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### **OUTPUT MANAGEMENT: NOT JUST FOR THE BIG BOYS**

**New Canaan, Connecticut, March 18, 2003** – You’ve been there before. Your company is in the middle of printing out its monthly invoice run, but there is a problem. Halfway through the run the printer has jammed. You’re stuck. You interrupt your IT staff from their activities to help. They spend time trying to fix the printer and then have to restart the invoice run. Fingers are now crossed; the staff hoping the jam doesn’t happen again. To be sure, someone is elected to stay late and make sure the job finishes successfully. However you look at it, your company has lost time (couldn’t the employees do something more productive than baby-sit an invoice run?) and money (all that lost paper). In the back of your mind, you’re wondering why you can’t just email or fax your documents automatically. There has to be an easier way.

This is a problem that affects all businesses, from the small five-person shop to the Global 2000 company. The good news is the large companies have figured out a way to solve the problem and now such solutions are becoming financially feasible for small and mid-sized companies. Large companies have recognized big savings and productivity gains thanks to products available that address the type of situation previously mentioned. The solution is software that intelligently controls the output of business critical application data, a process known as “output management.”

“Every company can benefit from the acceleration of business critical processes like invoicing and the guaranteed delivery of output without human intervention,” says Andrew Wellman, Director of Sales and Marketing at LBM Systems of New Canaan, Connecticut, a company that specializes in output management software. “When a company is printing out checks or invoices, it wants guaranteed output delivery without intensive human management. Output management software maximizes the



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use of existing IT infrastructure, putting data into a format that someone can understand, and managing that data to make sure it gets to its proper destination. For many small and mid-sized companies this process is particularly critical because it helps make the most of their limited resources.”

Effective output management systems enhance critical processes in three ways: formatting, delivering and retrieving output. Let’s look at what these areas involve and how they can be especially important to small and mid-sized companies:

**Formatting:** “By taking advantage of formatting features, a company can save considerable funds on output,” says Wellman. “There are plenty of small and mid-sized companies still using dot matrix printers and pre-printed forms for business critical functions like invoices and check writing. This means the company is not only stuck warehousing pre-printed forms and having to order them from a printer, they also have to line-up all the forms on the printer and hope that the print run will go right. If an entire invoice run is slightly off, the run has to be done again. This not only wastes expensive, pre-printed paper, it also wastes time.”

Output management software allows a company to convert data from any application and then format it to their liking. This means a company can eliminate the use of pre-printed forms and instead automatically convert the application data to print out like a pre-printed form. This not only saves the company money, but also allows for quick and easy changes to the formatting routine should there be a need. This avoids the waste and cost of ordering new forms whenever a change is needed.

“An example is the work we do with Deutsche Bank, where they use output management software for both their invoice and check printing processes,” says Wellman. “They have eliminated the need for pre-printed forms by having the software format data and overlays. Additionally, decisions such as logos, signatures, and the language that will appear on the document are determined automatically based on data-driven values.”



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Formatting features can also allow two completely different programs to output data and have it print out in the exact same way. This can be very useful for companies that are in different locations with different programs, or companies with heterogeneous computer systems.

**Delivering:** The data created by the company's business application is sent to output management software, which then will intelligently determine the best way to handle it. In the case of a jam, the software can either pause the data and pick up where it left off once the jam is fixed, or can automatically shift the print job to other resources on the network. In addition, the software can prioritize output delivery sequences, ensuring that the most important jobs are delivered first.

In the case of a person trying to distribute files via email, the software can take the data and create digital PDF files and then send them out in an email. This can be done even if the original program creating the data has no feature for creating a digital image file. A feature like this is indispensable for companies looking to automate their invoicing or report distribution processes. For an example, if a company normally prints and mails its invoices, it can now deliver PDF invoices via email and, using common email notification, track when the clients received their invoices. Using the software, even an older system can generate an impressive looking invoice that can be in a customer's hands within seconds.

"Sometimes I tell people the easiest way to understand the delivering part of output management is to think of the software as an air traffic controller, guiding the data flights to their proper destinations based on the status of the destination and deciding which data flights take the highest priority," Wellman says.

One example of delivery is the work LBM does with the City of Palo Alto, California. They use output management software to split large and time-consuming print runs across multiple printers. This shortens the print time, which is particularly helpful for jobs that must be completed in a timely fashion.





In addition, should they experience a printer problem, the software automatically redirects the print job to alternative printers to guarantee output delivery.

**Retrieving:** We've all heard the promises about how digital technology will eliminate the need for paper. Why hasn't this happened yet? First it's difficult to be able to retrieve digital files when you need them and secondly, transferring hard copy into digital forms can require extra, time-consuming steps.

"Output management software really shines when it comes to archiving and retrieving documents," says Wellman. "Say a company has a four-part, business-critical document that they repeatedly use. The output management software can take that form, make a PDF of it, and automatically deliver it to a network storage system. Then when someone needs to access that file again, they can use the same output management software for retrieval. In the past, these types of documents were hand filed, now they can be done automatically, without ever using paper."

Of course with any technology upgrade, there are bound to be concerns and misconceptions.

**Expense:** "Output management products are typically viewed as high-end products that fit into major enterprises with hundreds of servers, but this isn't the case any longer," says Wellman. "Because the return on investment is so rapid, smaller systems, even those with one server, can achieve significant value. When a company controls its data and guarantees its delivery, it's an important development. There are now output management options for small and mid-sized companies."

**Difficulty:** "No one likes change, even if it is beneficial. Changing a process is always difficult and we see many companies with the mindset that 'we've always used pre-printed forms and if that works why fix it,'" says Wellman. "This is especially true in small and mid-sized companies because they traditionally view their IT departments as a burden, not an asset. Many managers distrust technology, but output management software can help reverse that fear by tying the various IT investments and disparate systems together into a more integrated solution. By using the pieces that are already in





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place, core systems do not have to change. The billing system and accounting systems can stay the same. Output management software can manage a Windows-based system just as well as one based in UNIX. At the same time, intelligently distributing processes across email, fax, printer and PDA technologies can maximize investments in these devices. Output management is all about taking advantage of the IT infrastructure a company already has in place.”

Output management software is good for companies with stretched IT budgets because change can be accomplished incrementally. “A company can start by replacing pre-printed forms for an automatic savings,” Wellman says. “Then the company can transition to an e-form output for billing. It doesn’t have to be done all at once. It can be done in small bites, helping the company digest the changes. Of course, once a company sees the cost savings of a complete output management strategy, they probably will accelerate implementation plans.”

Wellman advises any companies that are exploring implementation of output management software to make sure that the software provides formatting, delivery and retrieval capabilities. “Many times a software package will do one or two, but to really harness the power of output management software, companies must implement all three,” he says. “In today’s tough business environment, small and mid-sized companies need to be doing the same thing the big guys are doing. All of our business needs are the same. We need to increase productivity and reduce costs. Implementing output management software not only is now feasible for the small and mid-sized business, but it also makes the company more agile and streamlined, saving money down the road.”

LBM Systems develops and markets software products that manage data created by business-critical business applications. LBM products format, deliver and retrieve output from financial/accounting, ERP, desktop and other applications vital to day-to-day business operations. For more information about their products visit [www.LBMsyst.com](http://www.LBMsyst.com) or call (203) 966-0661.

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