



**Interview:**

**Brian Henderson**  
Director  
Worldwide Product Marketing  
Lexmark International

Empowering government agencies to operate more efficiently through process improvement is a challenging assignment, but it's one of many that Brian Henderson tackled as the Federal Consulting Director for Lexmark Government Solutions. By developing a complete application platform built around advanced multifunction product (MFP) technology, software and services, he and his team delivered solutions that help federal agencies capture, manage and access information better—reducing their cost of operation.

Henderson led the team that brought the first smart-card-secured multifunction printer to market in 2006. Thanks to its compliance with Department of Defense security requirements, it allowed the DoD to take advantage of innovative MFP capabilities to streamline their operations. In 2012, Henderson managed the refresh of Lexmark's entire monochrome A4 and small workgroup color product lines, announcing the largest and most capable suite of products in the company's history.

Now, as Lexmark's Director of Worldwide Product Marketing, Henderson is responsible for the strategy and roadmap of Lexmark's Smart MFP Ecosystem and associated products. He has twenty years of IT management experience, specializing in application development, customer relationship marketing and business process management.

InContext recently talked to Henderson about the rise of so-called "smart" MFPs, which feature embedded software, interactive user interfaces and connections to enterprise networks and applications. In this interview, he explains why smart MFPs represent such a fundamental shift in product capability, buyer expectations and everyday business workflows.

## Smart MFPs: An Ecosystem of Efficiency

*As traditional MFPs become commodities, smart MFPs star in enterprise technology ecosystems that reduce costs, boost efficiency and enable future growth.*

### Where did the term "smart MFP" come from, and how does the industry define it?

**Henderson:** The term came from the concept of MFPs doing more than just printing, copying, scanning and faxing. With their easy-to-use interface, ability to run applications natively and integration to the network and network applications, they can actually serve as application platforms. Industry analysts call them "smart" since they have intelligence built in to perform process functions and enable business operations.

### Aren't you just talking about an easy-to-use copier interface with icons and a touchscreen?

**Henderson:** Not quite; while the smart MFP is easier to use, that's not just because of its interface. The smart MFP can be programmed to perform business operations such as integrating scanned images into workflow or document-sharing applications such as SharePoint or Perceptive Process. The additional advantage to the smart MFP is that each icon can be programmed to prompt the user for needed information. This helps ensure that the right information is collected about a document at the time it is scanned. It also aids in the training of users—They no longer need to remember all the steps of every process; the smart MFP can remember it for them.

### A lot of companies already have MFPs that consolidate the functions of printers, copiers, scanners and fax machines. What does a smart MFP add to the mix?

**Henderson:** Yes, the smart MFP performs many of these functions, which is part of its value. But the real advantage comes in using a smart MFP as part of a business process.

In a typical business environment, users scan a document from a scanner to their workstation, then—using some kind of imaging software—check the image on their workstation, perhaps annotate some information about the scanned document, save that locally, enter the application they need to use to accomplish their task, then copy and paste the image or parts of the content into that application.

With the smart MFP, the user only needs to select the right icon that drives the relevant process, scan the document and let the device do the rest. The MFP is integrated to network applications that use scanned images or the data within those images—helping the user to eliminate steps, be more productive and reduce errors.

So the smart MFP does perform the functions of traditional printers, scanners, copiers, and fax machines, but it also handles these value-added tasks that traditional devices can't. This creates incredible potential for cost savings that can be used to reduce operating costs or help fund related process improvements.

## Smart MFP: The Gartner view

Gartner, a widely consulted information technology research and advisory company, defines a smart MFP as “A device that goes beyond a regular MFP’s ability to print, fax, copy and scan paper documents. An SMFP also can be programmed by a third party, the user or the technology provider to perform custom functions; easily integrates with office and enterprise applications; is management-friendly, with consistent architecture and user interface; works well on the network; and is based largely on open industry standards. SMFPs can perform usage tracking and other functions that help organizations actively manage their office printer/MFP fleet.”

Lam, L. (2014, July 16). *Market Definitions and Methodology: Imaging and Printing Services, Worldwide* (Gartner ID: G00263554)

“Smart MFPs are not just expenses, but tools that can help drive process improvement initiatives and productivity.”

