THE MFP REPORT

Business Intelligence for Manufacturers, Suppliers, Sellers & Supporters of Multifunction Peripherals

Lexmark Plays Catch Up with OnePrint Subscriptions

It's Now a Three-Way Race for Toner Subscriptions with Lexmark Challenging HP and Brother

With HP moving increasingly aggressively and successfully to make subscription services a centerpiece of its consumer and SMB printing business, Lexmark responded on September 29 by announcing its new OnePrint subscription service.

And HP is not the only other hardcopy vendor with a subscription program. Brother announced its EZ Print Subscription service a year ago for selected inkjet devices. And then some months later, Brother quietly added a set of plans for selected monochrome laser MFPs and printers.

Lexmark said its OnePrint service is "a simple subscription print solution that helps small and medium-sized businesses save time and money." Lexmark touted the new program as having no monthly overage fees, saving up to 50% on toner, including hardware maintenance, and able to be cancelled at any time.

Interestingly, OnePrint was available initially in France, Germany and the UK, with availability in the US and Canada coming "soon." Lexmark did not indicate if or when the new

Ricoh OEM's an HP Inkjet AIO

In a surprising and in some ways unprecedented move, Ricoh Europe in late September quietly debuted a new A4 inkjet AIO called the IJM C180F. What is particularly interesting about this new printer — which is the only inkjet AIO in Ricoh's European product line — is that it is an OEM version of the Officejet Pro 9015 that HP launched in 2019 *(The MFP Report, Mar 19)*. HP replaced the Officejet Pro 9015 in 2020 with an otherwise identical HP+ model called the

Ricoh Europe's IJM C180F is a rebadged version of the Officejet Pro 9105 that HP launched over three years ago.

Amazon Has Little to Show for Any of Its Hardcopy Initiatives

Amazon, whose $486 billion in revenue last year made it number two in the world in overall sales behind only Walmart, is generally seen as a company that gets most things right. But four different Amazon initiatives that relate closely to the hardcopy market — Dash, Alexa Printer Skills, Print with Alexa, and the Smart Sticky Note Printer — seem to have quietly have gone awry or petered out.

Dash, etc. Amazon's oldest interaction with hardcopy vendors and printer owners relates to various efforts over the past seven years to streamline and automate ordering and delivery of ink and toner for mass market print devices.

Amazon first got involved with hardcopy vendors when it launched the Dash Replenishment Service *(DRS)* in back 2015. Amazon wanted DRS to change the way consumers order, pay for, and receive everyday products used in the home, including ink and toner *(The MFP Report, Oct 15)*.

Brother and Samsung were early adopters of DRS, which initially relied on so-called Dash buttons. These were small Bluetooth-connected buttons one stuck on a device, such as a printer. Amazon Prime customers could then order more toner or ink simply by pushing the Dash button, which communicated with the Amazon app on the customer's phone.

"The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse"

COMMENT

If it feels sometimes these days that the global hardcopy industry in the 2020's is facing challenges of nearly biblical proportions, you're not far off. It's almost as if we're confronting the apocryphal Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Interestingly, none of these horsemen has originated within the printer world. Each has arrived as an unplanned and unprecedentedly disruptive exogenous event, albeit against a backdrop of an industry that was already in decline. And while these developments are certainly revelatory, their combined outcome is much more likely to be recessionary, rather than rapturous.

First, there was the white horse of pestilence in the form of the global COVID-19 pandemic. We already know how that played out. Office printer placements plummeted, with A3 sales hurting even more than A4 sales. Office page volumes dropped 20% or more, and there's precious little hope for much of that ever coming back. Vendors and channel partners saw revenue contract significantly, and profits falling even more precipitously. Yes, sales of low-end inkjet and laser units and their pages ticked up, but not nearly enough to offset the massive declines elsewhere. And hybrid work arrangements and huge investments in DX have gone from niche to the new normal across major swaths of the economy.

Then came the red horse that brought unprecedented logistics and supply chain problems. Hardcopy vendors found themselves unable to produce and deliver to customers sufficient quantities of products in multiple segments and categories. Not only was this precisely at a time when post-pandemic sales opportunities were on the upswing, but these ongoing challenges are unlikely to be fully resolved for another year.

Ask anyone in or around the printing industry about these first two horsemen, and they'll assure you their eyes are wide open. They'll insist they've got a plan to deal with this altered reality. But I believe – and honestly I fear – that their actions indicate otherwise. I've yet to see efforts to evolve and diversify that have sufficient breadth, realism and urgency to do the job.

Then there are the other two horsemen. They're equally obvious, but with both of these the hardcopy industry hasn't yet come close to fully appreciating the impact and the increased downside risk they portend for printing.

We've witnessed the arrival of the black horse of political destruction and war. Russia's completely amoral invasion of Ukraine has been massively disruptive to the global order, with ever more dire effects yet to be felt across Europe this winter. Additionally, for the first time in a century, we're seeing a naively vile embrace of fascism in parts of Europe and even in the US. Then there's

growing worry over how and when China might seek to reabsorb Taiwan. Then there's the perennial torpor when it comes to meaningfully fighting the ever-worsening global climate crisis and all that entails. Any one of these items could send the global polity into dangerous disequilibrium, and I shudder to think what havoc would ensue from big disruptions in multiple domains.

On top of all this, we continue to experience the pale horse of economic danger, disruption and distress. The combination of persistently high inflation, climbing interest rates, slowing economic growth, wild swings in exchange rates, and a possibly imminent recession is something the world has not experienced in more than five decades. Moreover, the last time this all happened, the hardcopy industry was entering an era of unprecedented growth. But now printing is on a precipice, facing unprecedented risk and a declining market.

It pains me to say this, but hardcopy vendors today seem unprepared for the consequences of such economic upheaval. Thus far, vendors and sellers have been able to pass on to their customers much higher prices for printing hardware, supplies, parts and service. That's certainly helped the industry in the near term. But it's difficult to fight price elasticity, especially in an industry in which demand is already declining. So today's higher printing prices will likely translate into even lower printing demand tomorrow.

The same is true of higher interest rates, especially in the A3 side of the business. Combining higher hardware prices, higher click charges, and higher lease rates makes for substantially higher monthly payments on A3 products for which demand has tumbled since the spring of 2020. And an outright recession – even one that might turn out to be shallow and short – would significantly exacerbate the already ample challenges facing all facets of the printing industry.

This economic turmoil also makes it far more difficult and risky for hardcopy vendors now to belatedly execute the kind of massive business transformation and diversification they've spent more time talking about than acting upon for the better part of the past decade. Now the responses from printer vendors need to be even more comprehensive, nearly fail-safe in their design, much better coordinated, and more quickly and expertly executed. Sadly but inevitably, not all hardcopy companies will make the transition. Some will simply fail to survive in their present form. But who? That's the question.

Brian R. Bissett
Publisher & Editor

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Xerox's Eloque IoT Joint Venture in Australia Shuttered After 16 Months

Just sixteen months after Xerox announced it had formed an Australian joint venture called Eloque to commercialize the much-hyped industrial IoT sensor technology developed at its PARC facility *(The MFP Report, May 21)*, Xerox unceremoniously shuttered the business in early September. While Xerox pointed to Eloque as an important proof point in its ability to leverage and monetize PARC technology, accusations are swirling in Australia that Eloque was a boondoggle.

The origins of what became Eloque go back about five years. In 2017, VicTrack wanted to investigate how to replace periodic, expensive, time-consuming site visits to 2,600 rail bridges in the state of Victoria. VicTrack is the state enterprise that owns Victoria's railway and tram lines. It was looking for a new solution that would continually capture and interpret field data to monitor bridge health. VicTrack started working with the University of Melbourne, VicRoads, and other Victoria state agencies, with funding coming from the Victoria state government Public Sector Innovation Fund.

Later in 2017, VicTrack signed a memorandum of understanding with Xerox PARC to utilize PARC's MOXI platform, a suite of industrial IoT technologies designed to predict the need for maintenance, repair or improvement in infrastructure. MOXI has been used in projects with more than twenty large private and public organizations, including General Electric, Con Edison, NASA, Panasonic, Hitachi, LG Chem, General Motors, BAE Systems, and East Japan Railway.

VicTrack developed a MOXI-based solution called FiBridge that used fibre optic sensors to monitor the structural health of bridges. It was first implemented as a short-term trial in 2018, and it was then expanded to seven rail bridges.

The Victoria government and Xerox began working in 2020 to establish their joint venture, which was announced publicly in May 2021. Xerox owned 62.5% of Eloque, and VicTrack owned the other 37.5%. Neither side said how much it had invested in the joint venture. However, the government of Victoria said it was committed to spending AU$50 million *(US$39 million at the time)* to utilize the FiBridge technology on high-priority rail bridges across the state.

Over the ensuing months, Xerox painted a rosy picture for Eloque. In early February 2022, Xerox said it planned by June to triple the number of bridges Eloque was monitoring in Victoria *(i.e., from 12 to 36)*. Xerox also said Eloque was targeting expansion into the US and Europe, adding that it expected the first US pilot tests by the end of 2022.

And then at its investor conference three weeks later, Xerox explained that Eloque could be used to monitor not just bridges, but also tunnels, ports, multistory parking garages, and other infrastructure. Xerox said that was a $9 billion addressable market, and it contended that investors should value Eloque at five times its (unstated) revenue.

Then barely six months later, Xerox pulled the plug on Eloque. Even the web site is gone. Xerox portrayed it as a joint decision that followed "an analysis showing that development and commercialization of the ... solution would re-

quire more efforts than initially expected." A spokesman was quoted in Australia saying Xerox might consider monetizing the technology through alternative means in the future. For now, it appears that PARC will continue to promote its underlying MOXI technology to partners and customers.

Reporting out of Australia said Eloque had "engineering limitations" that were evident almost from the start. A leading opposition politician in Australia called Eloque "a case study in funny money, crooked processes and secrecy." From the outset, there were local engineers in Victoria who questioned VicTrack's decision to contract with PARC without requesting or considering competitive bids. They also claimed that less expensive local technology was readily available.

Reports from Australia indicate VicTrack spent about AU$7 million *(US$4.5 million)* to start and operate Eloque, and another AU$9 million *(US$5.8 million)* developing the technology. And Xerox is described as having contributed AU$7 million *(US$4.5 million)* in funding and AU$8 million *(US$5.2 million)* in intellectual property. That is a total from both parties of AU$31 million *(US$20.1 million)*.

Eloque did not seem to have a lot to show for that investment. The company is said to have laid off all 29 of its employees in September. But that was only four more employees than when the joint venture was announced. Sensors were ultimately deployed at a few dozen bridges in Victoria, but VicTrack was in the process of removing them.

