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DECIDING WHAT YOU WANT FROM YOUR COPIER

Machines are usually changed every 4 to 5 years. Technology advances rapidly, so the capabilities of new machines may not be as familiar to you as your existing machine. This guide is intended to give you some pointers to help in your decision.

1 WHEN TO CHANGE

The Finance and Lease Association recommends the maximum period a copier should be kept is 5 years. It is possible to keep them on for longer, but consider the cost, reliability, whether support and spares will continue to be available and whether it continues to meet all your needs.

1.1 Cost Considerations

- What is the current operating cost? (copy charge and lease/rental)
- Is it cheaper to keep you old machine going or invest in a new one?
- Is there any charge or outstanding finance to be paid if you terminate your old contract early?
- If a new machine is more expensive are the extra features or benefits worth it?
- Would a new machine be more flexible (networked as a printer, fax, scanner) and save costs elsewhere?

1.2 Reliability

- What is the age of the current machine - if approaching 5 years will the copy charge cost increase?
- Is it starting to become unreliable and need for constant calls by an engineer?
- How many copies has it done? The greater the copy volume, the more the parts are likely to have worn.

1.3 Technology

- Digital copiers can also act as multi-function devices that scan, print, copy and fax.
- Consider installing a networked photocopier that doubles as a printer together with advantages including finishing and stapling units and double sided printing.
- Consider whether operational costs are cheaper for a networked photocopier/printer rather than a traditional printer?

2 FEATURES

2.1 Benefits of Digital Machines

The main benefit, apart from the ability to connect to a network, is the "scan once/print many" operation. A digital copier scans in originals and stores the digitised image in memory. It then reproduces copies, one set at a time. The copied sets are stacked, set-by-set, in the finishing (sorting) unit. This allows long, non-stop runs of multi-page sets to be made, as there is no limit on bin capacity. Once scanned, originals are no longer required. From the stored image, a digital copier can reproduce any number of sets and collate them electronically. This removes the need for a sorter as the copied sets are deposited, one set at a time, in the output tray. Where multiple sets are required, a digital copier generally uses an offset stacking technique to separate the collated documents that can also be stapled automatically as they emerge from the machine.

Some other benefits of digital copiers are

- the ability to electronically send originals over a network results in copies (prints) being first generation outputs rather than second generation scanned images;
- a reduced level of noise because once originals have been scanned the copying/printing phase is generally quieter.

2.2 Multi-Function Devices

Multi-function devices can act as copiers, printers, scanners and fax machines.

Advantages

The main advantage is that it is able to replace a copier, fax, scanner and printer. This may be of benefit where space is an issue. A second benefit is obviously cost. Rolling all functions into one machine has the potential to lower capital cost. In addition, the copy charge rate and overall operating cost of a multi-function device compared to operating costs for printers and fax machines, may represent a considerable saving. Multi-function devices are best suited for small office environments where there are a relatively small number of users and there is less chance of conflict in the operating mode at any particular time.

Disadvantages

One drawback is the conflict of uses, particularly if installed in a large office with a large number of users. If the device is used as a printer and copier then, use as a copier can be delayed if producing a large print run. Similarly, if you want to send a fax, you might be frustrated if it is being used as a copier. Modern fax machines are relatively cheap and it may be an advantage to have a stand-alone fax in a large office environment. This can also minimise the risk of losing important incoming documents if the device is out of service because of a paper jam or other problem. Whereas you can re-send a print job, you might not know if an incoming fax has been lost. Multi-function devices also come with scanning features but desktop scanners are relatively cheap devices and a stand-alone unit might be worthwhile. Irrespective, to be fully useful, scanners should come with OCR (Optical Character Recognition) software in order to convert graphics to text. Not all multi-function devices come with OCR software and may have to be purchased separately.

2.3 Copier Features

Selecting the most appropriate features is one of the more difficult tasks and the final choice may be a subjective personal preference. If you don't initially order a feature, it is usually possible to add it later if needed.

Consider such requirements / features as;

Hole Punching: Some copiers do automatic hole punching that can save a lot of time.

