

Leading by example

It will have come as no surprise to many in the industry that Kyocera Mita won Green Vendor of the Year at the first ever ARNIT Industry Awards. This is largely because of the company's hard, and very visible, work to change the perception of printing as one of the least environmentally friendly sectors of IT.

The Japanese vendor's management philosophy is to coexist harmoniously with nature and society ... as [Kyocera Mita] work[s] together to create a world of abundance and peace.

It's high-flown stuff but the company takes it seriously, and these values are championed by its Australian subsidiary. Local managing director, David Finn, pointed out that Kyocera is no Johnny-Come-Lately to the environmental challenge. "Kyocera's corporate involvement came in 1985. That was well before anybody really thought about climate change and the problems with the ice caps and things like that," he recalled.

The 50-year-old, \$US12 billion vendor started tackling its overall business processes and designing new products from the ground up to fit its new environmental consciousness – and find ways of minimising financial and ecological waste. And it's an ongoing process, Finn said.

That means changes to its entire range of document imaging hardware: printers, copiers and MFDs. And to go green yet still appeal to hard-nosed business customers, it also has to offer competitive total cost of ownership and service.

"Our environmental message is to reduce, reuse and recycle, wherever possible," he said. "You can get lower total cost of ownership when you lower landfill requirements and recycle, so you have end-to-end management of the product."

In its Sustainability Report 2006, Kyocera chairman, Koji Seki, talked up the vendor's Economy, Ecology and Systems (ECOSYS) concept.

"It aims to promote the drastic reduction of newly input resources, industrial wastes and environmental load by extending the lifecycle of drums, the heart of the imaging system, developers and other consumable parts to the very limit," Seki wrote. "And reducing the frequency of parts replacement to as great a degree as possible."

Kyocera mandates a policy of internal compliance with environmental standards, aggressive promotion of environmentally sound practices and policies, efficient use of energy and resources and cooperation with government environmental policies.

But Kyocera goes further than many companies, because it has committed to following requirements at least as stringent as international standards as well as a

program of ongoing research into improving products in line with environmental protection. What's more, it has committed to scientifically studying and assessing the environmental impact of all its business activities at all levels – not just the manufacture of its products – and taking action to reduce negative effects.

E-waste is a growing problem, but Kyocera has designed its products to reduce the need for landfill, recycling as much as possible. Kyocera's Machine Recycle program means none of its ECOSYS printers, copiers and MFDs need go to landfill. Kyocera will pick up a machine from a customer's site in the metropolitan area and 100 per cent recycle it.

"We're striving to do everything we can to make a clean product. More than 98 per cent [including packaging] can go to recycling. Our printer cartridges are one-tenth the weight in landfill of our competitors' products, at 200g," Finn said.

The vendor uses heat, abrasion and corrosion-resistant ceramics as a greener replacement for metal parts – such as fuel injectors and gas turbine components – where possible.

Its fifth-generation laser printers feature a positive contact roller charging system that has reduced ozone production – a problem with many printers and copiers. Ozone in the environment in large quantities can irritate the human respiratory system.

Kyocera complies with the European Union Restriction of Hazardous Substances (RoHS) directive that restricts the use of environmental toxins lead, mercury, hexavalent chromium, cadmium, polybrominated biphenyl (PBB) and polybrominated diphenyl ether (PBDE).

To overcome the problem of lead, Kyocera uses lead-free soldering but, to get over the higher heat needed, uses alternative components that don't melt at the usual low temperatures. All products sold in Europe must be RoHS-compliant.

It also uses Polylactic Acid (PLA) in some of its consumables. PLA is a biodegradable plastic made from plant sugars.

Finn noted that Kyocera in Australia, whose products are already all Energy Star-compliant, recently achieved ISO14001 certification, the international standard for environmental management systems. "Nobody else has got that," he claimed. Nobody else, that is, except for Kyocera Mita offices in other nations.

The vendor won't stop there, though. The plan is to go on researching improvements and incorporating those improvements to further reduce the Kyocera burden on the environment.

- FLEUR DOIDGE

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