In pure financial terms, the abrupt abandonment of Eloque is not material to Xerox's financial results. But at a time when Xerox has been unable to regain any of the massive revenue loss it suffered during the first year of the pandemic, loosing even a few million dollars is concerning. Moreover, the Eloque fiasco raises questions about how honest Xerox was with partners and investors in its aggressive

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Xerox's CareAR Unit Partners with Lenovo

In an interesting twist, Chinese PC giant Lenovo and Xerox's CareAR augmented reality (AR) software unit simultaneously announced on August 23 their "global collaboration." The plan is to bring together Xerox's CareAR SXM software platform with the ThinkReality A3 smart glasses that Lenovo announced at the Consumer Electronics Show back in January 2021. The Lenovo smart glasses are a 5G-capable mobile head-worn solution that sells for $1,499. The companies intend to deliver multiview and multiparty handsfree experiences for frontline workers to take advantage of the full potential of the so-called SLAM method (simultaneous, localization and mapping), which makes it possible for AR applications to recognize three-dimensional objects and states with overlay augmentations.

Additionally, the existing integration between CareAR and ServiceNow will enable field technicians wearing Lenovo's smart glasses to connect with a remote expert from their ServiceNow workflow to see exactly what the technician is seeing and provide live visual assistance, and also to have a side-by-side view of a digital twin with instructional content.

Ricoh Acquires Its First IT Services Business Since Its mindSHIFT Fiasco

Ricoh announced on September 14 it had acquired a Pennsylvania company called Cenero, which it described as "a service-focused audio visual technology, unified communications, and IT solutions provider." No terms for the deal were announced, but privately-held Cenero is believed to have about $50 million in annual revenue.

Ricoh said it purchased Cenero to expand its range of "hybrid work solutions for enterprises," with an emphasis on audio visual *(AV)* and unified communications solutions. Ricoh said Cenero offers "flexible solutions that improve communication, drive productivity, and empower collaboration." Ricoh also stated that Cenero's expertise "will help Ricoh support its customers with their growing number of offices, meeting rooms, and learning spaces that are quickly being modified to support hybrid working and learning modes."

Cenero's expertise is similar to that of companies in the UK and Denmark that Ricoh purchased in June. Cenero said its "suite of unified communications and Constant Connect managed services fits in perfectly with Ricoh's portfolio of digital workplace solutions." Some of Cenero's key partners include Sharp, Samsung, Poly *(now part of HP)*, Pexip, LG, Legrand, Barco, Cisco, Biamp, Crestron, and Panasonic.

Cenero was founded in 2000 and is based in Malvern, ten miles from Ricoh's US headquarters in Exton, Pennsylvania. The company appears to have been self-funded, and its only acquisition was a small AV systems integrator in northern New Jersey called Avectus in 2018. Cenero has about 200 employees, including its offices in or near Baltimore, Charlotte, Dallas, New York and Washington, DC. Cenero will operate as "a Ricoh company, with its current management and employees reporting to Ricoh North America."

Even more interesting than who Cenero is and what it

does is what this deal may mean for Ricoh in the US. In Europe, Ricoh has purchased almost twenty IT services type businesses in the past eight years to accelerate its strategy of becoming foremost a broadly defined digital services company. But Cenero is Ricoh's first such acquisition in the US since its ill-fated purchase of mindSHIFT back in 2014.

Ricoh never revealed what it paid for mindSHIFT. But in 2018, Ricoh closed down its wholly-owned mindSHIFT subsidiary. And Ricoh in Japan booked a surprisingly large ¥40 billion impairment loss for the unit. That was about $380 million at the time.

Since then, Ricoh has invested globally quite heavily to grow its broadly defined "Office Services" business, which encompasses IT infrastructure services, managed IT services, business process services, and application-related services.

In FY2021, which ended on March 31, Ricoh had ¥584 billion in Office Services revenue. That is $4 billion, or 33% of its total revenue. Ricoh's target is to grow that to 42% of its revenue in FY2025. Ricoh last fiscal year got 51% of its Office Services revenue from Japan and 28% from Europe, versus 18% from the Americas and 3% from elsewhere.

Moreover, when Ricoh in March reported on progress under its current midterm management plan, management said its "top priority" was to spend ¥200 billion, or $1.4 billion, on Office Services acquisitions in Japan and Europe. There was no mention of making similar acquisitions in the US. And while Ricoh provided detailed presentations on its Office Services business and strategy in Japan and in Europe, it said very little about its US Office Services business

We asked Ricoh if buying Cenero should be seen as the start of a concerted effort to acquire IT-type services companies in the US. We also asked what lessons Ricoh took away from its failed mindSHIFT acquisition to better ensure success with Cenero and any future similar acquisitions.

Unfortunately, Ricoh's answers did not little much light on either issue, and Ricoh continued its long-time practice of deflection and obfuscation when it comes to the mindSHIFT legacy. Ricoh responded that "our North American business strategy centers on sensing market needs, innovating, and adapting to deliver more value for our customers, and we will continue to evaluate new opportunities to build upon Ricoh's existing portfolio and growing development pipeline for global outsourced digital workplace services."

The company further added that by "combining Ricoh's technology prowess and expertise with that of Cenero, we are strongly equipped to deliver that value and adapt to changing market needs." Ricoh wrapped up by stating that "while we cannot comment on future acquisition plans, we can confirm that our North American business strategy is focused on building more value for our customers, which can be the result of acquisition in certain cases."

Xerox: Eloque Is No More ⊃ *... from p. 3*

promotion of the joint venture. Keep in mind that just a few months ago, Xerox held up its success with Eloque as a proof point in its efforts to "monetized investments in software."

The failure of Eloque also makes one wonder about the fate of two other tiny businesses Xerox spun out of PARC earlier this year. Xerox created Novity in March to provide predictive maintenance solutions for the chemical, oil and gas industries. And it created EverCase in June to develop supercooling technology for food preservation.

Even more broadly and more significantly, the failure of Eloque raises questions about the viability of a much more important Xerox diversification initiative: the CareAR enterprise augmented reality software unit. On multiple occasions, Xerox has stated it is forecasting CareAR will generate $70 million in revenue this year, and close to $150 million in revenue in 2024. A year ago, Xerox ascribed a $700 million valuation to CareAR based on a $10 million investment from ServiceNow. That amount was equal to one-third of Xerox's entire $2.1 billion market cap at the end of September.

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"Harmony at Work" TV Spots Are Canon's First for Printers in Years

On September 6, Canon USA announced its new *"Harmony at Work"* integrated marketing campaign, which it said is "rooted in the insight that in a world of chaos and drama, what the workforce seeks above all is harmony." The campaign is intended to "creatively and effectively demonstrate how Canon truly takes the drama out of work."

Canon said the *"Harmony at Work"* campaign is aimed at "difference-makers in today's society who are shaping the evolution of work and leading daily in their personal and professional lives." The campaign encompasses four TV spots that highlight various Canon consumer and SOHO products — including inkjet AIOs — that can be used "at home, in the office, at school, or anywhere in between."

Canon is featuring America actor and comedian Brett Gelman in each of the four TV spots. Gelman is best known for his roles in hit TV series, including the BBC's *"Fleabag"* and Netflix's *"Stranger Things."* Each spot focuses on "a dramatic scenario" in which Gelman's character "faces a challenge with work, and Canon has the solution."

Two of the TV spots highlight Canon's inkjet printers.

In *"Thanks Mom,"* Gelman is cast as a college student whose mother signs him up for Canon's PIXMA Print Plan to avoid running out of ink. This is the first time Canon USA has put any marketing muscle behind the ink subscription plan it quietly debuted a year ago *(The MFP Report, Aug 21)*. However, the spot falls flat, first for having 46-year old Gelman portray a college student, and second for pretending that a college student today takes a printer to college.

In the *"Smartest Dummy"* TV spot, Gelman appears at home as a virtual ventriloquist, and his dummy suggests using a Canon MegaTank inkjet printer and a Canon EOS camera to make his life easier at his home office.

The *"Nama Scan"* TV spot features Gelman as a yoga studio owner using a Canon imageFORMULA scanner to capture and organize his receipts. And in the *"Advanced Technology"* spot, Gelman is a graphic novelist using Canon's AMLOS hybrid meeting software solution.

Canon developed the *"Harmony at Work"* TV spots in partnership with McCann Detroit and MRM Media. They debuted during the annual EMMY Awards broadcast on September 12. Canon did not indicate where else the TV spots can be seen. Nor did the company reveal what it is spending for the *"Harmony at Work"* campaign. ◥

One of Canon's new "Harmony at Work" TV spots features 46-year old American actor Brett Gelman as a college student whose mother gets him a PIXMA Print Plan ink subscription for the PIXMA AIO in his dorm room.

Canada's Valsoft Buys Two Tiny European Print Software Companies

An interesting but low-profile Canadian software company by the name of Valsoft announced on September 28 that it had purchased Euroform and MPS Monitor, a pair of very small and not all that successful European print management software developers. These two acquisitions also marked Valsoft's entry into the print software market. And they came just two months after Valsoft entered the document management market with its purchase of WorkDynamics Technologies, a tiny Canadian software developer.

These three companies are among more than 50 mostly very small and mostly European software firms Montreal-based Valsoft has purchased since 2015, including 14 companies just in 2021. Moreover, print management and document management are two of 25 vertical markets in which Valsoft has acquired software businesses.

We could not find any credible numbers for Valsoft's revenue, although it has been one of Canada's fastest growing software companies in recent years. Valsoft says it has more then 1,500 employees in at least ten countries. We also noted that Valsoft in March of this year announced it had received a $100 million minority equity investment from Viking Global Investors. That is $73 million in US dollars at the current exchange rate. Viking is a Connecticut-based hedge fund with over $37 billion in total capital.

Valsoft emphasizes that it is a decentralized company that buys businesses to hold onto them and help them grow, while keeping current management in place. Valsoft has what it refers to as "an operational arm" called Aspire Software that provides "additional support and operational expertise."

As for Valsoft's latest acquisitions, Euroform was founded in Ballerup, Denmark in 1993; MPS Monitor was founded in Milan, Italy in 2009; and WorkDynamics was founded in Ottawa, Canada in 1998. Each company has about two dozen employees and around US$5-$7 million in revenue.

Euroform' JetAdvice family of on-premises and cloud MPS solutions allow channel partners to remotely assess, manage, maintain, secure and optimize their customers' office, large format and thermal printer fleets. And MPS Monitor provides an IoT solution that helps some 2,500 dealers monitor print devices used by 220,000 end users.

Meanwhile, WorkDynamics has developed electronic document storage and retrieval software that is used primarily by government and public sector organizations across Canada and the US, largely to manage correspondence. ◥

∨ VALSOFT

Euroform and MPS Monitor join over 50 companies Valsoft has purchased since 2015. With these deals, Valsoft has now added print management to the two dozen or so vertical markets in which it provides software.