Scanning Facility: Not all copiers can scan to a file but is it a feature you really will use very often? If it comes with the machine of your choice, then fine, but if not it might be more economical to buy a low priced desktop scanner.

Reduction/Enlargement: What range of reduction/enlargement can it handle? Does it meet your needs of at least copying your largest originals down to A4?

Platen/Document Feeder Capacity and Size: Can the copier handle your largest original document? What is the capacity of the document feeder - can it handle the original documents that you typically copy?

PIN Access and Secure Printing: Some machines have PIN number access that provide control over access and give basic data on usage for cost recovery purposes. Networked digital copiers usually have a "secure print" option that allows confidential files to be sent to the copier but not printed until the sender releases this with a code at the copier.

2.4 Output Features - Finishing or Automatic Stapling

A finisher collates output copies by offset stacking the sets. This is sometimes called "electronic sorting or stacking" where alternate sets are separated by laterally shifting them by about 1 centimetre in the output tray. If the sets are to be stapled then the finisher does this as each set exits the finisher and eliminates the need for separating sets by offsetting. Further, most finishers offer a range of stapling options and positions, including centre "saddle stitching" for centre folded booklets.

Some finishers offer the option of multiple output bins which are used to separate jobs that may have been printed across a network from different users. Network software usually permits selection of the output bin, if multiple bins are available. More sophisticated finishers allow insertion of pre-printed, cardboard covers. These covers can be relatively thick, as they do not pass through the copier's fusing rollers. Such features therefore facilitate the production of high quality publications that may have previously been sent out to a commercial printer.

Selecting the most appropriate output device will come down to a few questions -

- First determine if a finisher is needed at all. Most digital machines have finishers as an option and can effectively separate/collate copies by using electronic stacking as they leave the output unit. If this is sufficient it can save money.
- If you require the output features of a finisher unit it is also worth adding the stapling unit as this can save a great deal of time for minimal extra cost.
- If considering a more sophisticated finishing unit that delivers saddle stitching, multiple output bins etc. you need to know that these features will be regularly used. The extra cost should be weighed against the option of sending the occasional "publishing" type job out to a professional printer or print services unit.

2.5 Connecting to a Network

Most digital copiers have the ability to be connected, via an interface card or unit, to a network. It is beyond the scope of this guide (and most users) to cover all technical aspects of network connectivity so it is essential that you seek IT if considering a networked device. When selecting a digital copier you may not initially consider, or want to go to the expense of, interfacing it to a network. However, it is a good policy to ensure there is an option to add this later.

3 MACHINE SIZE AND SPEED

3.1 Calculating Your Monthly Copy Volume

When endeavouring to select the "right" sized machine for your organisation it is helpful to know the current monthly copy volume of copies done on your present copier. This can best be acquired by reviewing your copy records for the past 12 months and working out a monthly average. If you do not keep regular records then this information may be obtained by reviewing recent invoices. These invoices generally cover a copy charge and therefore indicate the number of copies done in the billing period. You will probably need to average these over a 6 or 12 month period to get a reasonably accurate monthly figure.

3.2 Recommended Copy Volumes

Faster may not mean more heavy-duty. There is often a misleading notion that the "faster the machine the stronger the machine" portraying that the faster machines can handle a bigger monthly volume. Whereas, this is generally true, some manufacturers produce exactly the same machine for their mid-volume range (e.g. 30-35 cpm) as they do for their higher volume range (e.g. 40-45 cpm). They just speed up the machine to match the perceived need of the market. Conversely, some mid-range copiers are slowed down versions of the higher speed models and therefore can represent a very robust option and a good buy.

One final factor worthy of consideration when choosing a machine speed is that copier engineers often report that machines which are run more heavily tend to be more reliable and average more copies between service. In other words, it might be good practice to keep a good mid-volume copier running at close to its optimum volume rather than nursing a more expensive and faster machine.

3.3 Speed Issues

Whereas your current monthly volume is the best indicator to the size of machine required, there are some good reasons why you may wish to consider a slower copier than your present machine.

