



The Farmers Alliance boosts output with next-generation Advanced Function Printing system



Overview

■ **The Challenge**

Upgrade to a powerful printing system to increase efficiency, minimize expenses and enhance customer service

■ **The Solution**

IBM® Infoprint® 2000 Advanced Function Presentation™ (AFP™) System

■ **The Benefit**

A cost-effective printing infrastructure that prints on demand and delivers global data access, secure output and reliable job completion

Growing up strong

Farmers Alliance was founded in 1888 when its first agents sold fire insurance protection to local farmers in the rural community of McPherson, Kansas. The town has grown a lot since then, and Farmers Alliance has kept pace. Still headquartered in McPherson, the insurance organization handles approximately \$110 million in annual written premiums across its property and casualty business lines, and boasts a network of about 800 independent agents in 10 mid-western states.

In 1988, Farmers Alliance purchased its first cut-sheet, duplexing laser printer: the 3820 IBM Page Printer.

Prior to installing the 3820 Page Printer system, Farmers Alliance had been using line printers to generate their documents -- from policies and billing statements to internal reports and general office documents.

Throughout the 90s, as the organization's print demands grew (it currently prints over one million pages per month), the company upgraded from the 3827 Page Printer to the IBM 3829 Advanced Function Printer, then once more to what it has today: the IBM Infoprint, 2000 Advanced Function Presentation (AFP) System, the next-generation AFP printing technology from IBM.

Offering Farmers Alliance unique cut-sheet printing capabilities, the Infoprint 2000 incorporates advanced technology from IBM for reliable document delivery, error recovery and print integrity. The IBM AFCCU™-based (Advanced Function Common Control Unit™) digital printing system provides strategic operational advantages. With its capability to accept native AFP/IPDS™ data streams and its powerful IBM pSeries™ server, the Infoprint 2000 with AFCCU is ideal for supporting Farmers Alliance's data center applications.

Ray Flagg, manager of I/S architecture for Farmers Alliance, talks about the company's recent growth and decision to implement the Infoprint 2000 AFP system. "We had our 3829 [printers] for about 5 years," he says. "They had always performed well for us, but they needed to be replaced in order to keep up with our growth. We were in the market for a new high-speed, cut-sheet laser printer, and the Infoprint 2000 was the logical replacement for us." Farmers Alliance installed its first Infoprint 2000 AFP unit in August 2000, and they purchased a second just two months later.

Cashing in on system features

With new Infoprint 2000 AFP System technology installed at company headquarters, Farmers Alliance drastically reduced its inventory of pre-printed forms, freeing up office space formerly devoted to form storage. "Our number one priority was a 'plug-and-play' [function] to preserve the large investment in our forms library," Flagg says. "Increased print resolution to 600 dpi has solved some longstanding, print-quality problems for the insurance company.

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For example, Our invoices have a remittance slip, and the remittance has an OCR scan line at the bottom, like the OCR line at the bottom of your checks," explains Flagg. "In the past, we had problems with banks not being able to read the scan line. Since the installation of the Infoprint 2000, we have had no problems with the bank reading that line." The Infoprint 2000 offers several features designed to enhance print productivity, including automatic image quality adjustment, active registration, variable intensity print heads, vacuum feeding for adjustments to different paper weights, a shorter, straighter paper path and trayless duplexing. Another feature that has impressed the folks at Farmers Alliance is the addition of a third, 2,000-sheet input drawer. "It gives us more forms options and the ability to use letterhead as a cover letter on our policies," Flagg says.

Gearing up for the future

Farmers Alliance plans to continue expanding and enhancing its print capabilities as its print requirements change. The next step is to implement the IBM Infoprint Server technology which consolidates print workloads from multiple servers onto a central print server.

"Using Infoprint Server technology will allow us to do LAN-based printing and print directly to specific printers, which will be a big advantage," Flagg says. Flagg is excited about the future benefits. "We'll be able to better manage print jobs and do more print-on-demand."

Service and support are key

Insurance is a service industry, and the level of service and support provided by IBM Printing Services representatives has impressed Farmers Alliance for years. "IBM has always had the support we needed, which is something we really appreciate out here in rural America," Flagg says.



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Dept. HT7/001H
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