Lexmark: Playing Catch-Up with OnePrint Subscriptions

supplies subscription program might be available elsewhere.

HP's Instant Ink program is available in about three dozen countries, while Brother's EZ Print program is available only in the US, although Brother does offer a different subscription program in a few European countries *(story on p. 8)*. And while Canon USA has its PIXMA Print Plan for inkjet devices, it offers no similar laser printer program.

Sort of the Same. The supplies subscription programs offered by HP, Brother and Lexmark are similar.

A customer chooses the plan that best matches his or her typical monthly print volume, and pays a flat monthly fee for those pages. Shortly after the customer signs up, an initial toner cartridge is sent. The enrolled printer has to stay connected to the internet so the vendor can monitor the number of pages printed and determine when the customer needs more toner, which is sent automatically.

The plans have no contractual commitment. At any time, a customer can stop subscribing, or choose a higher or lower plan. The subscription cartridges typically have a higher *(but unspecified)* yield, and the vendor can determine if an enrolled printer is not using the special subscription cartridges. Vendors also pay the shipping costs when sending new cartridges and for customers to return used cartridges.

But while the HP and Brother programs are almost identical, there are some important differences that generally are not positive when it comes to the new Lexmark program.

In addition, HP is way ahead of either Brother or Lexmark in offering its printer supplies subscription program. HP rolled out its Instant Ink program for consumer and SOHO inkjet devices a decade ago, and then expanded the program to cover low-end SMB laser devices two years ago. HP mentioned in August that it had more than eleven million Instant Ink subscribers, although the vast majority of these subscriptions are for personal home or SOHO inkjet AIOs.

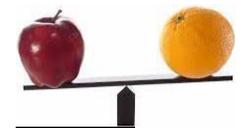**Eligible Printers.** Lexmark's new OnePrint subscriptions are available for a total of eight A4 monochrome devices. All of these are part of the GO Line that Lexmark promotes for SMB customers, and the products were released between 2019 and 2021. A couple of the products are discontinued, and prices for the other eligible models range from $199 to $489. However, it appears for some products that only particular units support OnePrint, since customers are asked to provide the specific serial number for the device in order to get a definitive answer regarding compatibility.

HP in the US offers Instant Ink toner plans for about two dozen monochrome LaserJet models, which are split equally between MFPs and printers. They have all been released in the last two years, and they are priced from $109 to $689. Brother's EZ Print service is available for thirteen monochrome laser devices, consisting of nine MFPs and four printers. These models were released between late 2017 and mid-2020, and they are priced from $149 to $399.

Multiples. Customers can have any number of printers on a single OnePrint plan. It appears Lexmark customers receive a single monthly bill and make a single payment for all those devices. The enrolled printers can be in different locations, and they can have different monthly page plans. But the customer has to ensure that a specific replacement cartridge is used in the specific device for which it is intended. Customers must also warrant that they will not use a OnePrint subscription in any kind of print-for-pay business.

As of August, HP Instant Ink subscribers can also have any number of devices and locations on a single monthly bill. This can include laser and inkjet devices, and they can be on different monthly plans. HP sends specific cartridges for specific devices. The same thing applies to Brother's EZ Print plans, except there is a maximum of ten printers.

Free Months. Lexmark is not offering any free introductory period for OnePrint. But depending on the model, HP currently offers either two or six free months up front for customers who are purchasing a new Instant Ink compatible LaserJet. And Brother is offering a two-month free trial for any newly purchased EZ Print compatible printer.

Promotion. Lexmark does not mention OnePrint on the product web pages or in the brochures for its OnePrint compatible devices. Lexmark also does not enable shoppers to search specifically for OnePrint enabled devices when browsing its products.

On the other hand, HP promotes Instant Ink in multiple spots on its web site, including on the web page for each compatible LaserJet. And it also helps customers search

Lexmark offers only three OnePrint monthly plans that range from 250 pages to 1,000 pages. HP and Brother offer more plans that can appeal to a greater breadth of customers. HP has five Instant Ink monthly toner plans that range from just 50 pages on up to 1,500 pages, and Brother has five toner plans that go from 25 pages to 1,500 pages per month. Not surprisingly, none of Lexmark's OnePrint plans aligns directly in terms of cost or number of pages with an HP plan or a Brother plan.

Toner Plans Vendor	Plan	Monthly Price	# of Pages	Cost Per Page	Roll Over Pages	Add'l Pages	Cost Per Add'l Page
Brother	Basic	$0.89	25	3.56¢	50	10 for $1	10.0¢
HP	Light	$1.99	50	3.98¢	100	10 for $1	10.0¢
Brother	Occasional	$3.49	100	3.49¢	200	20 for $1	5.0¢
HP	Occasional	$3.99	100	3.99¢	200	10 for $1	10.0¢
Lexmark	Everyday	$7.99	250	3.20¢	n/a	n/a	n/a
Brother	Moderate	$8.99	300	3.00¢	600	25 for $1	4.0¢
HP	Moderate	$13.99	400	3.50¢	800	15 for $1	6.7¢
Lexmark	Frequent	$13.99	500	2.80¢	n/a	n/a	n/a
Brother	High	$15.99	700	2.28¢	1,400	40 for $1	2.5¢
HP	Frequent	$19.99	800	2.50¢	1,600	20 for $1	5.0¢
Lexmark	Enhanced	$19.99	1,000	2.00¢	n/a	n/a	n/a
Brother	Power	$24.99	1,500	1.67¢	1,400	40 for $1	2.5¢
HP	Business	$25.99	1,500	1.73¢	3,000	60 for $1	1.7¢

Lexmark: New OnePrint

specifically for Instant Ink compatible products. Likewise, Brother indicates on its relevant product web pages if a model is Refresh Subscription Eligible, and it helps customers search and find all subscription compatible products.

Range of Plans. HP and Brother each offer five different monthly subscription plans, but Lexmark has only three OnePrint plans. And the HP and Brother plans cover a much broader range of pages per month, thereby appealing to a greater breadth of customers. HP's plans go from 50 to 1,500 pages, and Brother's plans go from 25 to 1,500 pages. Meanwhile, Lexmark does not have a plan for less than 250 pages per month or for more than 1,000 pages per month.

In addition, none of Lexmark's OnePrint plans aligns directly with an HP Instant Ink Plan. No doubt Lexmark did that intentionally to make it more difficult for people to compare the vendors' subscription plans. In contrast, Brother's 100-page and 1,500-page plans align directly with HP.

Cost per Page. Aside from convenience, the major incentive for customers to enroll in a supplies subscription

Lexmark's CarbonNeutral Models

On September 29, Lexmark announced that two models in its low-end GO Line for SMB customers have received CarbonNeutral certification from Climate Impact Partners. The two products are the 42 ppm A4 monochrome B3442dw printer it shipped two years ago and the 26 ppm A4 color MC3326i 3-in-1 device it launched last year. These models, which Lexmark called "the flagship devices in its GO Line, have respective street prices of $379 and $499. Lexmark said these "are among the first office laser printers sold in the US and Canada to provide certified carbon neutrality by default, right out of the box and with no additional fee."

While Lexmark said these products were already designed to minimize carbon emissions. And nothing about how the printers are made, sold or used has changed. Instead, Lexmark has contracted with Climate Impact Partners to support "third party-verified climate projects to offset any remaining carbon emissions." In other words, Lexmark pays Climate Impact Partners for industrial carbon credits that are sufficient to offset the carbon footprint of these two devices. Climate Impact Partners is a private company that has been in the carbon offset business for more than 20 years. It is based in London, with a US office in Charleston, South Carolina.

It is worth noting that HP has worked with Climate Impact Partners for the past two years to provide CarbonNeutral MPS and to make some of its Design-Jet wide format inkjet printers CarbonNeutral.

plans is — or should be — to lower the cost per page for printing. This is also the key metric one should use to compare the monthly plans from one vendor or across vendors.

The per-page costs for Lexmark's three OnePrint plans are clustered together in a fairly narrow band ranging from 3.20¢ down to 2.00¢. Meanwhile HP's per-page costs start at 3.98¢ and go down to 1.73¢; and Brother's per page costs start at 3.56¢ and go down to 1.67¢.

Allowing for differences in the number of monthly pages, Lexmark's OnePrint plans are priced aggressively against HP's Instant Ink plans, but Brother's EZ Print plans are even more aggressive. Basically, Brother offers the same or more pages per month as HP at a 3% to 14% lower cost per page. In particular, Brother's 89¢ plan for 25 pages will likely attract customers, but quite a few of them may well find they need to move up to the 100-page plan.

It is also worth pointing out that in Europe, Lexmark's OnePrint plans have a significantly higher cost per page — between 20% and 50% higher depending on the plan — when converted from euros or pounds to dollars. But HP's plan and per-page prices in Europe and the US are similar.

Drum Anyone? All of the LaserJets that are eligible for HP's Instant Ink laser plans use all-in-one toner cartridges. But all of the Lexmark and Brother models that are eligible for their respective programs have separate toner cartridges and longer-life drum/imaging units. Inexplicably, neither Lexmark nor Brother mentions whether it includes or does not include drum/imaging units on their respective program web sites or in their respective terms and conditions.

Only when we asked these vendors did we find out that Lexmark includes imaging units in its OnePrint program, but Brother does not include drum units in its EZ Print program. The $106 drum used in Brother's EZ Print compatible printers prints 12,000 pages. So with Brother's 300-page to 1,500-page plans, the drum lasts from forty months to as little as eight months, adding 30-50% to the monthly cost.

Rollover Pages. Lexmark's OnePrint is unique in the sense that it is a "use it or lose it" program. Customers can not roll over any unused pages at the end of a month to use in the next month or in subsequent months. That gives customers an incentive to try to live within the limits of a plan with fewer pages so as not to waste money.

In contrast, HP and Brother allow their subscribers to roll over twice the number of pages in their monthly plan to use in future months, and those rollover pages never expire.

Extra Pages. On the other hand, Lexmark proclaims that it does not charge customers that exceed their monthly OnePrint page allotments. Both HP and Brother charge their subscribers $1 for each block of extra pages they need to use in a given month. Depending on the plan, that $1 buys between 10 and 50 additional pages for HP, and between 10 and 60 additional pages for Brother. So those extra per-page costs start at 10¢ and drop down to as low as 1.7¢.

However, Lexmark's marketing of this supposedly important differentiator and subscriber benefit is vague, incon-

One of the biggest potential "gotchas" in Lexmark's new OnePrint toner plans is that Lexmark penalizes customers who exceed "the ISO recommended page yield identified on the print subscription cartridge." This is something Lexmark only mentions in the OnePrint terms and conditions. Lexmark treats a customer who prints too many high-coverage pages — and thereby obtains a lower than expected yield from its OnePrint cartridges — the same as if the subscriber printed more than the number of pages in the monthly plan. That is, Lexmark bumps the subscriber up to the next higher OnePrint monthly plan.