- Despite the advantages offered by digital machines that can be set up as networked printers, there has been a general shift in work from copiers to printers as staff tend to run off multiple copies of documents on their "local" printer resulting in lower photocopying numbers. Consequently, a slightly lower capacity machine may suit your future needs. (Conversely, if you are contemplating setting up a networked copier, in order to drive a change away from the more costly outputting to a printer, then you may have to estimate a potential increase in copier volume).
- The growing access to the Internet as a delivery medium in lieu of printed page has generally had an effect on lowering photocopier volumes over the past few years. This trend is certain to continue.
- The increased productivity of today's copiers compared to their predecessors. The "scan once - print many" feature of a digital copier results in effectively greater throughput and productivity on long runs. Further enhancements have reduced or eliminated the loss of speed when doing double sided copying. Larger paper bins, automatic stapling and endless stacking have also contributed to greater productivity. This increase in productivity could mean that a slightly slower machine than your current machine may well meet your future needs.
- Features that were only once available in the high volume copier range are now readily available in the lower end machines. As a consequence, you do not have to unnecessarily oversize in order to deliver the required functionality.

- With the above factors in mind, you could consider a reduction of about 5 to 10 copies per minute in copier speed. The savings may be attractive.

Selecting the Right Speed Machine

The following table has been compiled from generalised data and may not strictly apply to your circumstance, but it does give a reasonable indication of a machine's capacity given a regular usage pattern. If you have peaks and troughs in your usage (i.e. 25,000 copies per month of which 20,000 is run in that last week) then you will probably want to ensure the machine can cope with the heavy load in the last week and go up a notch in speed.

Copier Range	Average Monthly Volume (copies/month)	Recommended Speed Range (ppm)	Comments
Low	less than 8,000	up to 20 ppm	Very low speed copiers/multifunction devices are only suitable as desktop machines doing a few hundred copies per month
Mid	8,000 - 10,000	20 - 25 ppm	Most copiers in this range come with advanced options such as document feeders, sorters, finishers etc.
Mid	10,000 - 20,000	25 - 35 ppm	Consider 40 ppm if speed is a priority
Mid	20,000 - 30,000	35 - 45 ppm	Some suppliers promote a 50 -60 ppm machine for this range but this isn't really necessary
Mid	30,000 - 40,000	45 - 49 ppm	Upper mid-volume territory. Consider 50-60 ppm if speed is a priority
High		50 - 60 ppm	If on a tight budget or speed is not a priority, then consider a 45 - 49 ppm
High	40,000 - 75,000	50 - 90 ppm	The 50-60 ppm can go higher than 40,000 copies per month. However, speed will be the determining factor.
High	75,000 - 100,000	75 - 100 ppm	This volume is in the high volume usage range. Analyse all the features carefully.

3.4 First Copy Time

Most manufacturers list the time to produce the first copy in their standard specification. This is the time it takes for the first copy to appear in the output tray or sorter. First copy time can vary markedly between machines. When comparing seemingly equivalent machines from a number of manufacturers the first copy speed may be a differentiating factor that should be considered. Users will become frustrated if it takes too long to just copy a single page.

3.5 Warm-Up Time

Although it should not be weighted too highly when comparing specifications of copiers, it may be useful to consider the warm-up times listed by the manufacturer. This is the time it takes for the machine being in a ready state to produce a copy after first turning on the power. There are differences between makes and models. Most machines have some form of energy saving mode that automatically shuts down the copier if left idle for a set period, which will save on your energy bills. The warm-up time from this mode may also be of importance.

3.6 Paper Capacity

Most modern copiers have a number of paper feed trays to accommodate different sized paper (say A4 and A3) or to deliver various colour sheets. Further, most copiers now tend to have at least one large capacity bin, that takes upwards of 1000 to 5000 sheets, and an A4R tray to cover reduction of A3 originals to A4 copies. There is no definitive formula for determining the optimum paper capacity of a copier. However, to determine the capacity of the largest paper tray or bin (i.e. the one that delivers paper for the most common copying task - usually A4 size) then it is reasonable to apply the following rule of thumb.

