



ALL SYSTEMS ARE GO!

As more people take to printing in offices, their consumables bill is going up too, along with your profits.

BY JANE SMITH

While companies try to combat price pressures by keeping a tight reign on their costs, employees just can't resist the print button, which means that the market for consumables is just growing and growing but at the same time there is a willingness to trial alternative products that just wasn't there in the past.

This, and the perception that OEM (branded cartridge) prices are high, means that alternative manufacturers can now capitalise on this new open-minded approach to trial. They and you in turn can provide savings to the customer of up to 30% and still retain a healthy margin.

Alternative manufacturers – those making compatible

products – are growing by more than 25% year-on-year and that trend is set to continue. But this steady increase is not just for price reasons alone, it's also to do with brand awareness, quality and confidence.

MINORITY REPORT

For many years the quality of compatible product was called

into question by a minority of players who thankfully have now all but disappeared. What remains today is a group of quality manufacturers and suppliers who pride themselves in delivering quality product at value for money prices.

Their marketing activity and the activities of everyone in the 'alternative' sector has also

contributed to building awareness and credibility. It's human nature. If you're going to try something new you'd rather do so using a brand name that you know. Once consumers try the product, they realise that the product performs just as well as the original and so they continue to buy. All these factors combined have led to a greater willingness to trial. And this has to be an opportunity for you.

BIG YIELDS

All the leading players understand the importance of product trial and service support to their resellers and in turn their customers. They can offer great support in converting your customers to their products by offering visits to factories and sharing quality and yield facts and figures. They are also happy to work with you to supply trial products to run testing within the customers premises. As trade partners the name of the game is to win the business between you so call on them for support, they all really do value that contact and relationship. They also want to train you. Why not invite them into a sales meeting and let them build your knowledge of this important and fast moving product group?

Another 'hot topic' currently is performance (or page yield). This too is helping the alternative manufacturer's argument. The Office of Fair Trading has been looking at this area and is recommending that a test standard be developed against which the performance of inkjet cartridges can be measured uniformly and made available to retailers and consumers at the point of sale. Together with pricing differentials this would certainly play into the hands of alternative product manufacturers.

European Directives such as the WEEE will follow shortly too, which encourage recycling and will make it more difficult for OEMs to prevent products being recycled by companies other than the original manufacturer.

So, as transparency of price versus performance starts to emerge and the

playing field is levelled even further alternative product sales are set to continue to grow and erode the market share enjoyed by the OEMs.

But remember, the market is growing at such a phenomenal rate that it's big enough for everyone. Time to get involved? ■

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