Lexmark: New OnePrint ↪ ... from p. 7

sistent and a bit misleading. According to the OnePrint program terms and conditions, if a subscriber exceeds the plan allotment for three consecutive months, Lexmark automatically moves the subscriber up to the next higher plan.

It is not clear if or when a customer can go back to a lower plan. Lexmark also does not say what it does if the subscriber was already enrolled in the highest volume One-Print monthly plan. And one has to wonder how large an overage Lexmark tolerates for one or two months before cancelling a subscription, which is at its sole discretion.

A Big Gotcha. A potentially even bigger problem with the OnePrint program is that Lexmark penalizes a subscriber that exceeds "the ISO recommended page yield identified on the print subscription cartridge" even though the subscriber stays within the monthly page allotment. This is mentioned only in the program terms and conditions.

Basically, Lexmark treats a subscriber who prints too many high-coverage pages — and thereby obtains a lower than expected yield from the special OnePrint cartridges — the same as a subscriber who exceeds the print allotment for three consecutive months. That is, Lexmark bumps the subscriber up to the next higher OnePrint monthly plan.

Neither HP nor Brother does this. Moreover, the fact that Lexmark does this risks eliminating one of the top benefits of other subscription programs. HP's Instant Ink and Brother's EZ Print shift the extra cost of printing high-coverage pages from subscribers to themselves. OnePrint does not.

Non-Subscription Supplies. Lexmark highlights the fact that it does not prevent non-subscription genuine Lexmark supplies from being used in a device that is enrolled in OnePrint. However, one might infer that Lexmark may lock out non-OEM cartridges from an enrolled device. HP and Brother also allow subscribers to use genuine non-subscription toner cartridges in enrolled devices.

With Lexmark and Brother, pages printed with those genuine but non-subscription cartridges count against the subscriber's monthly allotment. This is not the case with HP.

By the way, in describing the benefits of OnePrint, Lexmark emphasizes that genuine Lexmark toner cartridges produce "consistent, reliable printing and professional quality results." This is more than a little ironic, considering that Lexmark's parent company — China's Ninestar — is one of the world's largest makers of non-OEM toner cartridges.

Cancellation. Lexmark, HP and Brother all highlight the fact that customers can cancel their subscriptions at any time. Cancellation is effective at the end of the current monthly cycle. With OnePrint, the subscriber must return any unused or partially used subscription cartridges, or the subscriber can instead pay for those supplies after cancellation. With the HP and Brother programs, customers' only option is to return all subscription cartridges. Those customers also lose all roller pages, and there is no credit for unused pages.

Warranty. Lastly, printers enrolled in the OnePrint program are covered by Lexmark's extended maintenance

package for up to five years, as long as the printers continue to be enrolled in the program. Brother does this as well, but it covers enrolled printers for a maximum of two years after the standard one-year warranty ends. In contrast, HP does not offer this benefit as part of its Instant Ink program, but it does do this for printers enrolled in its HP+ program.

In Sum. Lexmark's entry into the toner subscription business with its OnePrint program is a welcome but overdue development. Unfortunately for Lexmark, despite pretty aggressive per-page pricing for its plans, OnePrint has several weaknesses when compared to HP's Instant Ink. And Brother's EZ Print program has even better per-page pricing, plus several other advantages versus OnePrint. 🏴

Brother Launches EcoPro Supplies Subscription Program in Europe

On September 25, Brother announced its first supplies subscription program in Europe. So far, Brother's EcoPro program is available only in France, the Netherlands and Belgium. But Brother plans soon to roll out the new EcoPro plan in other European countries, including Germany.

It is easy to confuse the new program with the EcoPro program that Brother launched in the UK in 2020 *(The MFP Report, Dec 20).* But the two EcoPro programs operate quite differently.

The UK EcoPro program has a flat monthly fee, and it is offered with or without one of three Brother inkjet or laser MFPs, which may be new or remanufactured. Either way, Brother offers a "low cost" 12-month plan and a "best value" 24-month plan. The monthly fees are higher when a device is included, and there is also a one-time initial fee for the device. Whether or not a print device is included, the UK EcoPro program is available only for 6,000 pages per year. Moreover, this is not a guaranteed number of pages. Rather, it represents the estimated number of pages for the supplies that Brother UK provides to its EcoPro subscribers.

The new EcoPro program in France, the Netherlands and Belgium is much like Brother's EZ Print program in the US. Four straightforward monthly supplies subscriptions re available for ten color inkjet AIOs, or for six monochrome laser MFPs or three monochrome laser printers. The color inkjet plans are 50 pages for €3.98; 100 pages for €5.99; 300 pages for €11.99; and 500 pages for €18.98. The resulting per-page costs start at 8.0 euro cents and go down to 3.8 euro cents. And the B&W laser plans are 50 pages for €1.99; 100 pages for €3.99; 300 pages for €10.99; and 500 pages for €17.99. The resulting per-page costs start at 4.0 euro cents and go down to 3.6 euro cents.

All of the new EcoPro plans allow subscribers to roll over two times the monthly plan allotment, but rollover pages expire after two months. And both the laser and inkjet EcoPro plans charge either 99 euro cents or 79 euro cents to purchase an additional block of ten pages in a month. 🏴

Brother's new EcoPro monthly supplies subscription program on the European continent is unfortunately easy to easily confused with the annual EcoPro program Brother launched in the UK almost two years ago. The new continental subscription program operates pretty much the same as Brother's EZ Print program in the US.

Canon Inc. Leverages uniFLOW Online for Work-from-Home Printing

On September 20, Canon Inc. announced immediate availability in Japan for its Hybrid Work Print Standard cloud printing solution, which is the first in a series of Hybrid Work Print cloud solutions Canon will offer. The company said it will add a lower end Hybrid Work Print Simple service next year. There is no word if or when Canon will make these new cloud print services available in the US or elsewhere.

According to Canon, the new service "provides work-from-home users with the same high security environment and management tools as conventional offices." Canon's Hybrid Work Print Standard works with iR ADVANCE Gen3 and DX series color and monochrome MFPs; PIXUS G and GX series MegaTank inkjet AIOs and printers *(which are sold as the PIXMA G series and Maxify GX series in the US)*; and Satera *(i.e., imageCLASS)* laser MFPs and printers *(which are sold as imageCLASS models in the US)*.

The new Hybrid Work Print Standard service is built on top of NT-ware's uniFLOW Online cloud solution. And customers must first subscribe to uniFLOW Online Cloud Print & Scan and Cloud Link Print Connection. Then there is a monthly per-device fee for the Hybrid Work Print Standard

Canon Branches Offer AgilePoint

Canon Solutions America — the direct sales side of Canon USA — announced on September 14 that it is now offering AgilePoint's namesake cloud-based digital transformation platform to help customers "quickly deliver solutions that meet the needs of today's hybrid work environment."

Based in Silicon Valley, AgilePoint is a privately-held, relatively small, nine-year old company that calls itself "the best kept secret for the intelligent optimization of enterprise productivity." It has also previously worked with Ricoh. Agile-Point has around 170 employees and $30 million in revenue. The company says it has over 2,000 customers in 28 nations and more than a million individual users, as well as 75+ partners and over 200,000 apps built on its platform. Pricing for AgilePoint starts at $39 per user per month.

AgilePoint 8.0 is the company's flagship product. It is "a low-code platform for building digital automation apps quickly and easily while ensuring future-proof simplicity." AgilePoint has more than 85 integrations to the most popular systems and cloud services built in, combined with the over 800 workflow actions and 65 application templates that together support multiple dynamic process patterns, coupled with six layers of granular security. AgilePoint's built-in features include the technology needed to achieve hyperautomation, including artificial intelligence, an event-driven software architecture, business process management, low or no-code tools, and platform-as-a-service. ◨

EFI Fiery Ships for Canon Presses

On August 29, EFI announced shipment of a new external Fiery digital front end (DFE) for the 65 and 70 ppm imagePRESS Lite C265 and C270 color digital presses that Canon introduced in the spring (The MFP Report, May 22). These are Canon's least expensive color presses. They are designed for "light production projects, including high-volume color needs in enterprises," and they have respective list prices of $36,600 and $42,100. Canon mentioned the imagePRESS Server M20 when it announced the new pair of imagePRESS models. The M20 utilizes EFI's Fiery FS500 controller platform. It replaces the M10 RIP for the previous models. That RIP used EFI's FS400 Pro platform. Canon's list price for the Linux-based M20 DFE is $8,278. The updated Fiery RIP has a 3.7 GHz Intel Pentium, 8 GB of memory, a 500 GB hard drive, and Adobe PostScript.

service. The fee is ¥2,900 *($19)* for each iR ADVANCE MFP; ¥7,000 *($47)* for 25 inkjet devices *(as low as $2 per device)*; and ¥1,500 *($10)* for each Satera laser printer or MFP.

Canon's Hybrid Work Print Standard service encrypts all print data to provide secure printing to supported devices, and it supports use of passwords to release print jobs at the device. The new service also tracks print job status, print usage and printing costs. And the service includes a function to log every print job for each user to provide an audit trail that reduces the risk of information leaks. ◨

Konica Minolta Dispatcher Paragon Cloud Now Available for Hybrid Use

On September 21, Konica Minolta announced in Europe that the Dispatcher Paragon Cloud solution it launched earlier this year is now available as a hybrid model. Dispatcher Paragon Cloud is part of Konica Minolta's Dispatcher family of print management solutions *(The MFP Report, Jan 22)*. It is basically a rebadged version of YSoft's SafeQ Cloud Pro solution, which was launched in 2020 *(The MFP Report, Aug 20)*. Dispatcher Paragon Cloud is a SaaS solution that is available with a fixed monthly or annual fee.

Konica Minolta said the hybrid model for Dispatcher Paragon Cloud is "the ideal solution for organizations whose data policy is that no data should leave the local corporate network, but who still want to benefit from the numerous advantages that print management in the cloud brings."

With the hybrid model, an edge device — typically YSoft's OMNI Bridge product — is interposed between the customer's printers/MFPs and the server in order to link the print devices to the cloud. Print jobs are spooled locally so the contents of print jobs stay in the customer's network, while metadata describing the print jobs travels securely to the cloud. This approach also limits consumption of network bandwidth, with faster job processing and printing. ◨

Canon's Hybrid Work Print Standard cloud service in Japan "provides work-from-home users with the same high security environment and management tools as conventional offices." It works with many of Canon's iR ADVANCE, PIXUS, and Satera printer for monthly fees that range from about $2 to $19 per device.

