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CSA and media storage is a fast moving sector where products keep changing and evolving. So much so that we're even beginning to see technologies converging. We find out what you need to know when selling accessories and storage.

BY KNEEZ BUKHARI

“I think there is a world market – for maybe five computers.”

Thomas Watson Senior, chairman of IBM, 1943.

HOW THINGS CHANGE

Thomas Watson would have, no doubt, been quite surprised to know just how the market for computers and accessories would take off. The market now encompasses a huge variety of products, from printers to palm pilots to plug-n-play flash devices. And, not only is the market constantly updating and evolving, but we are now starting to see technologies, in a bid to become quicker and more efficient for our time-starved populace, converge with one another to form new and exciting hybrids!

Already, multi-function devices (MFDs) that combine printing with other functions such as faxing, emailing and scanning are becoming more

common and more cost-effective. Why are they so popular? Because they save space, among other reasons, one of those rare commodities that SMEs need to take into account. And what this gives you is the opportunity to sell. Anything that, ultimately, saves a company time, space and money, will be of huge benefit to them. And like any good fashion guru knows, you must accessorize, accessorize, accessorize. This means paper for printing, copying and faxing, printer cartridges with which to do the printing copying and faxing, storage files for all the printing, copying... you get the picture. The good old staples of the office environment.

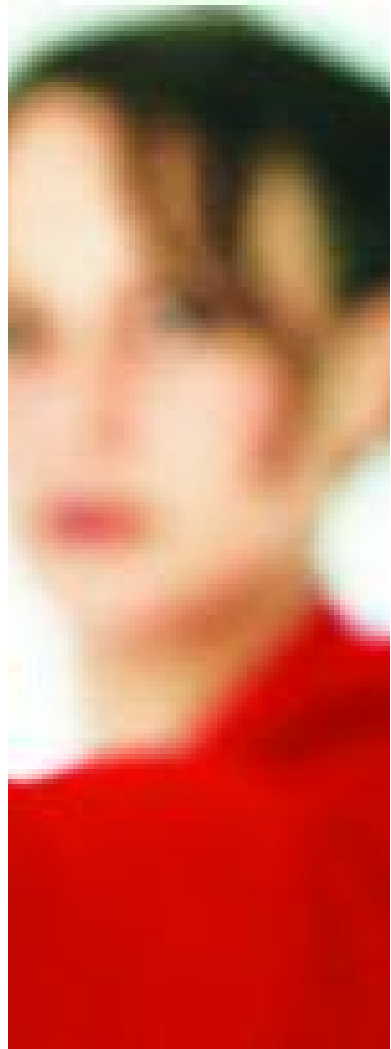
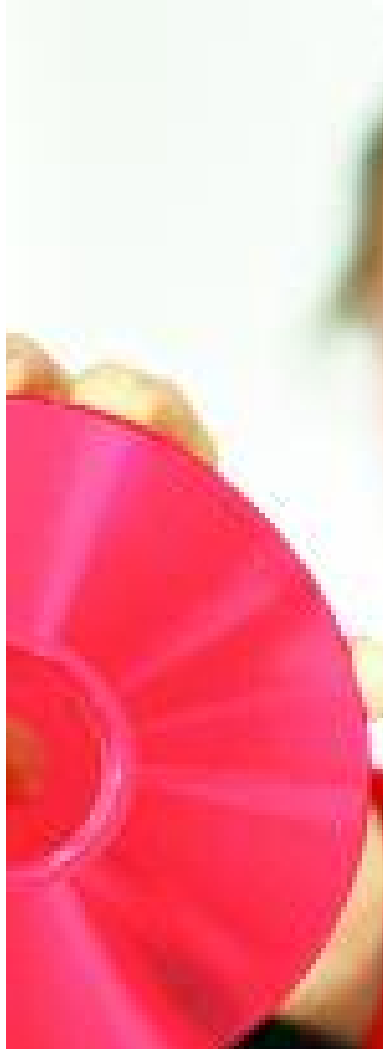
What you do need to bear in mind however, is that the spawn of computer convergence, while usually smaller, shinier and far more efficient than their predecessors, usually also require a veritable menagerie of add-ons or -ins.

For one thing, all the extra space available for information requires a means of transferring and storing the data safely and securely. Then there's the physical act of connecting a single user to a printer, or networking an entire office. Not to mention the vast amount of accessories available depending on the intended use of a computer: computer programmes, cables, USB flashdrives, DVDs, CDRs, jewel cases, flatbed scanners, webcams, discs, disc storage systems, disc labels, disc label makers, products with which to clean your discs, the list is simply endless.

The outcome of all this evolving technology and its resulting paraphernalia is that users are continually relying on resellers to tell them what they need. So, do you know what they need?

The truth is, there isn't a one-size-fits-all solution for those wanting to buy csa and media storage. It all depends on what they intend to use





the equipment for. And sometimes, Mr. X may not know what equipment he needs, just the results that he wants. But if you know what you're talking about, you won't sell Mr. X a product, you'll find out what his problems are, and sell him the answer.

For example, complex and unique storage problems require capable storage systems, and the pickings are by no means slim. Just as computer usage has developed, so our requirements for saving and transferring the data we amass are changing, too. But choosing where to put the, often large, data files can be tricky. Find out what your buyer needs storage for. Are they just after a way to save some digital pictures? Or, are they looking to manage their overall information flow? Will they need a box of discs, a USB flashdrive, or a wireless local area network?

Storage space is something you need to familiarize yourself with; due to the advent of video and high-resolution photography moving from analogue into digital, the number of applications demanding higher capacities has grown. But if you don't know your megs from your gigs, don't worry, many companies are offering you their expertise in the techie field.

Semar Majid, technical marketing manager at Imation (UK), says, "Saving storage space regarding actual storage capacities and ergonomically has become a strong focus of most businesses these days. Businesses are having to pay a price for cost-per-gigabyte and therefore

the most economical storage solution is going to win." Imation has recently launched the Imation Disc Stakka, which holds up to one hundred 12cm discs and can be linked to a PC or Mac computer via a single USB connection supplying both power and data, and enables even the smallest of businesses to access nearly one terabyte (1000 gigabytes) of storage.



Another storage device you should be aware of is the USB flashdrive. This is plug-n-play convenience at its best. This lighter sized gadget simply plugs into the back of your hard drive to transfer up to two gigabytes of information anywhere you want. And a four gig flashdrive is shortly to be released, which will make moving all that valuable data around even easier!

Other selling opportunities include printing accessories. If a company has just invested in a new printer, they will want to know the best way to make optimum use of the product. Let them know which accessories you can supply to complement the purchase. For example, Sigel's 3C technology for business cards, which allows companies to print their own professional business cards on a sheet of card like regular printer labels, getting rid of the need to outsource to a professional printing company.

And don't forget to mention after-care. New technology also requires the products with which to take care of it. Liz Finlay, sales and marketing director at AF, says, "With the introduction of Chip-and-PIN in the UK AF Cardclene should become part of retailers' regular cleaning routine to ensure the efficient functioning of their Chip-and-PIN card technology."

So, when selling information management, find out what your customer needs and sell him or her an entire solution, and don't forget the add-ons! ■