

Multifunction Product Buyer's Guide



Top 8 issues, services and solutions characteristics to consider in assessing and choosing MFPs for Small & Medium Business owners.

01

Clearly define your requirements

02

Total Cost of Ownership and MFP cost / value benefits

03

Third party evaluations and real use situations

04

Seamless network integration

05

Ease of Use

06

Multitasking

07

Bi-directional Communications

08

Device Management, Remote intelligence, and Support

Clearly define your requirements

Understand what you intend the MFP to do for your end users and how adding MFPs to your mix will support business applications and provide value-add capabilities. Beyond printing and copying how do you want to use the MFP to help manage documents, reduce paper, simplify workflow, manage forms etc?

- How many copy, print, scan, fax and email jobs will the device be asked to run each day? Are there peak usage periods when jobs might conflict with one another?
- How many users will each device support?
- What is the total monthly volume of output?
- Do you need to offer, as well as control, both black-and-white and color printing?
- Do you need a range of workflow and routing solutions (scan to email, desktop, remote location, repositories) ?
- Do you need to combine and route documents in a variety of file formats and does the vendor support this solution?

Total Cost of Ownership and MFP cost/value benefits

MFPs are useful assets to help manage and control costs for printing and imaging, and also add new capabilities to your organization. Consider how MFPs can address total cost of ownership for printing and imaging assets, better consolidation and management of resources across the organization, and improve business process efficiency.

- Does the vendor provide fact-based tools and methods to help you assess current TCO and estimate return on investments?

- Do different product models perform the same functions the same way across the product family?
- How well does it reduce time and resources for document production and distribution?
- Is the product priced competitively with comparable stand-alone devices?
- Are supply costs competitive?
- How much space savings does it provide through compact design?

Third party evaluations and real use situations

Evaluate the data on spec sheets and compare actual performance, and management and support issues using reports from independent testing agencies. Be sure to also test and validate performance with your own applications and network environment.

- How efficient is network printing of basic jobs vs. rated engine speed?
- Does the device optimize scanning file compressions to reduce network traffic?
- Can the product handle heavyweight papers?
- Are the print drivers WHQL-certified and based on the Microsoft printer platform, using the Microsoft Driver Developer Kit? Are the drivers standard with the Microsoft operating system software?
- Is the standard base printer memory at least 128MB, with room for optional memory?
- Is the device capable of print quality at 600 x 600 dpi or higher?

Seamless network integration

Consider how easy the system is to plug into an existing network, and whether it is easy to deploy and will provide immediate benefits with little start-up training.

- Does the vendor provide web based software that configures, manages, monitors and reports on printing devices throughout the enterprise?
- Are the print drivers for all devices provided and installed from a common CD with always the most current drivers downloadable from the web?
- Will it play well with current desktop applications, standards, and document repositories in place?
- Does the scanner emit industry standard file formats, such as PDF (including searchable PDF), TIFF, and JPEG?
- Can users scan documents to their PC for immediate viewing and/or repurposing?
- Can the MFP create text-searchable PDF files, providing greater access to documents archived in shared file folders or EDMS applications?

Ease of Use

Ease of use for end users means less calls to the help desk, and fewer IT resources for training and problem management. Usability should be paramount, and without compromise.

- Are the product user interfaces intuitive?
- Are the software application user interfaces intuitive?
- How much training is required for a user to become functional?

MFP buyer's guide

- How has the product been designed to accommodate jams? Is the paper path short and efficient? How many touch points are there? How many jam access reach areas are there? Touch points are any lever or pull knob the user must actuate to clear a jam. The number of touch points is one determinant in the user's success in clearing a jam — the fewer, the better as an indicator of paper path design. An access reach area is where a user must reach inside the machine to pull out a jammed sheet. Again, the fewer, the better.
- Are online help and documentation available and easy to use?
- Does the product work the same way whether you're copying, printing, scanning or faxing?
- Does the vendor provide custom print drivers (same look) for both PCL® and PostScript®?

Multitasking

Take a close look at the system's ability to truly multifunction efficiently and concurrently for each of the services (print, copy, scan, fax) and assess real performance and productivity in actual use situations.

- Does the product let you copy, print and get machine status from the Web?
- Does the product allow for virtually unlimited job program and scan-ahead capability, without performance degradation? This feature improves workgroup productivity, allowing users to stage jobs in a queue.

Bi-directional Communications

A failure to communicate timely and accurate information to users and IT administrators on the status of jobs, queues, and devices will result in more intervention by IT staff to solve, prevent or anticipate problems. Solid bi-directional communications both at the device, and across the network is essential.

- Does it provide job and device status from the desktop?
- Does it provide sufficient information, tools, and controls to anticipate problems, reduce machine downtime, minimize user frustration?

Device Management, Remote intelligence, and Support

Consider carefully the vendor's commitment to provide robust device and fleet management tools and utilities. And, look for device relationship management software and intelligent monitoring that optimizes the device's availability and uptime.

- Can you easily integrate the MFP with your existing network and print management tools?
- Does the vendor provide a set of robust Web management tools and reporting systems?
- Do the vendor's device management tools provide robust support for competitive equipment, as well as their own?
- Does the system provide remote diagnostics and remote service and ordering supplies before they fail?
- Does the vendor provide consistent quality of service?