Konica Minolta said the Dispatcher Paragon Cloud hybrid model is for "organizations whose data policy is that no data should leave the local corporate network, but who still want to benefit from the numerous advantages that print management in the cloud brings."

Ricoh: AIO in Europe Is OEM'd Version of Old Officejet Pro

Officejet Pro 9015e *(The MFP Report, Nov 20).*

Ricoh USA confirmed it will introduce the IJM C180F early in 2023. That will be the first time any product OEM'd from HP will be sold by another vendor in the US.

Over the years, HP has OEM'd inkjet devices to a handful of companies. Ricoh is only the third vendor in the world today that is selling any OEM'd HP inkjet AIO, and it is the only Japanese vendor in this group. The other two vendors are Samsung and Xiaomi. Since Samsung sold its printer business to HP in 2017, it has OEM'd an array of HP inkjet AIOs and printers that it can sell only in Korea. And then two years ago, Xiaomi launched an OEM'd version of an HP Deskjet AIO that it sells in China, India and a few other countries. In addition, LG had sold select OEM versions of low-end HP AIOs in Korea for a few years about a decade ago, .

Ricoh has added the IJM C180F to bolster its offerings for the here-to-stay hybrid work-at-home market. That was the same rationale for its decision last year to ship the SG 3210DNw inkjet printer *(The MFP Report, Feb 21).* That product was nearly the same as a then four-year old printer that uses Ricoh's ill-fated homegrown GelJet piezo inkjet technology, which has for a long time been close to defunct.

Several years earlier, Ricoh had dropped the handful of GelJet products it sold in Europe, the US, and most other markets. Aside from Europe, the only other place where Ricoh still sells any GelJet products today is Japan, where it offers five single-function GelJet printers and one GelJet AIO.

Ricoh's launch of the IJM C180F comes just ten months after its worldwide shipment of the M C240FW A4 color laser MFP and the related P C200W printer. Those models are OEM'd Lexmark devices, and they were Ricoh's least expensive color products until the IJM C180F arrived. Ironically, these back-to-back OEM deals with Lexmark and HP come at a time when Ricoh has been telling investors it is working to significantly boost its own OEM business.

Pricing for the IJM C180F was not available yet from Ricoh or from any online sellers, but the product will likely be the least expensive multifunction color printer Ricoh sells in Europe. For reference, HP's Officejet Pro 9015e has a US street price of $289, and HP sells the equivalent Officejet Pro 9019e in Europe for €359 including VAT, or about $353.

One difference we spotted between the new Ricoh AIO and the existing HP device is that Ricoh is selling only high-yield ink cartridges that print 2,000 black pages and 1,600 color pages. HP sells those, as well as standard yield cartridges that print 1,000 black pages and 700 color pages. We have not yet seen any prices for the Ricoh supplies.

In addition, the new Ricoh model has fewer dark gray accents than the HP product. Both models have a white body. But only the top of the printer portion of the Ricoh AIO is dark gray, while the HP model also has a dark gray document feeder, base, and paper cassette. And the Ricoh device does not support HP's Smart app or other HP+ features.

In all other ways, Ricoh's IJM C180F is identical to HP's Officejet Pro 9015e. Ricoh's new AIO weighs just over 20 pounds, and it is about 17" wide, 13" deep and 11" tall. The AIO has a front-facing, C-shaped paper path that connects a 250-sheet input tray to a 60-sheet output tray. The IJM C180F also has duplex output, an A4 scanner, and a 35-sheet simplex document feeder. The adjustable control panel has a 2.7" color touchscreen and no buttons. And Ricoh quotes HP's very high monthly duty cycle of 25,000 pages.

Ricoh's new AIO has 512 MB of memory. It also has USB 2.0 device and host ports, wired Ethernet, and WiFi for connectivity. The IJM C180F is a 4-in-1 device. It has ISO print speeds of 18 ppm for color and 22 ppm for monochrome, with first-print times of 10 seconds for color and 9 seconds for B&W. The new AIO supports Mopria and AirPrint for mobile printing. And it works with the free Ricoh Support Station mobile device app that Ricoh launched earlier this year for the Lexmark-made M C240FW color laser MFP and the related P C200W color laser printer.

The IJM C180F has an 8 ipm scan speed for both color and B&W, but Ricoh does not provide any copy speeds. And Ricoh says nothing else about the scan or copy features, but it does note that the AIO has a 33.6 Kbps fax modem. ◨

HP Pays Again for Blocking Ink

In early September, it was revealed that HP reached the latest in a string of settlements in different countries concerning its use of firmware updates that end up preventing many of its inkjet AIOs from using non-HP ink cartridges.

This issue dates back to 2016, when HP introduced dynamic security updates without properly informing customers of the consequences. It became an issue once again two years ago when a lawsuit contesting this practice was filed against HP in US District Court in northern California.

HP's actions have cost consumers a lot of money, time and frustration, but the settlements have been small, and HP has never admitted any wrongdoing. HP previously paid settlements or fines that reportedly totalled AU$100,000 *(US$75,000)* in Australia in 2018; $1.5 million in the US in 2019; and €10 million *($12.3 million)* in Italy in 2020.

HP's latest settlement is with a consumer group called Euroconsumers for $1.35 million. The settlement covers customers in Belgium, Italy, Spain and Portugal who owned any of 35 Officejet, Officejet Pro or PageWide Pro models between September 1, 2016 and November 17, 2020. Keep in mind that HP's global printer supplies revenue in the fiscal year that ended on October 31, 2020 was $11.6 billion.

These customers in Europe can receive compensation of either €20, €35 or €50 *($20, $34 or $49)*, depending on the specific HP model. Customers can also receive an additional €45 *($44)* if they provide evidence of "specific potential losses" in excess of these flat amounts. However, if the sum of all the claims exceeds $1.35 million, the amount each customer receives will be prorated downward. ◨

To best of our knowledge, HP has OEM'd any of its inkjet devices to just four other vendors, and Ricoh is the first Japanese vendor on this list.

HP's actions have cost consumers a lot of money, time and frustration, but the settlements have been small — so far totalling a bit over $15 million — and HP has not admitted any wrongdoing as part of these settlements.

Epson America Refreshes Its Low-End Cartridge-Based AIO Lineup

On September 13, Epson America announced four new A4 inkjet AIOs that refresh the low end of its cartridge-based product line in the US. The new models are the 3-in-1 Expression Home XP-4200 and XP-5200, which are priced at $114 and $129; and the 4-in-1 WorkForce WF-2930 and WF-2960, which are priced at $109 and $159. Epson said the new AIOs, which were available at announcement, are designed for "busy families and professionals."

The Expression Home XP-4200 and WorkForce WF-2930 replace the Expression Home XP-4100 and WorkForce WF-2830 that Epson America launched more than three years ago *(The MFP Report, May 19)*. And the Expression Home XP-5200 and WorkForce WF-2960 replace the Expression Home XP-5100 and WorkForce WF-2860 that Epson shipped over four years ago *(The MFP Report, Apr 18)*.

While new models are priced the same as the ones they replace, those earlier models were originally priced $10 to $30 lower when they were launched in 2018 and 2019.

Epson's four new AIOs share the same engine and design. However, the Expression Home XP-4200 and Work-Force WF-2930 use one set of cartridges and share the same print speeds; and the Expression Home XP-5200 and Work-Force WF-2960 use a different set of cartridges and share the same faster print speeds. All of ink cartridges are new.

Epson America has not launched two other related lower-end models — the Expression Home XP-2200 and XP-3200 — that are available in much of Europe *(story on p. 12)*.

Epson has said nothing about what is new or different in its latest inkjet AIOs, probably because nothing much has changed, and what has changed is not for the better.

The big difference is that Epson's new 222 and 232 series ink cartridges do not include high-capacity color cartridges, unlike the previous 202 and 212 series cartridges. And the prices and yields for the high-capacity black cartridges and standard capacity black and color cartridges are different as well. But the big impact on customers is that the lowest possible color page costs on Epson's new models are about 25% higher than on the old models.

The higher page costs for Epson's latest cartridge-based home and SOHO models appear to be part of a concerted strategy to "encourage" customers instead to buy the company's EcoTank models. Epson in the US does not have an ink subscription program comparable to HP's successful Instant Ink program.

The not-at-all-updated $114 Expression Home XP-4200 is Epson's lowest priced AIO in the US.

Expression Home XP-4200 and WorkForce WF-2930. These are the lowest priced 3-in-1 and 4-in-1 products Epson sells in the US. They both use Epson's new 232 series of Claria ink cartridges, with black page costs of 8.0¢ or 13.3¢ and color page costs of 28.3¢ or 23.0¢.

The AIOs come with a set of standard yield cartridges. The $19.99 black cartridge prints 150 pages, and the three $6.99 color cartridges print 140 pages. In addition, Epson sells a high-yield 380-page black cartridge for $30.49.

The XP-4200 and WF-2930 share the same print, scan, copy and mobile features, which have not changed. Both AIOs have a USB device port and WiFi connectivity. The ISO simplex print speeds are 5 ppm for color and 10 ppm for black; the ISO duplex print speeds are 4 ppm for color and 6 ppm for B&W; and the ISO copy speeds are 3.8 ppm for color and 7.7 ppm for B&W. Epson does not mention any scan speeds. And it also continues to highlight voice-activated printing on the new models, even though it has little practical value.

The XP-4200 is a compact all-black device. It weighs 9.5 pounds, and it measures just under 15"

Epson Europe Extends Ad Pact with Usain Bolt

Epson Europe announced on September 5 that it had renewed its advertising partnership with Usain Bolt for another twelve months. Epson Europe had originally signed "the world's fastest man" a year ago to be the face in Europe for its EcoTank inkjet AIOs and printers (The MFP Report, Oct 21). In this second year, Bolt will promote not only the EcoTank line, but also Epson Europe's ReadyPrint ink subscription service, which is not available in the US. Jamaican-born Bolt is considered to be the greatest sprinter of all time, having won eight gold medals in the 2008, 2012 and 2016 Olympics. Epson also described Bolt as "one of the most recognizable people in the world." Epson's relationship with bolt in Europe mirrors Epson America's ongoing marketing relationship with legendary basketball player Shaquille O'Neal. That US ad campaign debuted in July 2019.

The higher page costs for Epson's latest ink cartridge home and SOHO models appear to be part of a concerted strategy to "encourage" customers instead to buy the company's EcoTank models. Epson in the US does not have an ink subscription program comparable to HP's successful Instant Ink program.

Epson: Entry-Level AIOs ⊃ ... from p. 11

wide, 12" deep and 7" high. It has a front-facing C-shaped paper path that connects the 100-sheet input tray to the 30-sheet output tray. The AIO also has duplex output and a 2.7" color LCD on the adjustable control panel.