As you talk to executives, managers and employees, what kinds of issues are they typically facing with traditional “non-smart” printers and copiers?

Henderson: Many of their issues come from the fact that these devices are seen and treated as cost items. They’re often thought of as commodities by leadership, where one is considered just as good as another. So while executives focus on objectives like maximizing employee productivity and achieving business growth, they don’t view their printer and copier purchases as part of the solution. However, if they could see that smart MFPs are not just expenses, but tools that can help drive process improvement initiatives and aid their employees in being more productive, they would make them an integral part of their process improvement and productivity initiatives.

Traditionally, MFPs simply meant combining functions like print, scan, copy and fax in one box. How does an ecosystem perspective, and the technology that supports it, change that?

Henderson: It makes it a holistic business solution. The ecosystem surrounding the smart MFP enables the advanced functionality and integration to the network applications that a company already has deployed or plans to deploy to achieve their objectives. An ecosystem brings together the paper and digital worlds in such a way that information that exists on paper can be used just like information that is already electronic.

You talk about bridging the paper and digital worlds. Why are companies that traditionally sold output devices and imaging supplies now pushing technologies that would ultimately reduce the use of paper and consumables?

Henderson: I know—it seems like a counter-intuitive, doesn’t it? However, we recognize that our customers need to print less. Paper and toner represent a large portion of the cost of operating a printer or copier, so we thought that by providing companies with a way to print less, they could save money and use the savings for things that can actually drive profitability.

This message also reinforces the reality that information is increasingly being processed in electronic format—a shift we can either fight or help enable. We chose to lead in the development and application of smart MFP technology, not just as a copier, or a printer, but as a device that enables businesses by automating functions, capturing information from paper documents and using it electronically—ultimately driving workflow efficiency and productivity improvements.

Could automating processes and cutting back on paper output eventually eliminate MFPs altogether?

Henderson: No, not completely. Technologists and futurists have been talking about the paperless office since the mid-1970s, but we’re still not very close to it. Paper continues to have a place in the way we work and interact.

The goal is to serve customers, and each individual user, in the way they want to conduct their business, while helping them to be as efficient as possible. That’s why you’re seeing a shift in the way products are being developed. Now instead of just being faster at printing, the focus is on ease of use, information security, software and workflow support, mobile and cloud integration.

Many companies have difficulty supporting remote locations with standard printers and copiers. Doesn’t deploying smart MFPs in the field make that even more difficult for IT?

Henderson: Well, it goes back to the concept of smart, now doesn’t it? A smart MFP can communicate in numerous ways. Part of the ecosystem is manageability. A smart MFP ecosystem will have remote management so devices can be monitored and configured remotely from a centralized management hub. Selecting the right smart MFP ecosystem makes it easier to manage remote devices, not harder.

## Does each vendor’s “ecosystem” lock a buyer into their products? What if a buyer decides to change the enterprise software they’ve been using after deploying a smart MFP ecosystem?

Henderson: A truly smart MFP ecosystem will be open, meaning that it will use open standards to integrate with other applications. Our whole design concept is that the smart MFP will enable the integration to network applications and systems in a way that’s easy for IT to deploy, support and manage.

Ease of deployment and management includes support for changing your IT infrastructure; that’s why companies want to identify providers who offer a smart MFP ecosystem that is both self-contained—meaning they don’t have to purchase other middleware, or third-party software—and leverages open-standards and APIs to integrate with their core applications. So when a company changes their HR system, for example, they should be able to obtain a new connector from their provider, not fundamentally change their smart MFP infrastructure or change the middleware because it was hard-coded to their old system. This is what we mean by future flexibility: the ability for IT to change their systems and processes to help the company grow, and not be inhibited by their smart MFP infrastructure.

## So does that mean that smart MFPs should be part of the responsibility of the IT staff instead of the procurement team?

Henderson: Well, that would be a decision that each company would need to make. However, the more we talk about the capabilities of smart MFPs and their associated ecosystem, it becomes clearer that these devices and functions should be managed within IT. These devices operate on the network, require security and access control, and integrate with other applications on the network.

Additionally, all of the manufacturers tend to say the same or similar things about their products and capabilities; however, how these get implemented, the level of integration and the flexibility that actually exists are items that can typically be better evaluated by the IT staff, not the procurement team. Typically, procurement is focused on getting a compliant item for the best price, but with smart MFPs, the functionality and how that functionality is implemented become the critical factors.

