PRAAS' Pivot to Compliance and Security Strengthens Partnership with Microsoft

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EXECUTIVE SNAPSHOT

FIGURE 1

Executive Snapshot: PRAAS' Pivot to Compliance and Security Strengthens Partnership with Microsoft

This IDC Market Note analyzes the collaboration between print management platform provider PRAAS and Microsoft. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the shift toward a hybrid work model for most organizations. IT infrastructures and processes are being improved to facilitate remote work, but print is often overlooked. PRAAS' Print as a Service is a cloud-based platform that captures information on all print output and stores it in a digital repository so it can be analyzed. The collaboration with Microsoft aligns the solution with current enterprise-grade applications and secures print workflows under typical zero-trust and data protection policies.

Key Takeaways

- PRAAS' Print as a Service is a cloud-based platform that captures information on all print workflows regardless of where they originate. The solution creates a centralized repository for all information regarding print, enabling printing cost attribution and data analysis to identify workflows that can be digitalized.

- PRAAS' collaboration with Microsoft adds a solid security layer as every access request needs to be authenticated and authorized. The solution also leverages Microsoft Information Protection to automatically identify and classify sensitive data and apply information protection policies.

- PRAAS and Microsoft share a common vision regarding PRAAS' proposition and the print pain points addressed by the platform. They also have joint commercial initiatives that can potentially propel PRAAS among Microsoft clients.

- IDC sees the PRAAS' Print as a Service platform powered by Microsoft as a timely and valuable proposition that addresses the challenges and risks of print in today's hybrid work environment.

Source: IDC, 2021

IN THIS MARKET NOTE

This IDC Market Note discusses the recent collaboration agreement between cloud-based print management platform provider PRAAS and Microsoft. It provides details on how the companies are collaborating and briefly touches on the implications of such a solution in the current context considering the rapid shift toward hybrid work.

IDC'S POINT OF VIEW

The business world remains impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and most white-collar staff in key economies are still working remotely from home for most of the week. Although a gradual and patchy return to offices is predicted, IDC anticipates that hybrid working models will continue to be widespread going forward.

This permanent shift comes with challenges. IDC's *European Future of Work Survey* unveiled greater risk of lateral movement by hackers and increased device vulnerability (with access of sensitive information from unmanaged devices) encountered by 33% and 31% of organizations, respectively.

As such, ensuring security and compliance across multiple remote access points continues to be paramount. While many aspects of organizations' IT infrastructures have been reviewed to comply with typical enterprise-grade security and compliance, print has largely been overlooked. IDC's 2020 print peripherals tracker data showed a clear shift of print from offices to homes at the beginning of the pandemic. Employees generally continued to print on home devices as they would on office devices. Printing with no encryption over unsecure home networks exposed companies to security breaches. IDC research shows that unmanaged printing can also easily lead to the release of sensitive data in a noncompliant way.

Fulton Francis, an international provider of managed print services (MPS), founded PRAAS Limited in 2020. PRAAS' Print as a Service offers a global cloud-based platform that enables the management of printers regardless of brand and location. Eliminating the need for print servers, the platform tracks documents being printed across office and remote locations. Aside from enabling management to claim back the real cost of print, PRAAS supports todays' dispersed organizations by ensuring that print is consistently secure and compliant.

PRAAS' Partnership with Microsoft

The COVID-19 pandemic and related movement restrictions was the perfect scenario for the launch of PRAAS. The company leveraged Fulton Francis' global print management focus on digitally transforming document workflows and recentered it to also address the pressing need of organizations to incorporate print in their shift toward a secure and compliant hybrid model. In this endeavor, the partnership with Microsoft is crucial.

PRAAS' Print as a Service platform incorporates both proprietary as well as best-of-breed third-party elements. In essence, client-deployed print management technology feeds PRAAS' proprietary contract and billing management technology iConsolidate, which acts as a centralized repository for all print-related information. The latter empowers customers to analyze and digitalize workflows. The platform is wrapped around a solid Microsoft security layer, ensuring enterprise-grade security and compliance.

The solution is effectively a Microsoft architecture that incorporates multilayer security and addresses user data, devices, and imaging services, including printing and scanning. The PRAAS platform benefits from Microsoft's zero-trust security technology model, meaning every access request is authenticated and authorized by analyzing all elements, including users' identity and applications' hosting environment to prevent security breaches. Microsegmentation and least-privilege access principles are utilized to minimize lateral movement and protect data at a file level.

Microsoft's security model enables PRAAS to better serve large organizations that can integrate printing as part of wider enterprise commitments to zero trust. PRAAS also benefits from Microsoft Information Protection, a solution that supports users in automatically identifying and classifying sensitive data and applying information protection policies to documents.

Also, key components of the PRAAS platform use Microsoft Power Business Intelligence primarily for reporting.

Although PRAAS and Microsoft have not made any announcement yet on their partnership, the companies are already communicating a common vision and a joint commercial strategy. Both recognize the current shift to hybrid models and the lack of compliance with data protection regulations and zero-trust company policies.

Speaking about the use of confidential documents by home based workers, Microsoft's Senior Director for Security, Compliance, and Identity Business Development Desmond Forbes said, "these employees manage confidential data, yet their organizations have minimal visibility, controls, or auditing capabilities to monitor compliance of remote printing. This global risk increased and accelerated with the transformation of the hybrid work model, driven by the global pandemic." He added, "in partnership with Microsoft, PRAAS intends to address the risks associated with remote printing and data management for both customers and enterprises."

IDC sees numerous additional synergies between the two companies. Product wise, the PRAAS platform is able to capture a huge amount of valuable print workflow information from remote users that would otherwise go lost. Microsoft, on the other hand, is among the best-positioned players to analyze that data though AI, track user behavior, and identify workflows in need for digital transformation.

Commercially, the partnership opens various avenues for PRAAS. The company is initially going to market through a direct sales model in conjunction with Microsoft, targeting Microsoft's Enterprise and Corporate client base with a full-service offering (comprising platform, devices, and optimization services). In addition, the platform is currently offered on Microsoft AppSource and listed as a Preferred solution, distinguishing PRAAS as a partner with deep, proven expertise and capabilities to address print needs.

Although IDC is not able to comment on actual implementations of PRAAS, the PRAAS platform is an integration of established technologies. The partnership between PRAAS and Microsoft builds a unique proposition that would solve many of the pains of print and make it accountable, secure, and compliant. Across all home locations, central offices, and bespoke facilities, truly hybrid organizations today require a central source of truth for print delivered through enterprise-grade technology. The PRAAS platform addresses this need and builds on Microsoft for peace-of-mind security.

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Related Research

- *Y Soft Looks to Disrupt the Fax Market with SAFEQ Digital Fax* (IDC #lcUS47587821, April 2021)
- *Fulton Francis Launches Vendor-Agnostic Print as a Service for the New Normal of Hybrid Work* (IDC #lcAP46541520, June 2020)

Synopsis

This IDC Market Note analyzes the collaboration agreement between cloud-based print management platform provider PRAAS and Microsoft. This announcement is timely and highly relevant given the increasing demand for solutions that address the enterprise need to shift to truly hybrid work models.

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