

HOW COMPATIBLE ARE YOU?

Well-matched, like-minded and well-suited: you're compatible!

BY JANE SMITH

The same page yield? Really? Looking at the quality and performance you can now expect from compatible laser and inkjet cartridges. And boy did we find out what a minefield the area of page yield still is!

All 'compatible' manufacturers have confirmed that confidence is growing and acceptability levels are increasing. Market conditions certainly look right for marked growth in compatibles sales and the experts believe this new interest is down to a number of factors not least of which is that you really can now expect the same quality and performance that you'd expect from an OEM cartridge at a lower price. But how?

As the 'under dog' of the past compatible brands have had to go the extra mile to convince the consumer that their product really does represent a value for money alternative.

We spoke to a number of key players including Kores, IT Image

and Q Imaging to get their perspective on where the industry stands with regard to 'comparing apples with apples'. What we found out was that the 'aftermarket' for consumables generally is highly competitive, confusing to the end user and ruthless.

Well toned

IT Image for example has been re-manufacturing toner cartridges since 1991 when good quality aftermarket components were hard to get hold of. Eve Mowbray told us "the business has always been based upon the principle that quality comes first and price second. "Today we are seeing better quality components available and a growing number of toner manufacturers producing toner for both the compatible manufacturers as well as the OEMs. With the right quality replacement parts and toners, remanufacturers have been able to produce a product to equal or exceed the quality of the OEM."

Morris Evans agrees and says that Kores work on the principle of keeping one eye upon the performance and quality claims of the OEMs whilst keeping both eyes on their own testing and performance achievement.

SUPPORT Interestingly the government's Office of Fair Trading (OFT) has been looking at this area too, in conjunction with Which? And as part of an IT services study, they have concluded that "there is much confusion and some OEMs have clouded issues in the past".

In fact it seems that all the 'compatible' guys out there are going that bit further to ensure that their quality and performance really does stack up. Tim McFarlane, Q Imaging reinforces this stance by confirming that within their new build programme they carry out vigorous independent testing regularly to compare their products against those of the OEMs. There are now independent labs specifi-

cally set up to carryout such testing including one called Bertl. Their website www.bertrl.com is worth a visit if you are interested.

The current criteria is based upon 5% coverage. This is equivalent to a standard letter. When this standard was set the majority of output was of the standard letter variety. However, as we all know, today we are producing very sophisticated documentation regularly on personal and departmental printing devices. Measuring the yield therefore becomes much more difficult and the old benchmark has become almost meaningless. Having spent some time 'digging' around on the subject, one has to say that it is too soon to have a foolproof method of measurement. We also observe that the strength of feeling amongst both the manufacturing community and the consumers themselves is driving the urgency of a solution to the dilemma. It's a case of watch this space. ■

From a sales person's perspective there are two issues to consider. The first is that of quality and it seems nowadays there is ample evidence to prove that the compatible, alternatives truly do give the same quality output as the OEMs. However, on the question of performance ie page yield it is early days. Whilst everyone we spoke to were adamant that their consumables would yield the same pages as their OEM equivalent the truth is there is no benchmark and no true 'apples for apples' way to compare.

