8 Step Guide

To

Buying Your

Multifunction Printer

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COPY, PRINT, NETWORK & DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT

Beginning your assessment of needs.

One of the issues which organizations face when they look to acquire new print and copy capability for their office is deciding how big the new unit(s) should be. Unfortunately, there is no single right or wrong answer to this issue. There are some guidelines, however, which can be applied. By considering the following components you will be able to decide among the many choices available to you.

1. How much volume is anticipated to be printed, copied, faxed or scanned?

One guide is the actual anticipated print volume for the device. Do you print, (total of all images from printing, copying and faxing if these options are installed) 2000, 5000, 10000, 15000 or 20000 plus pages per month? Each of these ranges will dictate a different operating level of equipment.

2. How many functions will the device support?

In the past copy equipment only handled one basic function, copying. Today's multifunction equipment can handle many more functions including printing, faxing, and scanning. For many machines these other functions can represent 50 % or more of the equipment's monthly volume. In addition, with each addedl function, the potential for multifunction conflict can increase. It may be necessary to deploy a unit which is faster and more robust to clear the functions more quickly, making the unit available for subsequent work or to reduce the inter user conflict which can occur.

3. What are the typical characteristics of the documents being produced?

When a networked multifunction device produces a document, the print engine is dedicated to that particular job for the duration of the task. Some units can interleave jobs however this is usually at the expense of each job taking longer to be produced. If the typical output on your device is a large document in multiple sets, then you will need to consider a faster machine than if your typical document is a quick 2 or 3 page file.

4. How many users are going to interface with the device and what functions will they use?

Basically the rule of thumb is for more users, deploy a faster machine, especially if some of the above factors also apply. For a small office with 3 or 4 users then an 18 or 20 page per minute device may suffice. If there are 5 to 10 users you may need to consider a 23 to 27 page per minute device. If it is 10 to 20 users then commonly we recommend a 30, 35, 40 or 45 page per minute device, depending upon the types of documents produced. When walk up copying is used extensively, then a move up one category is considered, since copying tends to take more machine time than printing due to the scan time involved. When there are many users each trying to do a volume of copy work there will be more conflict for access than if they were printing to the device. This is because the users are left waiting at the device while someone else's job gets finished. When in print mode users generally do not go immediately to the device and

there is time for the jobs to clear.

5. Consider adding print only devices for some relief of network print conflicts.

Usually it has been more cost effective to deploy networked multifunction devices to handle the bulk of print and copy work. There are now low operating cost network printers that can often supplement the print needs of offices by diverting some of the work from the multifunction devices. Designing this kind of hybrid configuration takes a good understanding of the many device choices, their operating costs and the potential need for advanced finishing and collating capabilities. Your print advisor should be able to offer you good information including the projected running costs of any devices which are to be considered. For many offices a combined fleet of equipment running on a cost per printed page pricing model is one of the more efficient ways to ensure users get the output capability they need and still have a low overall cost of operation.

6. Is colour printing or copying a desired feature for your office?

Up until very recently colour printing was seen as a high cost capability usually restricted to only marketing or executive offices. With the many changes in technology on both the hardware and the software front it is now much more common to see colour capable laser quality equipment in general office settings.

What has made this possible?

Firstly with the advent of four in line colour print engines it is easier to produce colour equipment which can print as fast as monochrome devices. It is now possible to have printers or multifunction colour units that produce black and white or colour documents at up to 55 pages per minute. There are many choices in the general office speed ranges of 30 to 45 pages per minute.

Secondly the overall cost of colour devices has dropped significantly and it is possible to acquire a comparable speed colour device for a small capital premium over the price of an equivalent monochrome unit. When specials are factored in, it is possible that a fully configured colour capable unit could cost less than an equivalent speed monochrome.

Thirdly, it is now possible to buy colour capable units with all of the options which have been available on black and white devices. Fax capability, scanning, network systems support and advanced finishing features including booklet making can be provided on many devices. In addition colour units can provide choices in paper sizes and paper weights to meet most demands.

Finally the operating costs of colour printing have reduced substantially, making the use of in-house colour print production very effective and more affordable. Most multifunction and printer centric colour units can be configured to restrict the users who have access to the colour functions so that one of the major fears of deploying colour,

unfettered use, can be controlled.

7. Accessories can improve productivity.

One of the areas which is often overlooked is the addition of useful accessories which add to the productivity of users. Even many small desktop units can provide electronic collation or duplexing (ability to print on both sides of a page automatically) and these are useful features. Adding additional trays so a variety of paper sizes can be accessed easily is also beneficial. Bypass trays are used for special papers and labels…your device should offer this feature if you anticipate this need.

