

Business Partner



University of Leicester Success Story

Investing in Education

The University of Leicester rightly prides itself on an international reputation for technological breakthroughs and pioneering research. This motivation extends beyond the academic realm to encompass the day-to-day running of the university, so naturally they expect nothing less than the best from their SAP system and their HP LaserJet printers. When it came to printing digitised signatures on outgoing cheques, they quickly discovered that s.a.x. UK Ltd. had a simple and effective solution that could help.

Pushing the Limit

The Management Information Services (MIS) department of the Finance Office of Leicester University, in the English Midlands, introduced SAP in 1999. They had already been producing cheques 'automatically' for many years at Leicester using a tractor-feed printer to print the cheque and a second printer with a rotating plate to add the signature. This involved complicated alignment both physically and in the software, so they wanted to simplify the procedure using laser printers as part of the move to the new SAP system. This meant having to embed the signature on the printer, which Chris Brain, of the MIS department, already knew from previous experience using non-volatile memory in HP LaserJets. Despite a wealth of in-house experience developing forms for SAP, they were looking for a mechanism to use the objects stored on the printer (in this case signatures) with the lowest possible SAPScript overhead.

They contacted City Business Systems, the HP reseller in Leicester, who had provided them with their existing HP LaserJet printers. City Business Systems in turn contacted s.a.x., because they knew this was the sort of solution the s.a.x. program could provide.





Protecting Investment

s.a.x. suggested the Advanced Function Enabler working with a FlashDIMM installed in a HP LaserJet printer. The FlashDIMM would contain the signature (converted into a TrueType font), and the Advanced Function Enabler (AFE) provides an easy way of accessing it. The AFE works as an integrated part of the SAP system (in the 'Z'-space), as a printer driver offering easy access to the capabilities of the HP LaserJet. The version in use in Leicester has a subset of the full AFE functionality that provides access to the necessary escape sequences for the signature. As Chris Brain puts it "The actual coding to get it to print the signature was trivial once we got the AFE software in."

An HP LaserJet 4050 completed the solution. This is kept in a restricted access area, to make sure that the signature printing cannot be abused.

According to plan, printing the signature was tested and working about two months before the rest of the SAP system was implemented.

Secure Situation

Both of the FlashDIMMs in Leicester have the signatures of the authorised and the backup signatory. One is installed in the printer in the Finance Office, the other is kept in a safe. When a signatory changes, instead of a new plate, s.a.x. creates the replacement TrueType signature and sends it to Leicester for downloading onto the 'spare' FlashDIMM – printing continues using the installed memory, ensuring unbroken operation until the 'spare' is swapped with the FlashDIMM in the printer.

The signature printing has been in use since August 1999. Chris Brain commented on the high quality, which is due both to the printer and the resolution of the signature font. He adds, "Certainly, from the programming side, it couldn't have been easier".

In fact, its greatest strength is that it keeps on working without being remarked upon – a simple, satisfying solution.



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