Smart MFPs, and the applications that are purchased or supported within their ecosystem, change the paradigm; the decision transitions to how well these devices and capabilities support the business objectives to help drive cost reduction, efficiency, productivity and flexibility for the future. So it’s not just a game about low prices anymore. Smart MFPs and the ecosystem surrounding them are not commodity items.

## Mobile computing continues to surge in importance. Do these users have any connection to a smart MFP ecosystem?

Henderson: Most smart MFP ecosystems have connections to mobile devices, enabling mobile printing and mobile capture of information. Again, the differences come into play in the way these capabilities are implemented. As a company investigates what they need their mobile capabilities to do, they will be able to identify the differences and select the right provider.

## From hardware vendor to business process partner

Henderson: The way companies buy printers, copiers and MFPs is changing. Buyers used to define a list of specifications and sought out the lowest-priced offer that met those specs.

Don’t get me wrong, companies still need an appropriate level of specifications and performance, but now it’s really about evaluating how the capabilities of the smart MFP and its ecosystem help accomplish the buyer’s business objectives.

Gartner says: *“SMFPs can play an indispensable role with an organization’s content management strategy. In this way, end-user customers will no longer see their printer or MFP provider as just another vendor, but a value-adding partner.”*

This is a big shift, but when IT buyers start seeing the potential efficiencies and savings offered by a smart MFP ecosystem, I think the traditional spec-driven, device-centric mindset will change. After all, IT buyers already know how to evaluate and purchase integrated systems based on scalability, reliability, flexibility and service.

Silva, F. (2012, March 27). *Competitive Landscape: Open Architectures for MFPs, Worldwide*; Market Analysis and Statistics (Gartner ID: G00228815)

“When the savings are calculated, buyers often see justification for updating their entire fleet at once.”

## Does a company have to replace all its existing printers and copiers at once?

**Henderson:** No, again it is about flexibility. Sometimes, companies plan a phased-in smart device rollout to accommodate budgets. Other times, when they have the budget, they do replace all of their devices at the same time. When the savings are calculated, they often see justification for updating their entire fleet at once.

But I want to make sure that we don't focus solely on the devices themselves, as though that's the only consideration. The smart MFP and its surrounding ecosystem provide the ability to enhance projects for business optimization or process improvement. As a company is planning their process improvement projects, for example, evaluating how work gets done in relation to printers, scanners, copy and fax machines will provide an opportunity to integrate the smart MFP into the project. That aids in budgeting, allowing them to appropriately change the devices being used in the impacted areas of the business first, and expand from there.

## Aren't smart features typically found only in the most costly, top-of-the-line devices?

**Henderson:** Not always; smart features are increasingly being brought to a broader range of products; for example, smart MFPs make up Lexmark's entire line of MFPs, except for only two entry-level models.

## What major functions, capabilities or frameworks should a smart MFP ecosystem vendor be able to deliver?

**Henderson:** Before throwing out a long list of what a vendor should deliver, I would say the first step is knowing what your own business objectives are—what you're trying to accomplish. A quality smart MFP vendor will work with you to define and clarify such goals, as well as educate you about technical capabilities you might not have thought of yet—not just hand you a list of features and products and say “Buy this.”

Second, you want an ecosystem that is simple for IT to implement, configure and manage, with flexibility to grow or change in the future as the business's requirements and needs change.

Third, the ecosystem needs to be smart enough to guide the business units and their users to accomplish the right tasks and processes with little training. All the components of the ecosystem, especially the smart MFP itself, need to be programmable to support specific processes, and specific applications that each organization works with.

From a more technical standpoint, the smart MFP ecosystem should support universal drivers, apps that run on the device itself, a server and serverless printing environment, mobile support, cloud support, existing API-based connectors to network applications and its own software that can enable the content and process management of the overall workflow.

The other critical capability is an ecosystem that is self-contained without needing to use third-party software or middleware. Many providers on the market enable third parties to operate their devices and perform the integration, but because of the nature of generic integrations and connections, this introduces unnecessary complexity and security risk to a company's network, which is never a good thing.