For only $15 more than the XP-4200, the WF-2930 adds a 33.6 Kbps fax modem and a 30-sheet simplex document feeder, although it has a smaller 1.44" color LCD. The WF-2930 is also two pounds heavier and two inches taller.

Expression Home XP-5200 and WorkForce WF-2960. These are the next least expensive 3-in-1 and 4-in-1 products Epson sells in the US. They use Epson's new 222 series of Claria ink cartridges, with black page costs of 6.4¢ or 9.5¢ and color page costs of 21.7¢ or 24.9¢.

The AIOs come with a set of standard yield cartridges. The $19.99 black cartridge prints 210 pages and the three $9.49 color cartridges print 185 pages. In addition, Epson sells a high-yield 550-page black cartridge for $34.99.

Aside from the new supplies, the only other change on the XP-5200 is that Epson has eliminated the memory card slot that was on the previous XP-5100.

Compared to the new XP-4200, the new XP-5200 costs $15 more, but it has lower page costs, output speeds that are 40-50% faster, and a bigger 150-sheet input tray.

The XP-5200 is also slightly larger than the XP-4200 because of the bigger input tray and a heftier exit tray. The all-black AIO weighs 11.9 pounds, and it is approximately

Epson Print Admin Can Scan Too

On September 29, Epson Europe announced a major upgrade to the Epson Print Admin *(EPA)* server software it launched four years ago and has mentioned infrequently since then *(The MFP Report, Oct 18)*. Epson declined to state if or when the new release of EPA will be available in the US.

EPA is primarily used in the SMB market for user authentication and print job release with MFPs that support the Epson Open Platform architecture. These are the WorkForce Enterprise A3 MFPs Epson sells through office equipment dealers and the WorkForce Pro A4 MFPs it sells through dealers and VARs. Despite the name and heritage, the new features in the latest version of EPA have nothing to do with printing. Instead, the new release incorporates "advanced workflow capabilities" in the form of scanning and OCR. However, these new document capture features do not appear to be available in the serverless version of EPA that Epson launched four years ago *(The MFP Report, Dec 18)*.

Epson said the new version of EPA can scan documents and convert them *(using unspecified OCR software)* into searchable PDF files in 29 languages. The new EPA software also has some more advanced scanning features, including automatic job separation using barcode sheets; the ability to recognize and skip blank pages; and automatic naming of scanned documents and folders using zonal OCR. Customers can also create one-button scan workflows. ◾

15" wide, 14" deep and 7" high. However, the print, scan, copy and mobile features of the XP-5200 are the same as on the new XP-4200 and the previous XP-5100.

The ISO simplex print speeds are 7.5 ppm for color and 14 ppm for black; the ISO duplex print speeds are 4.5 ppm for color and 6.5 ppm for B&W; and the ISO copy speeds are 5.5 ppm for color and 11 ppm for B&W. Epson does not mention scan speeds but highlights voice-activated printing.

The WorkForce WF-2960 is unchanged functionally and operationally from the previous WF-2860. However, the pricing for the new model is interesting. The 4-in-1 WF-2860 is priced $50 higher than the 3-in-1 XP-5200, while the 4-in-1 WF-2830 is priced only $15 higher than the 3-in-1 XP-4200. But the differences between the two pairs of related models are very similar. That is, the WF-2960 has all the features of the XP-5200 plus a 30-sheet simplex document feeder, a 33.6 Kbps fax modem, and wired Ethernet connectivity. The WF-2960 is also a couple pound heavier and a couple inches taller than the XP-5200. ◾

The $159 WorkForce WF-2960 is the priciest of Epson's four "updated" AIOs for the US market.

Epson in Europe Adds a Pair of Lower-End Expression Home AIOs

Along with the Expression Home XP-4200 and XP-5200 that Epson America launched on September 13, Epson Europe has shipped the related but lower-end Expression Home XP-2200 and XP-3200, although the XP-2200 is available only in some countries. This continues a trend in recent years by which Epson has rather inexplicably opted not to ship its most entry-level AIOs in the US market. In Europe, the XP-2200 and XP-3200 replace the XP-2100 and XP-3100 that Epson shipped in 2019 *(The MFP Report, Sep 19)*.

Prices for the new AIOs are unchanged from the prior models. Prices for the XP-2200 are €69 or £59 *(about $68)*, and prices for the XP-3200 are €89 or £74 *(about $85)*.

The easiest way to understand the Expression Home XP-2200 and XP-3200 is in terms of what Epson has removed or changed from the Expression Home XP-4200, keeping in mind that all three AIOs use the same supplies.

The XP-3200 is basically the XP-4200 with a smaller 1.44" color LCD, while the XP-2200 is quite a bit more stripped down. It has no LCD; no duplex output; slower ISO print speeds of 4 ppm for color and 8 ppm for B&W; and a slimmer 50-sheet paper tray. ◾

With a price equivalent to about $68, the stripped down Expression Home XP-2200 is Epson Europe's least expensive AIO.

Toshiba Brings Its Latest Line of Refreshed e-Studio MFPs to the US

PRODUCTS

On September 20, Toshiba America Business Solutions *(TABS)* formally launched its latest "next-gen" series of updated A3-size e-Studio MFPs. The new Office Collection 3 consists of seven color models and five B&W models.

Toshiba had already announced a series of ten updated e-Studio products in China and Japan a few months ago *(The MFP Report, Jun 22)*. At the time, TABS stated that the same new products would be available in the US in the fall. Nonetheless, TABS was already showing the new models on its US web site back in June, along with spec sheets.

Deciphering the New Models and Prices

In Japan, Toshiba made two strategic changes with the new line. First, it reduced the number of A3 MFPs between 20 and 65 ppm by one-third *(i.e., from 15 to 10)*. Second, the previous product line used one engine for the 20-50 ppm MFPs and another engine for the 50 ppm and faster models. In contrast, all of the new 20-65 ppm color and monochrome e-Studio MFPs share a single updated version of what had been Toshiba's lower-end A3 engine.

This means Toshiba's new 55 and 65 ppm color and monochrome e-Studio models are significantly smaller and relatively less expensive than the current models. This is similar to the approach Canon, Kyocera and Sharp have taken recently when updating certain parts of their product lines.

TABS is being somewhat less aggressive in pairing down the number of models, going from fifteen to twelve products between 25 and 65 ppm. TABS is replacing the 20-50 ppm color and monochrome MFPs it launched in the fall of 2018 *(The MFP Report, Sep 18)* with a new set of 25-45 ppm models. It is dropping the 50 ppm color and monochrome products it shipped a few months later *(The MFP Report, Dec 18)*. And it is adding the new 55 and 65 ppm models.

More specifically, TABS in its color product line is dropping the 20 and 50 ppm 2010AC and 5015AC. In between those two models, the new 25 ppm 2520AC and 2525AC, 30 ppm 3025AC, 35 ppm 3525AC, and 45 ppm 4525AC replace the same speed 2510AC, 2515AC, 3015AC, 3515AC and 4515AC. And TABS is adding the new 55 and 65 ppm 5525AC and 6525AC. Then in March 2023, the 55 ppm 5516AC will be dropped, and the 65 ppm 6516AC will be replaced by an updated model with the same speed.

Note that TABS and some other Toshiba TEC sales companies have not introduced the 20 ppm 2020AC color MFP — a slower version of the 2520AC — to replace the 2010AC.

In its monochrome product line, TABS is dropping 20 ppm 2018A, 30 ppm 3018A and 50 ppm 5018A. The new 25 ppm 2528A, 35 ppm 3528A and 45 ppm 4528A replace the same speed 2518A, 3518A and 4518A. And TABS is adding the new 55 and 65 ppm 5518A and 6518A. Then in March, the 55 ppm 5518A will go away, and the 6518A will be replaced by an updated 65 ppm model.

The two additional e-Studio MFPs that TABS has launched in the US — which Toshiba is not selling in Japan — are the 25 and 30 ppm 2525AC and 3025AC color MFPs.

Toshiba's list prices for the Office Collection 3 color models are $8,199 for the 2520AC; $16,739 for the 2525AC; $19,369 for the 3025AC; $24,639 for the 3525AC; $29,999 for the 4525AC; $30,999 for the 5525AC; and $39,109 for the 6525AC. And the list prices for the Office Collection 3 monochrome models are $10,849 for the 2528A; $13,479 for the 3528A; $16,419 for the 4528A; $19,889 for the 5528A; and $23,059 for the 6528A.

One thing that is apparent from these prices is that TABS is charging a significant premium for its new color models versus the same speed new B&W models. That premium ranges from 52% on the 2515AC, to 83% on the 4525AC.

Moreover, the list prices for the new e-Studio MFPs are all over the place when compared to the previous models.

Prices for the new 25-45 ppm color and monochrome models are about 19% higher than the original prices four years ago for the models they replace. Prices for the new 55 and 65 ppm color models are about the same as the original prices four years ago for the heavier-duty products they replace or complement. Prices for the new 55 and 65 ppm B&W products are about 20% lower than the original prices four years ago for the heavier-duty models they replace or complement. Most option and accessory prices are 10-19% more than they were back in 2018. And prices for various e-Bridge Plus connectors are 50-75% lower than they were when launched in 2018.

What's New or Different?

TABS shared a concise list of the relatively few ways in which the various models in its new e-Studio A3 lineup differ from each other, which is great. But like most hardcopy vendors, TABS did not do a lot to make clear what was new or improved in its latest MFPs. Not surprisingly, Toshiba has made only a few minor changes to the engine. It has made some changes to the e-Bridge Next controller. And it has introduced four new or improved paper-handling options.

We spotted three changes to the MFP engine. First, the paper trays now have a soft-touch auto-close design. Second, Toshiba has joined Fujifilm and Sharp in adding sensors that detect when someone approaches the MFP, causing it to wake from sleep mode. And third, all of the MFPs have new toner cartridges.

As for the supplies, the new toner cartridges have different yields for some but not all of the new models. For all of the new color MFPs, the black toner yield is slightly higher *(38,400 pages vs. 38,000 pages)*, while the color toner yield

The 65 ppm e-Studio 6525AC color MFP uses the same engine as Toshiba's slower and less expensive models. It will coexist alongside an updated heavier duty 65 ppm color e-Studio model coming in the spring.

Toshiba: e-Studio Update ➲ *... from p. 13*

is nearly 20% higher *(39,000 pages vs. 33,600 pages)*. For the new 25, 35 and 45 ppm monochrome MFPs, the 43,900-page yield for the black toner is unchanged. But for the new 55 and 65 ppm B&W models, the black toner yields only 39,800 pages.