(NB. this estimate assumes single sided copying)

1. From the average monthly volume, determine the typical daily volume by dividing the monthly total by 20 (assumes average of 20 working days per month).
2. Assuming that there will be peaks and troughs in demand, and that you will not want to have someone check and refill the copier more than once daily, then multiply the daily average figure by 1.5 in order to provide a reasonable buffer.
3. Round the number up to the nearest multiple of 500 pages (one ream) to a maximum of 5000 sheets.
4. The calculated figure gives you a good estimate of the minimum capacity of the main bin or tray.
5. If the machine you are contemplating does not have a large capacity feed unit to match the calculated capacity it is a fair bet that the machine is not fast / large enough for your needs.
6. Do not worry if you can not exactly match a paper feed unit with your calculation but use this as a guide to what you do require. If it within a $\pm 25\%$ range then it will probably suffice - but if it is smaller you may just have to fill it more often.
7. If the calculation in 3 above exceeds 5000 sheets then you are doing some serious copying and will undoubtedly want an operator to be on hand to recharge the LCT regularly. Most copiers are limited in A4 capacity to about 5000 sheets.

Examples

A). Average monthly volume = 30,000 copies
Capacity = $(30,000/20) \times 1.5$
= 2,250
Round up to 2500 sheets

B). Average monthly volume = 10,000 copies
Capacity = $(10,000/20) \times 1.5$
= 750
Round up to 1000 sheets

4 COSTS

4.1 Total Cost of Ownership (TCO)

When planning for a replacement copier it is advisable to do a few calculations that will give an indication of the Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) of the machine over the planned life cycle and to translate this to an effective net cost per copy.

Such calculations will enable you to:

- compare the cost of operating your existing copier against the anticipated cost of the new machine;
- will provide a means of comparing machines on offers from suppliers;
- give an indication as to the suitability, in economic terms, of the chosen copier for your organisation;
- determine the relative cost of different financing options (i.e. purchase, lease, rent or "click charge" copy plan).

4.2 Elements of the Total Cost

There are two major components that contribute to the cost of owning and operating a photocopier, Capital Component + Copy Charge.

Capital Component

This can either be

- The purchase price of the copier plus options;
- The rental cost, spread over the full rental term;
- The leasing cost, spread over the lease term.

Purchase

It is advisable to spread this over the anticipated or planned "life cycle" of the copier. Generally this will be three to five years. A good rule is to plan for four years.

Rent or Lease

For leased or rented copiers, there is a financing component to be considered that involves interest rate factors and allowances for the residual value of the copier at the end of the rental/lease period.

Rental options generally require you to sign up for a fixed period. For a shorter period (say 3 years) the residual value, generally expressed as a percentage of the purchase price, is higher and the total repayments over the full term may be less than the full purchase price. This is because the supplier can generally refurbish and then re-market the copier and extend their return on the asset. For longer rental terms (say 5 years) the residual is generally very low as the machine is probably close to its useful life. As a consequence, the total repayments over the term would normally exceed the purchase price when taking into account interest rates.

Leasing is slightly different to rental in that the customer is generally required to pay out the residual value and assume ownership of the photocopier at the end of term.

Copy Charge Component (maintenance)

Most photocopier suppliers charge a copy charge rate (pence per copy) that is applied against each copy done on the machine. This usually covers the cost of toner, parts, drums and general preventative maintenance. The copy charge is generally billed separately by invoices raised against periodic meter readings.

NB. The copy charge does not include the cost of paper.

4.3 Copy Plan Agreements (click charge)

Some photocopier suppliers offer an alternative method of financing the cost of owning and operating a copier. This is by establishing a Copy Plan Agreement (commonly called a "click charge"). The mechanism for establishing a Copy Plan Agreement is relatively simple. The supplier effectively adds

- the total cost of renting the capital component of the copier, over the full term,
- and the copy charge for to the total number of copies contracted to be run over the full term.

The supplier then divides the sum of these two components by the total number of copies to arrive at a net cost per copy (click charge rate).

The crucial factor in determining the click charge is the total number of copies.

