



Whitepaper:
Virtualized fax servers –
why they're better than
an appliance

GFI FaxMaker™

Network fax server software for Exchange/SMTP/Lotus

Organizations can achieve numerous benefits as they move from traditional manual faxing to a network fax server solution.

Here are just a few examples:

- Saves time
- Eliminates the need to spend on consumables
- Creates process efficiencies
- Uses work flow automation to increase employee productivity
- Helps comply with privacy and security needs and regulations
- Reduces costs.

Helps comply with privacy and security needs and regulations

Many organizations looking at fax servers consider a hardware appliance to be the easiest way to go. Without research and investigation, this seems to be a good conclusion. However, after carefully weighing the pros and cons of each, this might not be the best solution after all.

Let's take a look at the benefits of a virtualized fax server as compared to a hardware appliance.

1. Hardware appliance fax server



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Real estate

Hardware appliances use precious real estate in your organization and do not assist in reducing the number of servers on your network.

Maintaining and future-proofing

Hardware appliances also come with their own difficulties. For example, it is not uncommon for an appliance to require firmware upgrades to ensure they are operating at peak performance. Unfortunately, firmware upgrades can and

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sometimes do go wrong and recovering from a bad upgrade can be very time-consuming and costly. It requires a significant investment in time, effort and money to keep up with the latest firmware upgrades in the event of a critical business failure.

If the hardware itself fails, the device becomes an extremely large paper weight. Repairing the appliance may mean shipping it back to the manufacturer or supplier and waiting for the repair before a fully operational fax server is delivered back to you. There are very few, if any, organizations that can afford that kind of downtime. It is true that extended service warranties and plans may be available for a replacement appliance while repairs are under way, but you will usually incur an extra cost for this as you will need to configure the replacement appliance. An appliance deployed today may become out of date within 12 months. Adding features and functionality to a hardware appliance is problematic too. Unless you have purchased a hardware fax appliance with more than you need today, things like adding lines or even users may not be as easy as you think it should be. A four-port appliance is a four-port appliance. If suddenly you need eight lines, you may need to purchase a completely new appliance.

Changing the way you communicate

If your organization is growing and you seek to improve your communications and work flow, a hardware appliance fax server could be a limiting factor. One such scenario is a company that has analog lines today. It may purchase a hardware appliance fax server that will take some of those analog lines and use them to send and receive faxes. That may be what the organization needs... today. In six months, when the organization has grown - not by a huge amount perhaps, but enough to justify the need for a change of phone systems - you may want consider bringing in ISDN lines to a phone system that is also capable of voice over IP (VoIP). Everything is upgraded nicely and the organization is very happy with its new phones, IVR, voice mail, call routing and overall professionalism. However, there is something lacking here: the hardware appliance fax server can only accept analog lines. The option at this point is to maintain the old technology or purchase a brand new appliance capable of using fax over IP (FoIP) or ISDN lines.

You may even want to reconsider maintaining any fax lines at all. Ask yourself: Can my appliance readily send faxes through a cloud-based fax service, help me reduce cost, enhance workflows and increase employee productivity?

Scalability

As the organization grows, more lines, more users and perhaps more fax servers are required. Scaling hardware-based appliances can be costly and generally requires feet on the ground to replace the appliance, even if configuration can be done remotely. For multiple-site organizations wishing to make use of least cost routing, maintaining a fax server at the point of entry or exit for faxes is an essential part of doing business.

Evaluation

It can be difficult to evaluate an appliance solution. Initially, it will have to be shipped to you so you can test it within your environment in a real world scenario. If you are not happy with it, you must ship it back and start your search all over again.

Now that we have a better understanding of some of the drawbacks of the hardware appliance fax server, let's take a look at the benefits of a virtualized fax server.

2.

Virtualized fax server



2. Virtualized fax server

Server set up and consolidation

Software solutions can generally be downloaded, installed and configured quickly.

One physical server can host multiple virtual servers. This reduces the number of physical machines and the footprint the organization requires and reduces the cost associated with purchasing hardware infrastructure. Running multiple virtual servers on one physical machine, however, enables reduced energy consumption, which is a big advantage for any organization.

Recovery

Since snapshots of virtual machines can be taken non-intrusively and non-disruptively at any time, if a machine crashes, it can be quickly and easily loaded from storage. This helps facilitate the quick recovery from any business disaster and allows for the virtual machine to be moved easily.

Freedom of telephony from reduced cables

A virtual fax server needs to use FoIP to communicate. As a result, there is no need to install a fax board or modem either on or in the physical server. Instead, it uses a software communication asset to facilitate FoIP or it can connect directly to a cloud-based fax service for full hybrid faxing. Your organization benefits because you will not need any phone lines running to your fax server. It communicates using your standard IP network! If you have to move the server, you no longer need to worry about making sure you have phone lines physically near the new location.

If you have an SIP provider or use a cloud-based fax service, the virtualized fax server can communicate directly with that provider to send and receive faxes – again, no physical phone lines required!

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If you don't use an SIP provider or cloud-based fax service or you would prefer to use your existing telephony infrastructure then of course, you do need to have a gateway that can convert the FoIP traffic to normal fax telephony traffic. Most organizations today have a PBX system that also handles this. If you don't, then a small media gateway would be required. Typically media gateways are very small in size, use very little power, and convert normal telephony into IP-based telephony and vice versa. Some media gateways also have the capability to switch between phone line usage and VoIP provider usage when one or the other fails. This is a very real benefit for ensuring business continuity.

Fax server updates

A virtualized fax server is typically a software fax server in a virtual environment. If the software vendor releases updates or new versions of the software, you are able to update your fax server to the latest version easily with little to no disruption to your operation. If you need to stay up-to-date, this is a must.

Flexibility

A virtualized fax server allows you take advantage of existing telephony infrastructure, choose a new service or change mid-stream. It gives you the freedom to move the server when and where you want. You are no longer tied to phone cables. You can expand or reduce the number of lines you use, change the number of users on each line, utilize the existing hardware you have, if applicable, and reduce your physical foot print. You can pretty much do whatever is right for you!

Isn't that the idea of choosing a fax server in the first place: Improving your business, your way?

About GFI FaxMaker®

GFI FaxMaker makes sending and receiving faxes a simple, secure and cost-effective process. It allows faxes to be sent and received from email clients and applications. GFI FaxMaker also works with online fax services; no phone lines or fax boards required. This award-winning fax server for Exchange, Lotus and SMTP/POP3 or cloud-based email servers helps you improve your organization's work flow and efficiency while saving time and money.



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