

Managed print partners come together for national business boost

A group of five Canadian managed print-focused partners have banded together to offer nationwide print services. The National Print Services Alliance offers coast-to-coast service and is comprised of a group of HP print partners.

Members of the NPSA include Printer-Works out of Nova Scotia, Ontario-based Cell-a-net Printer Services, Calgary-based PrinterWorks West, Printer World International out of Edmonton, and Vancouver-based PrinterWorks Imaging Solutions.

Amongst those five partners, the NPSA has 13 offices across Canada, and together with subcontractors, covers the whole country, said Kevin Hiebert, president of both the NPSA and its Ontario member Cell-a-net.

“Each member has stewardship over any NPSA business in part of the company, and through members and their partners, we’ve got 100 per cent of the country covered,” Hiebert said.

Hiebert said the strength of the group is its “local ownership and national coverage.” Member organizations had all been working together to deliver print services outside of their respective service areas before the group came together, but were doing so in an ad hoc fashion. Members realized they needed to come together, Hiebert said, to be able to market a true nationwide approach, and to combat the difference in perception between local and national print services partners.

Already, the group has earned a close partnership with HP. Currently, all installation and services for HP’s large-format DesignJet printers are done through the Alliance, and the company has recently added break/fix support for the company’s Edgeline lineup across Canada.

Having already worked together informally, the member organizations already had existing service level agreements and best practices with each other in terms of service delivery, escalation and expectation, so bringing it together into a more formalized structure under the NPSA name has been an easy process, Hiebert said.

“We have established procedures for call logging, tracking and dispatching, and each regional member has management on board at their level,” Hiebert said. “Every owner is fully behind this 100 per cent, signed on and responsible for service execution at the regional level.”

Although in some regions, services are fulfilled by subcontractor partners – Cell-a-net is responsible for Ontario and Quebec, for example, but does not have presence in La Belle Province – the NPSA only partners with print-focused partners for those subcontracting engagements to ensure consistent customer experience.

The individual regional partner is responsible for all business done in that region through the NPSA, both to the customer and to the partnership itself.

Large format is the group’s “bread and butter,” and its main differentiator is being able to deliver cross-country service at a specialist, rather than generalist, level.

Although print has historically been low on IT’s radar screen for services, and has often been moved over to

the operations or facilities management business, Hiebert said a variety of forces are changing that trend, as customers look for services like full fleet management and uniform service over a greater area.

“Print doesn’t get the attention it deserves with the complexity of MFPS, the convergence of printers and copiers and the move towards more managed print solutions,” Hiebert said. “But we’re starting to see more and more demand for those kinds of services.”

Going national has been impactful for members, Hiebert said, allowing them to address business that previously would have been out of reach, either because parts of the business are outside of the member’s individual’s geographies, or due to reticence by large business customers to do national deals with regional partners. Each member still also goes to market with their existing brand to existing local customers, while having the NPSA behind it for new or existing customers that need national components.

“It’s huge in that we’re capturing business that we wouldn’t have otherwise been able to capture – it’s all business that we wouldn’t be touching otherwise,” Hiebert said. “We’re really filling a need that simply wasn’t able to be met before.”

For the foreseeable future, NPSA remains focused on “continuing to refine and excel on delivering on HP services and growing business within that engagement,” Hiebert said. That said, the group will consider working with other print vendors in the future.

“We’re evaluating the possibility of approaching another OEM where we feel we can deliver value by leveraging the same skill sets we have and the benefits that we’re bringing to HP,” he said.

Although there are other print-focused partners in the country, Hiebert said the NPSA’s current coverage model is about complete. Eventually, they may look at extending the NPSA brand to some of its subcontractor partners, but it’s not an imperative.

“The volume is still concentrated in our home areas, so even though the geography of Canada is huge, the vast majority of the business is handled by one of our members directly,” Hiebert said.

There’s also the opportunity to expand geographically. It’s not a priority, but Hiebert said that now that the blueprint is in place within Canada, it may be time to look for cross-border business, particularly for a similar band of print services partners south of the border looking to build business in Canada.

“We do see another potential market for us in U.S.-based MPS providers looking for a one-stop shop solution for managed print delivery in Canada,” Hiebert said.