4.4 What is a Reasonable Cost?

The best benchmark that can be established to compare photocopier operating costs is the net cost per copy. This is the effective cost per copy when spreading the total number of copies to be run over the full term or life of a machine (i.e. capital + copy charge).

The net cost per copy will depend on a number of factors including:

- The correct matching of copy volume to speed (size) of machine.
- Whether the photocopier is to be networked and includes all connectivity costs.
- What features are included on the copier (paper bins, stapling unit etc.).
- The planned life cycle of the copier (i.e. the longer you run it to amortise the capital component cost, the cheaper the net cost per copy). It is advised that you plan for a 4 or 5 year term.

To a large extent, it is hard to generalise about certain makes or models being intrinsically cheaper or more expensive than other models. You have to look at each bid from the supplier and determine the true TCO yourself.

5 BUY, RENT OR LEASE

In terms of net cost per copy, over a typical 4 or 5 year term, the best option is generally to buy the photocopier and pay a standard copy charge to cover maintenance, toner costs and servicing. This does not take into account other factors that might be relevant to your own circumstances.

It may not always be possible to raise funds necessary to purchase a machine outright and therefore a rental or lease plan provides a viable alternative. You may have a situation where you need to use a machine over a shorter period, say two years. Under this circumstance, it could be difficult to economically cover the purchase price across only two years of copies.

If considering a rental or lease plan, you should still do the comparative cost to determine the net cost per copy but you should be aware of the liabilities that come with such financing schemes. There are a number of financing options that can be used to cover the acquisition of photocopiers. These are:

1. Rental agreement
2. Finance Lease
3. Operating Lease
4. Copy Plan (click charge) agreement

5.1 Rental Agreement

On the day that you enter into a rental agreement the photocopier company receives a payment from a financing company covering the full cost of goods - from then on, you are dealing with a finance company. You should be aware, when you enter into a rental agreement, that:

- you commit to an agreement for a fixed period (typically 3 to 5 years);
- there may be penalties for early termination;
- the rental payments will be due in advance and are usually due quarterly;
- there is usually an additional copy charge applied to cover the cost of toner, maintenance and servicing (unless it is a "click charge" agreement);
- rental charges cover the capital component and are generally fixed at a set rate for the full period of the agreement - this does not apply to the copy charge component;
- the onus is often on the customer to inform the supplier, at the end of term, to remove the copier - otherwise they could roll-over automatically, committing you to additional rental;
- unlike finance lease schemes, there is no residual value placed on the copier and you cannot pay out any residual and take ownership at the end of term.

5.2 Finance Lease

The principles of a finance lease are:

- they are similar to rental agreements except that there is a fixed residual amount factored into the financing schedule;
- the quarterly rates will depend on the term of lease and the residual value;
- the higher a residual value, the lower the rates for a fixed term. A low residual will attract higher rates but a lower payout factor;
- the customer is required to "buy out" the residual at the end of the lease term and assume ownership of the copier;
- lease charges cover the capital component only and are generally fixed at a set rate for the full period of the agreement - this does not apply to the copy charge component.

Finance Lease or Rental Agreement?

In determining whether to enter into a rental or lease agreement, you will need to consider whether you want the burden of owning a relatively old machine at the end of the financing term or have the option to changeover to a new machine. Rental assumes that you will changeover the machine whereas leasing passes ownership to you. Therefore, for short terms, leasing is probably better whilst for five year terms it is advisable to rent and changeover to a new machine at the end.

5.3 Operating Lease

An operating lease differs from a finance lease. Although there is a residual value (%) of the purchase price that is applied to the lease, there is no requirement for the customer to purchase the goods at the end of the lease period.

N.B. West Mercia Supplies offers outright purchase or operating leases over 3 or 5 years.

5.4 Copy Plan Agreements (Click Charge)

An alternative method of financing the cost of owning and operating a copier is a Copy Plan Agreement (commonly called a "click charge"). The mechanism for establishing a Copy Plan Agreement is relatively simple. The supplier adds -

- the total cost of renting the capital component of the copier, over the full term, and
- the copy charge applied to the total number of copies to be run over the term.