The monthly duty cycle on the MFPs ranges from 83,000 pages on the 2520AC, to 243,000 pages on the 6528A.

Controller. In the controller, Toshiba has switched from using a 320 GB self-encrypting hard drive to using a 128 GB solid stated drive *(SSD)*. The memory has been upgraded, from 2 to 4 GB on the 25-45 ppm models and to 6 GB on the 55 and 65 ppm models. After some uncertainty as to what processor it was able to source, Toshiba ended up sticking with a 1.33 GHz dual-core Intel Atom chip.

There is also a new holder for a second network interface card so the MFP can operate on two IP networks simultaneously. But strangely, Toshiba does not appear to be selling the actual network card. For added security, there is a new optional Trusted Platform Module *(TPM)* 2.0 chip, although it is not on Toshiba's price list. And there is some type of built-in anti-malware capability, but Toshiba provides no details. Lastly, embedded ABBYY FineReader OCR, which used to be an overpriced $775 option, is now standard.

Otherwise, the features and options for the e-Bridge Next controller are unchanged. Gigabit Ethernet and a USB host interface are standard. The $748 WiFi/Bluetooth kit is still pricey, and there is also a $130 USB hub. And for additional security, Toshiba sells a 320 GB FIPS certified hard drive for $470, and an IPsec enabler software license is $859.

PCL and PostScript emulations are standard for printing, along with direct printing of PDF and JPEG files. Windows, Mac and Linux drivers are included, and mobile printing is supported via AirPrint and Mopria. A Unicode font enabler is available for $800. And Toshiba also sells a serverless MultiStation Print device license for $209. This allows users to pull a job sent to one e-Studio MFP and print it on any of the other e-Studio MFP on the network.

The network scan and scan-to-USB features are unchanged except for embedded OCR now being standard. Toshiba also still sells its $569 Metascan Enabler kit to add text fields to images. In addition, either one or two 33.6 Kbps fax cards with JBIG can be added for $1,159 apiece.

The e-Bridge Next controller continues to support Toshiba's web services based e-Bridge Open Platform. Additionally, the new MFPs support the existing $99 e-Bridge Plus connectors for direct scanning and printing with Microsoft Exchange, OneDrive for Business and SharePoint Online; Gmail and Google Drive; and DocuWare.

Paper-Handling. Toshiba has introduced four new or improved paper-handling options for the updated e-Studio MFPs. First, Toshiba has created an enhanced version of its 300-sheet single-pass duplex document feeder that now has double-feed detection, a feature that is still relatively uncommon on office MFPs. Second, Toshiba has added a new side-attached large capacity feeder that holds 2,000 letter-size sheets. And third, Toshiba has replaced the previous 50-sheet floorstanding stacker/stapler and booklet finisher with new 65-sheet stacker/stapler and booklet finishers.

Model by Model

Toshiba's new Office Collection 3 models can be divided into three groups based on mostly minor differences.

e-Studio 2520AC. This 25 ppm color MFP is an outlier in the series. It has been cost-reduced to achieve a low price for customers in less demanding environments.

While the engine is largely the same as in the other models, the 2520AC uses LED imaging technology — which was originally sourced from OKI — rather than laser imaging technology. However, it shares the same toners.

This model also requires an $859 "external interface enabler" in order to utilize Open Platform solutions. And the 2520AC has more limited standard and optional paper-handling than the rest of the lineup.

The 2520AC mainframe has one 250-sheet universal paper drawer, a 100-sheet bypass tray, duplex output, and a 550-sheet internal exit tray. Customers can add one 550-sheet universal paper feed unit for $743 and then add either a $299 desk; a 2,000-sheet tandem letter feeder for $1,470; or a 550-sheet universal paper feed pedestal priced at $1,170 that can be fitted for $653 with another 550-sheet drawer or with an envelope drawer.

The 2520AC can be paired with a $54 platen cover or a $1,999 recirculating document feeder that holds 100 sheets and has a 73 ipm simplex scan speed. For output, customers can select a $327 job separator tray; a 600-sheet internal finisher with 50-sheet stapling for $2,100; or a 3,250-sheet floorstanding saddlestitcher that can staple 65 sheet for $4,050. The saddlestitcher requires a $299 bridge unit, and there is also a $1,010 hole punch unit.

The 2520AC has a 10.1" color touchscreen control panel. And for $111 apiece, customers can add a numeric keypad, a Bluetooth keyboard, and a tray to hold the keyboard.

The Other 25-45 ppm e-Studio Models. The 2525AC, 3025AC, 3525AC, 4525AC, 2528A, 3528A and 4528A share all of the same standard and optional features as the 2520AC, with a few changes and additions.

As mentioned, these seven MFPs have a laser engine. And they come standard with support for e-Bridge Open Platform solutions. Each mainframe comes with dual 550-sheet universal paper drawers that have the new soft-close feature *(except for the 2528A)*; a 100-sheet bypass tray; duplex output; and a 400-sheet internal exit tray. These models can also print on 12" x 18" paper, and the color models *(but not the B&W models)* can print on banner paper.

These models support the same paper supply options as the 2520AC, plus the new 2,000-sheet external letter-size paper tray, which is priced at $2,670.

Like the 2520AC, these MFPs can be equipped with the platen cover or the recirculating document feeder. But they

The 25 ppm e-Studio 2520AC color MFP is an outlier from the rest of the series. It has been cost-reduced to achieve a relatively low $8,199 price for customers in less demanding environments.

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can also be paired with one of two 300-sheet single-pass duplex document feeders with scan speeds of 120 ipm for simplex and 240 ipm for duplex. The base feeder is $2,700, and the new version with double feed detection in $3,010.

These MFPs also support an additional $2,720 floor-standing finisher that holds 2,250 sheets and staples 65

sheets. It requires the same $299 bridge unit as the saddle-stitcher, and it can use the same $1,010 hole punch unit.

The 55/65 ppm e-Studio Models. Lastly, these higher speed models differ from the midrange units in that they have 6 GB of memory; they have the optical sensor for automatic wake-up; they have a larger 550-sheet internal exit tray; they do not work with the internal finisher; and the B&W models can also print banner sheets. ◰

Fujifilm Launches Remanufactured and Single-Function A3 Color Models

Fujifilm Business Innovation in September announced two new sets of midrange A3 color products in Japan.

On September 27, Fujifilm announced the ApeosPort-VI C RC series, which is comprised of remanufactured versions of six color MFPs it originally launched in late 2016 *(The MFP Report, Nov 16)* and sold through 2018. The newly launched C2271 RC, C3371 RC, C4471 RC, C5571 RC, C6671 RC, and C7771 RC have respective speeds of 25, 35, 45, 55, 65 and 70 ppm in both color and B&W. However, they do not appear on Fujifilm's Japan web site.

Fujifilm says the remanufactured models reflect the idea that "used products are not waste, but valuable resources." Fujifilm says they are remanufactured using "a unique closed-loop system" that reuses up to 84% *(by weight)* of the original machines. By reducing the number of new parts, carbon dioxide emissions are up to 76% lower than for newly manufactured equivalent machines.

Then on September 28, Fujifilm announced the Apeos-Print C4570 and C5570. These 45 and 55 ppm printers are single-function versions of the multifunction Apeos C4570 and C5570 MFPs that debuted last year *(The MFP Report, Apr 21)*. So far, these products are available only in Japan. The printers appear to have a somewhat different controller than the existing MFPs, but the printers do share the same standard and optional paper supply and output related features. However, the printer control panel has a 4" color touchscreen, versus a 10" touchscreen on the MFPs. ◰

The 55 ppm ApeosPrint C5570 color printer shares the same paper-handling features as last year's 55 ppm Apeos C5570 MFP.

Sindoh Announces OEM'd Foursome of A3 Monochrome bizhub MFPs

Korea's Sindoh announced its latest series of OEM'd A3 monochrome MFPs on September 16. The four new models are the N800, N801, N802 and N803, which have respective print and copy speeds of 45, 55, 65 and 75 ppm. The new Sindoh models are OEM versions of the same speed bizhub 450i, 550i, 650i and 750i that Konica Minolta launched two years ago *(The MFP Report, Sep 20)*.

Ironically, while Sindoh was founded in 1960 as Ricoh's first overseas subsidiary, it appears Ricoh no longer owns any shares in the publicly-traded Korean company. And most of Sindoh's product line today consists of A3 models that

are OEM'd from or that borrow extensively from products developed by or for Konica Minolta. Sindoh OEM's just three A3 color MFPs from Ricoh. The company generates most of its revenue in Korea, but it also sells a subset of its products in a smattering of other countries in Asia *(including China and India)* and in Europe. Sindoh established a small presence in the US back in 2012, but it failed to gain traction with dealers. Sindoh left the US in 2017.

The new N800 series products appear to mark the first time that Sindoh has OEM'd models from this segment of Konica Minolta's monochrome bizhub product line. The new MFPs fit in below the 75 and 90 ppm N910 and N911 that Sindoh launched in 2018, and above the 26, 30, 42 and 48 ppm N620, N621, N622 and N623 it shipped in 2020. It does not appear that Sindoh had OEM'd versions of the previous bizhub 458e, 558e and 658e that Konica Minolta shipped in 2018.

As with Sindoh's other OEM'd bizhubs, the N800, N801, N802 and N803 differ from Konica Minolta's own products in just a few ways. They have a different exterior color scheme and a modified user interface; they do not support the Open-API software platform or related solutions; and none of Konica Minolta's various i-Option kits are available. ◰

Sindoh's new 75 ppm B&W N803 is an OEM version of Konica Minolta's year-old bizhub 750i.

Sindoh's Profit Way Up in 2022

Sindoh in September released its second quarter financial results. The company's revenue for the April-June quarter increased a relatively modest 2.7% year-over-year to KRW87.034 billion, or $61.4 million. But Sindoh's net profit was almost ten times higher than in Q2 of 2021, coming in at KRW20.106 billion, or $14.2 million. These numbers produced an extremely high 23.1% net profit margin. For the first half of 2022, Sindoh's revenue was up a scant 0.3% from 2021, but net income increased a hefty 220%. And the company's net profit margin in the first half of 2022 was 23.7%, which was more than triple its 7.4% net profit margin for January-June 2021.

Canon Launches Lower-End A3 Monochrome MFPs in Emerging Markets

PRODUCTS

Between July and September, Canon launched several updated lower-end A3 monochrome imageRUNNER *(i.e., not iR ADVANCE)* MFPs in multiple emerging markets. The new models are based on two different, long-standing engines.

iR 2700/2700i Series. On September 7, Canon formally announced the 25, 30 and 35 ppm iR 2725, 2730 and 2735 in China. Over the summer, Canon had already quietly released the nearly identical 25, 30, 35 and 45 ppm iR 2725i, 2730i, 2735i and 2745i in other emerging markets, including India and parts of EMEA. Both sets of MFPs are defeatured versions of the 25, 35 and 45 ppm iR ADVANCE DX 4825i, 4835i and 4845i that Canon USA announced a few months ago *(The MFP Report, Jun 22)*.

