barr systems

Customer Spotlight

Barr Gives Grocery Retail Industry Food For Thought

Company
Williamson & Associates

Profile
Atlanta-based grocery retail industry consulting firm

Products Featured
Barr Enterprise Print Server
BARR/NJE
BARR/SYNC for Microsoft Networks
BARR/PRINT390

An old Chinese proverb goes like this: "If you neglect your art for one day it will neglect you for two." That could be a mantra of modern printing, where printer uptime is accounted in terms of minutes or seconds rather than days, and rescuing the moment comes not a moment too soon.

For Dan Williamson, head of Williamson & Associates, an Atlanta-based grocery retail industry consulting firm, rescuing the moment means solving information technology teasers and printing puzzles for his clients. Whether it's paychecks, operating statements or inventory lists, Williamson is responsible for one of the most important, yet under appreciated, facts of life for large grocery retailers and distribution centers—making sure everything gets printed when and where it's supposed to, with no hitches.

As with all great puzzles, this involves more than meets the eye. It's not a simple thing to manage legacy print data in excess of 1.3 million pages per month coming in from a mainframe 500 miles away—especially when you're dealing with a variety of printers dispersed over several locations in the metropolitan area. And all this on the heels of a newly upgraded host. As an expert print technology professional and businessman, Williamson quickly turned to Barr Systems for solid answers.

"I could talk all day about how the Barr solution makes my job easier," Williamson asserts, referring to a recent Barr Enterprise Print Server installation that he coordinated for a large client. The Print Server allows a much more centralized, comprehensive approach to print management than was possible before, with routing, conversion and distribution features that eliminate headaches and use legacy applications and equipment to their fullest potential in a modern network setting.

In this recent installation, the Microsoft® Windows NT®-based Barr Enterprise Print Server was configured to accept mainframe data over an existing Synchronous Data Link Control (SDLC) connection to the host. Here's how it works: the Barr solution is SDLC-attached to the mainframe via an SNA gateway using BARR/SYNC for Microsoft Networks. The BARR/SYNC product permits true full-duplex SDLC operation by supporting advanced link parameters.

The data is then routed and processed using BARR/NJE, a Network Job Entry (NJE) solution that establishes a peer-to-peer connection with the host. NJE is the most powerful method for connecting to a mainframe, allowing data to be routed according to job header information. BARR/NJE passes the jobs to the Print Server spool, which gives managers the ability to control department-wide printing operations from a single, easy-to-use spool window.

From the Print Server, data is sent to the intended destination device. In this case, most of the print goes to a Xerox® 4635 printer that is connected to the Print Server via BARR/PRINT390, a Bus & Tag channel attachment solution. Using a third-party parallel-to-twinax converter, line data is also sent to two IBM® 4245 printers, remnants of the days before Y2K when an S/36 host ran the show.

"Based largely on the success of the installation at this facility, my client is considering implementing Barr's NJE solution nationwide,"

Williamson remarks. “I don’t handle much of the host programming, but most large retailers and distributors have the technical resources to implement NJE once they take the time to get familiar with it.” This would also involve eliminating SNA from the network by configuring SNA gateways at the host.

For large grocery retailers, the lack of a well thought-out printing strategy would quickly bring the orderly series of events, leading to food on the shelves, to a grinding halt. That’s why Williamson, and companies with millions of dollars of perishable goods at stake, rely on Barr for their print management solution.

Warehouse Print Configuration