They then divide the sum of these two components by the total number of copies to arrive at a net cost per copy (click charge rate).

The crucial factor in determining the click charge is the total number of copies.

This requires the establishment of a reasonably accurate monthly copy volume which is often an uncertain factor. The supplier must establish the target volume in order to spread the capital component of the click charge over each copy. If you fall short of anticipated volumes then they will not recover the capital cost of the machine. As a consequence, Copy Plan agreements commit you to a required volume and, consequently, can be a trap. More importantly, some agreements lock you into a minimum monthly volume and if you don't reach the figure then you pay for them anyway, so be cautious. Of further consideration, often in copy plans the agreement permits a supplier to periodically increase the rate to cover inflation. Unfortunately, this increase is often (and incorrectly) applied to the capital component of the click charge that is generally financed separately. Basically, this unfair as the finance will be at fixed rates and should be thoroughly investigated before signing any such agreement.

Warning:

Always consider the purchase (or rent / lease) plus copy charge option as the most cost effective method and investigate thoroughly the alternatives before locking yourself into a click charge agreement. Copy Plan agreements can be an advantage if your plan allows additional copies each month to be effectively deducted from the total committed copies and therefore enable you to reach the target volume more quickly. However, if you do not reach the normal copy volume rate then it can have serious consequences on the overall financing of the copier.

6 SERVICING

6.1 Copy Charges

Whether you buy, rent or lease, including a copy plan (click charge) agreement, it is usual that part of the charge covers servicing, generally referred to as the copy charge. The copy charge is normally billed separately, usually quarterly.

6.2 What the Copy Charge Covers

The copy charge covers reasonable action and components necessary to keep the copier in working order and producing good quality copies, typically including -

- replacement toner;
- replacement drum;
- other components subject to wear;
- regular, preventative maintenance servicing;
- breakdown servicing as required;
- training (as required).

6.3 What the Copy Charge Does Not Cover

The copy charge does not typically cover -

- the cost of paper or staples;
- damage caused by malicious intent or rough handling

6.4 Advantages of a Copy Charge Arrangement

A copy charge arrangement is the most economical servicing arrangement as it covers all standard parts and service at a fixed rate. It covers the cost of replacement toner irrespective of rate of usage dependent on the degree of "blackness" on a page. Toner usage is normally based on 6% coverage on a page but even if you use more by copying lots of black sections or photographs, the copy charge covers extra toner required because the supplier has an obligation to keep it topped up. The copy charge is usually fixed for a period enabling reasonably accurate prediction of operating cost, given regular known copy volumes.

6.5 Disadvantages of a Copy Charge Arrangement

The only issue to be aware of is the right of the supplier to increase the charge during the term of agreement. For a properly sized copier, where the copy speed matches the copy, the copy charge component is typically 60% of the total cost of ownership (TCO). Any significant variation in copy charge rate can therefore significantly affect the TCO. If a supplier offers a considerably low copy charge in order to close a deal, be sure to get a written agreement as to what period the charge is fixed for and to what extent the charge can be increased after that period.

It is normal within the industry for copy cost charges to be reasonably stable for a five year period. Beyond that time, as parts become worn, the cost of maintenance increases and suppliers usually increase copy charges beyond the typical guarantee period of five years. This is a strong incentive to consider ownership for a period of no more than five years.

6.6 Response Times

West Mercia Supplies suppliers are contracted to provide a maximum of eight hours response time to service a copier. This means that the engineer should be on-site, servicing the machine within eight hours of you placing a request for service call. In some instances, the operator taking the call will attempt to assist you over the phone to ascertain if it is a simple problem or due to operator error.



6.7 What to do if you are not getting satisfactory service

Assuming you are paying a copy charge for your photocopier's servicing it is your right and the supplier's obligation to have the machine operating satisfactorily at all times and, importantly, producing high quality copies. If you are not satisfied with the service you are getting or the quality of copies on your machine then insist that the matter be escalated to the Service Manager. If you are still not satisfied then you should inform West Mercia Supplies who will take up the matter on your behalf.