



Why Higher Ed IT Directors Are Standardizing Their Print Fleets

Nobody sat down and designed the print environment you're managing today.

It grew the way most things grow at large institutions: one department and grant-funded wing at a time. Somebody needed a printer, so they got a printer. And then they got a different printer. Then the original one went out of contract and got replaced with something newer from a different manufacturer, under a different service agreement. Multiply that across a campus of any real size and you end up with a fleet nobody fully controls, supported by contracts nobody can fully see, running on firmware nobody has touched in years.

If that description sounds familiar, you're not alone. Nobody plans for this. This is just how institutions end up.

What "Fragmented" Actually Looks Like on a Campus

For IT teams trying to support it, a fragmented print fleet means something very specific: Six different device brands mean six different service relationships, parts inventories, and sets of troubleshooting steps your staff has to know. A ticket comes in from the library, another from the registrar's office, and another from the building that bought its own equipment with departmental funds. They all print, more or less, but none of them were purchased with a shared strategy in mind.

Meanwhile, supplies are being ordered in small batches at retail prices because there's no central visibility. One building is on firmware from four years ago because nobody has a defined patch cycle for print devices. Another department renewed its local lease because waiting on central procurement felt slower than handling it themselves.

The result is a slow, steady accumulation of overhead that nobody ever formally agreed to take on.

Four Things a Fragmented Fleet Costs You

Support Overhead

Every device brand your team supports is a learning curve. This means different interfaces, different error codes, and different call queues when something breaks. More variety in your fleet translates to more time your IT staff spends getting oriented before they can actually fix anything.

Budget Opacity

Without central visibility, it's difficult to see your total print spend. You're making budget decisions without full information, and the people asking you to justify those decisions don't have it either.

Security Gaps

Unmanaged print devices carry real risk with default passwords, unpatched firmware, and hard drives that never get wiped at decommission. Standardization doesn't automatically solve all of that, but it makes it significantly easier to address.

Procurement Friction

Renewing contracts piecemeal, negotiating separately with multiple vendors, and having no consolidated volume to leverage for better pricing adds up in time. And it costs you in the deals you're not positioned to get.

What Standardization Actually Involves

The word "standardization" can sound like a bigger lift than it usually is. It doesn't mean replacing every device on campus before the semester starts or a months-long implementation that disrupts operations during finals week.

It typically starts with a print assessment that maps what you have, where it is, how it's actually being used, and what it's costing. That visibility can be surprising. Devices that seem busy aren't, and buildings that seem fine have old firmware. Departments that think they need a dedicated device could share one without any real change to their workflow.

From there, rightsizing: matching device type and capacity to actual usage by location. Then it's time for consolidation to a preferred manufacturer and a single service relationship, which means one number to call, one contract to manage, and one vendor accountable for the whole fleet.

Phased approaches are common and worth planning for. Most institutions can't swap everything at once, and most don't need to. The point is a clear direction, not an overnight overhaul.

What Changes When It's Done

One service relationship means one call when something breaks. You have a dedicated help desk to lean on instead of a queue of different vendor contacts depending on which device is down. Supplies get ordered automatically rather than reactively.

Decommissioned devices get sanitized properly because there's a process for it.

For IT directors, the clearest change is fewer interruptions. When the print environment runs predictably, it stops generating the volume of one-off tickets and vendor conversations that tend to crowd out everything else. That's time back for strategic work, which is what most IT directors would rather be doing anyway.

How Cooperative Purchasing Makes This Easier

One of the real barriers to standardization in higher ed is procurement. Going through a full RFP process for a fleet overhaul takes time and resources that most institutions don't have in reserve.

[Marco's contract with E&I Cooperative Services](#) eliminates that step. E&I is a member-owned, nonprofit purchasing cooperative exclusively focused on education. Membership is free, and their contracts are already competitively solicited, which means they satisfy procurement requirements without a separate bid process.

Where to Start

Before any institution can standardize its print fleet, it needs to know what it's actually working with. That's true whether you're planning a phased consolidation over two years or just trying to build a business case for central IT oversight.

A print assessment gives you that baseline — what's there, what it's costing, and where the gaps are. It gives you the information you need to make a decision.