conclusion is, "The Solimar Print/Director is a quiet system."

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Gary Edmondson
GNC

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