Finishers with stapling capability are a common addition on workgroup units. More advanced finishers offer multiple position stapling which can be selected by the users from the copy top or from their print driver. Three hole punching is now a common feature and provides efficient and worry free punching for building booklets. Large production equipment can even be purchased with inline coil binding capabilities.

More advanced finishers can offer booklet folding and centre stapling. These are especially useful on colour multifunction units and printers so you can create your own brochures or catalogues.

Having choices for output bins is a feature that often gets overlooked. With finishers usually a couple of output locations are provided. Some machines can have separator trays added and these are frequently used to separate out faxes from other output, but could be used in a variety of other ways. Some vendors offer physical mailbox units which permit network print jobs to be routed to a specific bin to reduce the conflict when large numbers of users or departments are printing to one device. Not all mailboxes work the same, so understanding how the device you are considering functions is important in determining what is best for you.

Discussing the types of printed output you use with your print consultant at the time of purchase can help you make the right choices of additional input and output options to maximize your productivity from the unit(s).

8. Are there other needs which the device should meet?

One of the areas of use for multifunction equipment that has rapidly found favour is network scanning. Many organizations are finding that while their copying has reduced in favour of printing, their need to be able to scan paper documents has increased substantially.

One must be careful in assessing the claims of vendors when considering scanning capability. Some vendors offer TWAIN scanning only as part of their basic scan package. (TWAIN scanning is the simplest form of scanning that requires the operator to go to the device and load the document on the feeder and then activate the scan

process from their computer using the TWAIN scan driver. In a network setting this can be a very difficult process to use and leads to conflict with other users.) This capability is okay for low volume use, with limited users but most offices find its restrictions problematic over time.

More advanced network scanning, where the user can direct images from the device to a folder or to their e-mail, is much easier to work with if any volume is to be undertaken. Even more advanced features including scan to e-mail (a function that is rapidly reducing the amount of fax being used) and scan processing are also available with some systems. Your vendor should be able to discuss how their scan capability could be integrated with your workflow to be able to make maximum use of the tool.

Consideration should be given to what you will do with the scanned images once you get them. A high speed multifunction scan unit (up to over 75 pages per minute double sided on some devices) can eat up a lot of paper and managing the resulting output becomes a whole new task. Integration with document processing engines and document management repositories can be a way to increase the value of the scan features on a multifunction but it takes knowledge on the part of your vendor to be able to correctly configure and recommend this kind of solution.

We have seen many locations where the scan features had not been optimized at the time of install and the users got little value out of the capability. On the other hand the scan feature can be used to route documents from branch locations to a head office, load records into and electronic document management system, feed e-mail distribution to replace long distance fax and many more productivity enhancing uses. Ensuring that your vendor understands the capabilities and benefits of the scan function is a critical part of your assessment of the vendor and their equipment. Sometimes it is necessary for the vendor to offer a choice of equipment just to match the scan functions to your needs…you should look for a vendor who can do this as not all systems are equal.

So with all this, what machine is right for me?

The answer to this question is as much art as it is science. Your vendor will give you some advice as to the appropriate levels, but it is important that you give honest consideration to all of the items above. There is value in right sizing the device…but more important is the configuration to provide the tools that you require in your operation. Today's multifunction devices offer substantially more than the copier of the past. Printers can vary substantially in operating cost from one vendor to another and often these costs are not disclosed.

How you use your new equipment can have significant impact on your office productivity. Sizing is dictated by more than raw volume. It is decided by the way you anticipate using the advanced features available. If in doubt, try to move up one category of device if the budget can support it.

Print device checklist.

Feature or Function	Your Requirements
Volume	
Low	☐
Medium	☐
High	☐
Functions	
Copy	☐
Print	☐
Fax	☐
Scan	☐
Type of Documents	
Small	☐
Larger	☐
Larger Complex	☐
Number and Type of Users	
1 to 5	☐
5 to 15	☐
More than 15	☐
Could Print Only Devices Work?	☐
Colour Printing?	☐
Copying needed?	☐
Volume of Colour	☐
Type of Document	☐
Paper Size	☐
Full Bleed Ledger?	☐
Paper Weight	☐
Finishing Needs	☐
Functions (see above)	☐
Type of scanning offered	
Links to other software	
Printing applications	☐
Scan functions	☐
Scanned Document Processing	☐
Links to Document Management Software	☐
Print Auditing Software	☐
Operating Cost Including Toner Cost	

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