

Printer and Copier Reliability

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White Paper

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How much money are you losing to printer downtime?

Most businesses tend to look at printer acquisition in terms of “hard costs”, most notably, rental or original acquisition costs and the cost of replacing consumable components like toner. These are the most easily quantifiable aspects of a printer. Less easy to quantify are the soft costs associated with printers. Some of these include:

- staff productivity loss due to printer downtime
- help desk calls
- staff training
- ease of maintenance
- service and repair call-outs

If your company is like most, the printer and copier fleet is a core part of operations, an essential service that can grind business to a standstill if it fails. Excessive downtime can have a serious economic impact on your company, and if you are experiencing unexpected and unbudgeted hardware issues, it may well be time to reassess your company’s printer and copier fleet.

Unfortunately, downtime tends to be one of the most unknown factors of operating a printing fleet. “Supportability” and “reliability” don’t appear as easily readable components on a specification sheet. It’s hard to find information on the reliability of a given brand or product, and it’s even harder to factor in hardware failures into your operating budget. There are things you can do to mitigate the downtime to your business and frequency of printer failures.

Ten tips for reducing printer downtime

Even though reliability is hard to measure as a cost to your business, there are a number of things you can do to mitigate the effect of hardware failures on your business. Here's our list of the top ten:

1. Buy a brand with a reputation for reliability. There are many journals and organisations that run comprehensive printer tests, and these are often your best source of information on printer reliability. Word of mouth is very important too, so ask colleagues about their experiences with a given company and brand.
2. Log printer failures, time spent on help desk calls and response times from the vendor. Keeping track of these things can help you build a wealth of historical data that can be used for cost and hardware replacement evaluations. Even if a printer is covered by a warranty, it is worth noting printer failures and support response times, since there will likely come a time when the printer is not covered. Printers with excessive failure rates should be replaced, since you'll often find that the costs associated with hardware failures will often rapidly outstrip the purchase price of a new printer. Sometimes it actually turns out to be cheaper to buy a new printer than to continue to support an old one.
3. A good warranty is a key indicator of quality, and can save you a good deal of money. Higher quality printers will tend to have longer warranties as well as on-site service agreements. Look for printers with on site warranty support for two years or more. Read the fine print to see exactly what is covered by the warranty.
4. Monitor printer usage. Few businesses practice any kind of proactive monitoring of their printing systems, instead waiting until a printer ceases operating before acting. Only then come the ritual calls to the help desk and the scramble to find a new toner cartridge or maintenance kit. Advanced monitoring tools, like Kyocera's KM-NET network printer monitoring tool, can keep you abreast of printer usage and give you a heads up when it's low on toner or requires the installation of a maintenance kit.

5. Train staff to troubleshoot the more common printer failures. Most printer 'failures' are, in fact, something easily correctable: paper jams, toner depletion, a consumable component reaching the end of its life. In most cases these can be readily fixed by departmental staff on the spot without needing to call the help desk. Staff should be trained and feel confident enough to do that, however, so it's worth spending an hour or two when you install a new printer to train them. You should also factor in maintenance times when making a purchasing decision. Before you settle on a printer model and vendor, it's worth checking on a few things that might not normally occur to you in the purchasing process: paper unjamming, maintenance kit install times, ease of toner replacement. The simpler these things are, the more likely that staff can be trained to handle it themselves and fewer calls will be made to the helpdesk.

6. Develop a fleet plan with some redundancy. Ensure that if a printer/copier fails, then people that need to print or copy can fall back on another device without too much disruption.

7. Look for a vendor with rapid service call response times. Sometimes it's inevitable that a printer will break down and you'll have to call in a vendor's support team to fix it. Ensure, before you buy, that a vendor can respond rapidly to your support needs. In most cases, you should look for same-day support.

8. Treating printers and copiers with a little TLC will go a long way to expanding their life. Environmental factors, for example, play a large part in how long a printer or copier is likely to last before failure. Printers in heavy dust environments are going to fail with higher frequency than those in cleaner environments. As much as possible, try to keep the printer away from environmental effects that are likely to cause hardware issues.

9. Higher volume printer/copiers tend to be engineered for reliability, more so than cheaper printers. They also have lower costs per page. But you need to balance that against the redundancy provided by having multiple lower volume printers as opposed to a single printer.

10. Talk to the manufacturers, instead of just buying a printer on specifications. Ask them about the technology they use and the warranty and support contract they offer. Not only can they provide useful information, you'll also get a feel for the culture of support the company has.

What about small business without the administrative resources to dedicate?

Unfortunately, for businesses without large printer fleets, it can be difficult to gather enough data to accurately assess the impact of printer availability on business productivity. Most of the data gathered tends to be anecdotal. The good news is there are third parties that perform extensive reliability testing on printers and copiers. Among the industry's best known are:

BERTL (www.bertl.com)

BERTL is a premier source for objective, independent product-evaluation reports and comparative analyses on digital imaging devices and software. BERTL's evaluation reports, customer satisfaction research, awards and product ratings are undertaken entirely at BERTL's expense for the benefit of its international subscriber base. According to BERTL, its primary focus is the end user at all times, and it publishes the world's largest library of evaluation reports on copiers, printers, MFPs, fax and colour and production devices.

Better Buys For Business (www.betterbuys.com)

Better Buys for Business is a leading independent authority on document imaging equipment (copiers, printers, faxes, and scanners). To assure its independence, Better Buys for Business accepts no advertising -- revenues are derived solely from the sales of its reports.

BLI (www.buyerslab.com)

For over 45 years, Buyers Laboratory Inc. (BLI) has been a source of unbiased and reliable intelligence for the imaging industry. Although originally based in the US, in 2005, BLI launched its international division with offices in Hong Kong and London. BLI also provides certification testing, rating products on their ability to meet various benchmarks for reliability and performance.

Industry Analysts Inc. (www.industryanalysts.com)

Since 1973, Industry Analysts Inc. has been a leading expert in the office automation industry. Specializing in market research and product testing, they provide comprehensive data and reports to manufacturers, vendors and end-users across the globe.

Supplier analysis e.g. Kyocera Mita (www.kyoceramita.com.au)

If you're interested in an evaluation of your printing systems and how they could impact your bottom line, Kyocera can help you determine the cost and impact of printer downtime and provide solutions and advice on minimising the effects of outages. It can also provide advice on restructuring your fleet to minimise costs.

About Kyocera Corporation

Established in 1959 and listed on the US stock exchange, the Kyocera Corporation group of companies has turnover in excess of 12 billion US dollars and is headquartered in Kyoto, Japan. With Australian/New Zealand head office in Sydney and branch offices in Brisbane, Melbourne, Canberra, Perth, Adelaide and Auckland, Kyocera is one of the world's leading manufacturers and distributors of document imaging solutions.

Kyocera is a company that is committed to the environment, offering digital copiers, networkable laser printers, wide format copier/printers and multifunction imaging solutions. Using innovative technology & product design, it produces products that offer a lower Total Cost of Ownership whilst reducing waste and pollution. For more information, visit www.kyoceramita.com.au.