

From increased convenience at the stores to document sharing

For its A4 documents, SPAR Austria relies entirely on Lexmark printers

For companies, the increase in service assignments and complaints via the hotline is an alarm signal – as it was the case with SPAR Austria, which realized that the quality of its printer fleet was constantly deteriorating. The requirements of the users could thus no longer be met. After an intensive test phase with four leading printer manufacturers, SPAR's internal IT service provider, SPAR ICS, decided in favour of Lexmark's new A4 single-function and multifunction devices for use not only at its stores, but also in its logistics distribution centres and branch offices. A decision that has mostly received positive feedback so far – especially from the employees, i.e. the direct users. Besides the high quality of the new Lexmark printers, their intuitive operation, sturdy compact design and functionality, a further convincing feature was the flexible handling with regard to the distribution of security updates.



The Company

As a subsidiary of the SPAR Austria Group, a private family business that was founded in Kufstein (Tyrol) in 1954, SPAR Business Services, Information and Communication Services (SPAR ICS) GmbH manages all IT matters within the SPAR Group from its ICS headquarters in Salzburg.

With around 500 employees, it provides solutions for more than 7,000 users at more than 3,000 locations in Europe. With its subsidiaries Hervis and SES Spar European Shopping Centers in the meantime having grown to be a Central European trading group, the SPAR Group operates 1,560 food retail locations in its home market of Austria, 701 of which are managed by independent SPAR merchants, with the rest being operated as branch stores/independent businesses under the SPAR, EUROSPAR, INTERSPAR and Maximarkt brands, as well as catering businesses.

Furthermore, the Group also operates in seven other European countries with over 1,360 locations. As an internal IT service provider, SPAR ICS uses state-of-the-art technologies, systems and methods and relies on strategic applications and infrastructure systems, most of which are developed in-house.

Current information and company news can be found at www.spar-ics.com und www.spar.at/unternehmen.



Figure 1: The SPAR and Lexmark project team

The Challenge

SPAR Business Services, Information and Communication Services (SPAR ICS) GmbH, SPAR's internal IT service provider, has experienced an ever-increasing demand for its services relating to print devices in recent years.



Figure 2: Using the Lexmark MS725dvn with Hot roll fuser technology in the SPAR cold store

Whether at the stores or in the field of logistics, the service assignments had increased significantly – and therefore also the costs. One key task for the output devices used at the stores, for example, is the precise printing of price labels – "precise" because the prices and price changes have to be printed on perforated, pre-printed paper exactly in a yellow field. This only works with high-quality printing devices which draw in the paper correctly even after umpteen thousand printing operations. Other typical printing tasks which are mainly required at the branches range from the printing out of supplier reports to reports on the sales figures. One special case is also the use of the devices in the cold rooms of the storage areas – here, very sturdy devices are required which can withstand the extreme conditions of cold and humidity.

The Solution

At the beginning of 2018, SPAR ICS was searching for a new partner and initiated a market comparison with four leading printer manufacturers, including Lexmark. During a four-month evaluation phase, the printers of all of the participating manufacturers underwent thorough testing in the test lab at SPAR ICS. In addition to technical tests to determine the quality and ease of handling, the agenda included discussions with the

service partner and those responsible for fleet service management. The work of store employees should not include having to deal with printer issues. They need devices which can intuitively be operated – including easy handling to extend from commissioning to navigating through the printing jobs, as well as adding paper and replacing toner. Other criteria related to the technical quality, the sturdiness of the printers, their compact design – every centimetre counts in the offices of the stores – as well as their functionality and flexibility. Furthermore, some new printers also had to be suitable for use in cold rooms. During the test phase, it turned out that the Lexmark devices were awarded the best marks in all of the decisive criteria. Last but not least, the decisive factor was the technical quality of the accurate paper feeder, which is so important for the SPAR stores.

Ultimately, SPAR decided in favour of the Lexmark printer fleet for its A4 output environment. For example, the MX622 monochrome multifunction printer with a print speed of up to 47 pages per minute was selected as one of the future key devices for the SPAR stores and central branches. Previously, they had mainly used single-function devices. Instead, the Lexmark offer included multifunction devices with high added value especially in terms of space savings, as the fax machines were no longer needed. With their new multifunctional devices, the logistics teams can now also scan documents on the printer and then share and exchange them with others. The scanning functionality used here specifically for SPAR is very secure, as scanned documents can easily be sent by email to a defined group of people. Confidential documents such as delivery lists or price documentation will thus not accidentally end up in the wrong hands even under time pressure. Moreover, Lexmark delivers its devices with full security packages.

In contrast, in the cold stores of the distribution centres where fresh and perishable goods are stored in high racks, the MS725 family of hot roll fuser printers is used.

The SPAR ICS testers put their faith here in a recommendation from Lexmark. In spite of the extremely unfavourable conditions for laser printers - in the cold stores there is a very high humidity level at low temperatures - the sturdy monochrome multifunction devices work reliably and even "forgive" the odd "jostle" in the harsh logistics business.

The employees - at the branch stores in particular - were immediately impressed by the simple, convenient and above all uniform operation of the new devices - especially across different device models. Older employees also cope with them very well - from the larger displays of the new Lexmark printers to the simple manner in which the toner is replaced. With the initial configuration of the printers being carried out together with Lexmark, the printer fleet management software Lexmark Markvision Enterprise will then be used for all further adaptations. Lexmark Markvision Enterprise offers SPAR a number of advantages: On the one hand, it is made available to Lexmark customers at no extra cost, while on the other hand, security updates can be applied centrally to all devices of the SPAR printer fleet, for example, irrespective of whether these are old or new devices and no matter which store is involved. The Markvision Enterprise software was certainly another decisive factor in the selection of Lexmark as the preferred printer partner in the A4 field.

The Result

Just six months after the start of the evaluation phase in early 2018 and the subsequent decision in favour of Lexmark as the future printer partner for A4 applications, the first devices were already delivered. In the middle of August 2019, 600 new Lexmark devices were already in use at the store branches, for logistics and in the cold stores. Continual replacements are made as soon as an old device stops working, or as part of a branch market modernisation. Processes at the stores and branch offices are not affected by this - the replacement is carried out seamlessly and quietly.

The total contract volume comprises 3,500 A4 printers and only a few different types of device. For example, at the central office, colour laser MFPs and single-function devices in mono and colour from the 6 range are used. In the areas of logistics and cold stores, SPAR puts its faith in the hot roll fuser technology of the MS725dvn devices. Smaller SPAR stores are well equipped with monochrome single-function devices (MS621dn) - and the large INTERSPAR hypermarkets additionally with monochrome MFPs (MX622ade). Hervis stores rely on CX625ade colour MFPs.



Figure 3: The MS725dvn at the SPAR logistics centre

After one year of collaboration the employees at the stores gave consistently positive feedback - even with active inquiries about when a new Lexmark device would finally be arriving at their store. This is rather unusual, as changes and new devices tend to be a rather difficult topic where employees often show a high level of scepticism and rejection. But not only the employees at the stores are very satisfied with the devices - the users in the branch offices have also noticed that their new devices are much quieter and therefore more user-friendly during operation.