Compared to the iR ADVANCE DX 4800i series models, the new iR 2700 and 2700i models have a less powerful controller, a smaller color touchscreen, no embedded solutions support, and fewer paper input and finishing options. However, there do not seem to be any functional differences between the 2700 and 2700i models, and Canon appears to sell only one or the other series in a given country.

Moreover, there is very little that separates the new iR 2700 and 2700i series models from the existing iR 2600 and 2600i series models they replace. Canon launched the 2600/2600i products in emerging markets nearly three years ago *(The MFP Report, Jan 20)*. We noticed only two changes. Canon has increased the speed of the recirculating document feeder on the 35 and 45 ppm models from 55 to 70 ipm for simplex and from 27.5 to 35 ipm for duplex. And the new MFPs support one fax line, rather than one to four.

The controller has a 1 GHz dual core processor, 2 GB of memory, 30 GB of eMMC memory, Gigabit Ethernet, WiFi, a USB device port, and two USB host ports. The MFPs have Canon's UFRII printer language and PCL emulation, with Adobe PostScript available as an option. They also have Canon's standard Universal Send network scanning features, with optional support for PDF trace and smooth and PDF digital signatures. As noted, a single 33.6 Kbps fax line can be added. And there is an optional ID card reader. However, there is no support for Canon's MEAP solutions platform.

The new MFPs have a 7" color touchscreen control panel, dual 550-sheet universal trays, a 100-sheet bypass tray, duplex output, a 250-sheet exit tray, and an A3 color scanner. The 35 and 45 ppm models have the sped-up 100-sheet document feeder. And the 25 and 30 ppm models have a 50-sheet recirculating document feeder with simplex scan speeds of 35 ipm for B&W and 12 ipm for color, and duplex scan speeds of 25 ipm for B&W and 8 ipm for color.

The key paper-handling options are two additional 550-sheet universal trays that attach to the bottom of the mainframe, and an internal finisher. Also unchanged are the 30,000-page toner cartridge and 172,000-page drum unit.

As sort of a footnote, Canon announced the 25 ppm Satera MF7625F in Japan on September 28. It is comparable to the iR 2725/2725i. And like other Satera devices, the MF7625F is an open distribution product, rather than one that is sold in office equipment channels. It replaces the MF7525F that shipped in 2019 *(The MFP Report, Dec 19)*.

iR 2425. The other A3 monochrome MFP that Canon China announced on September 7 is the 25 ppm iR 2425, which quietly shipped in other emerging markets over the summer. Despite the overlap in speed, the iR 2425 is based on a different engine than the iR 2700/2700i series models.

The iR 2425 is more compact, and it is strictly a desktop device. Canon targets the 2425 primarily at SMB customers. It is also the least expensive current generation A3 iR model Canon sells. While the MFP lists for the equivalent of about $3,500 in China, the street price is generally under $2,000.

The iR 2425 uses an updated version of the engine found in the 20 ppm iR 2006N and in the 22 ppm iR 2206 and 2206N. Canon launched those products almost four years ago *(The MFP Report, Jan 19)*, but the origins of the underlying engine go back well over fifteen years. No products based on either the existing platform or the updated platform are sold in the US.

The controller, MFP capabilities, and options for the new iR 2425 are nearly identical to those outlined above for the new iR 2700 and iR 2700i series products. The only difference we spotted is that PCL is optional, rather than standard on the 2425.

This controller is a big step up from the previous 20 and 22 ppm iR models, which had either 256 or 512 MB of memory, no storage, Ethernet, USB device and host ports, and WiFi. Those MFPs also had no PostScript option, no embedded OCR, and more basic PC and network scanning.

The iR 2425 is a 77-pound device that is approximately 25" wide, 26" deep and 20" high. Canon has redesigned the exterior of the new MFP. Most notably, it has moved the control panel from near the exit tray on the print engine on the right side of the device, to in front of the scanner on the left side of the MFP. And the control panel now has a 7" color touchscreen, versus the old 5-line text LCD.

The new MFP has a 250-sheet universal tray, a 100-sheet bypass tray, duplex output, a 250-sheet exit tray, and an A3-size color scanner. Customers can add a 500-sheet universal paper tray, and either a platen cover or the same 50-sheet document feeder that Canon includes with the iR 2725/2725i and 2730/2730i. In some countries *(e.g., India)* Canon sells a model called the iR 2425i. It is identical to the iR 2425 except that it includes the document feeder.

Lastly, the supplies for the new MFP have not changed. The iR 2425 and iR 2425i use the same 10,200-page toner cartridge and the same 66,000-page drum unit.
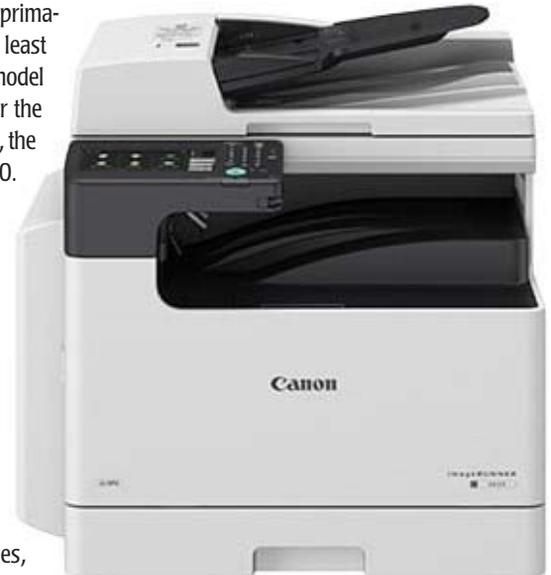
Although the new 25 ppm iR 2425 is the same speed as the new iR 2725, it is based on a different engine. The iR 2425 is more compact and strictly a desktop device. It is also the least expensive current generation A3 iR model Canon sells anywhere in the world.

Amazon: Little to Show for Its Initiatives in Hardcopy

TECH
TOPICS

Amazon dropped its physical Dash buttons in August 2019, and replaced them with an embedded Dash Replenishment capability that integrates with Alexa and certified compatible printers to make reordering ink or toner easy.

With Dash Replenishment, customers can track printer supply levels in the Alexa app, get notifications from Alexa when supplies run low, and reorder supplies from Amazon as needed. Amazon touts Dash Replenishment as taking advantage of its payment systems, customer service, and fulfillment network to give customers access to Amazon's low prices, broad selection, and reliable delivery.

To implement Dash Replenishment, a printer vendor uses the Alexa Smart Home Skill API and the Alexa Connect Kit *(ACK)* The vendor integrates the ACK module into its printers and pays Amazon an unspecified one-time fixed fee. The ACK provides the requisite managed services, software, and tools the printer vendor uses to develop and then to manage Alexa-connected smart products on an ongoing basis.

To use Dash Replenishment, the customer opens the Alexa app and searches for their printer vendor's Alexa Skill using the device discovery function. The customer then enables the Alexa Skill and links his or her account to Alexa. Once linked, customers' devices are discovered, and customers can set up Dash Replenishment for their printers.

When we checked two months ago, Amazon was selling more than 200 certified Dash Replenishment printer models. However, Amazon stated back on April 30 it stopped accepting new sign-ups for Dash Replenishment for all types of products, although existing Dash Replenishment customers could continue using the service. However, HP still has on its own web site what appears to be a working sign-up page to enroll new printers in the Dash Replenishment.

Moreover, Amazon also continues to offer "Auto Replenishment" for more than 80 printers. A few months ago, one could select either Auto Replenishment or Dash Replenishment when shopping for printers and other products, but one can no longer search for Dash Replenishment devices since new sign-ups for the service are no longer allowed.

Unfortunately, we could find no information on the Amazon web site or elsewhere that explains what Amazon's Auto Replenishment is or how it differs from Dash Replenishment.

And if that were not sufficiently confusing, Amazon sometimes steers printer customers instead to use Smart Reordering for ink or toner using Print with Alexa *(see below)*.

Alexa Printer Skills. It was almost eight years ago that Amazon shipped its first Echo smart speakers. In two years, Amazon sold about five million of them. And then in the following six years *(2016-2021)*, Amazon sold over 150 million more Echo devices, so it is not surprising that printer vendors have taken notice. However, Amazon's smart speakers sales did plummet 45% from 2020 to 2021.

By 2018, voice-enabling consumer printers to work in conjunction with Alexa *(and possibly Google Assistant or Microsoft Cortana)* had become the new "cool thing" in the hardcopy business. HP, Canon, Brother and Epson each developed a so-called "printer skill," which is sort of an Alexa app that can perform specific tasks. The goal was to drive much broader access to printing and printed content. HP even talked about eliminating the need for a smart speaker by integrating voice support directly in future printers.

Nearly every consumer inkjet printer and many low-end laser printers sold in the past three or four years works with the hardcopy vendor's printer skill. The challenge has been that these printer skills do not really do much, and what they can do is not very useful or practical. All one can print is a shopping list; a to-do list; coloring book pages; three games *(i.e., Sudoku, Bingo cards, word search puzzles)*; or a few stationery items *(e.g., ruled paper, graph paper, calendar)*.

None of these printer skills is able to check the supply of ink or toner or paper in the device. And none of them can actually print user-specified content from a PC, a phone or any web site. Moreover, these printer skills have not been meaningfully updated or enhanced since becoming available.

One somewhat different case is Sharp, which in late 2018 added a "copier" skill for its new A3 office MFPs. Ironically, the Sharp skill has no printing features. Instead, it provides limited voice support for copying and scanning.

In 2019, Amazon gave developers a way to create so-called skill connections that would enable Alexa to pass certain information from one skill to another. The idea was that skill connectors would provide a way for Alexa to print more types of content from a broader variety of web sites. But it does not appear that any hardcopy vendors have opted themselves to leverage these capabilities to broaden the range of content that can be printed using voice commands.

Fast forward to today. Among more than 100,000 Alexa skills that are available today from Amazon, just six work with printers. Canon has separate skills for its inkjet printers and its laser printers; there is one printer skill each from Brother, Epson and HP; and there is Sharp's copier skill.

Given their limited utility, it is not really surprising that these printer skills are relatively unpopular and not very well-liked. Amazon users have provided about 4,600 reviews for these six skills after four years; 77% of those reviews are just for the HP printer skill, while Canon's laser printer skill has just one review. The average scores *(on a scale of 1 to 5)* are 1.0 for Canon's laser skill; 1.6 for Brother's printer skill; 2.8 for HP's printer skill; 3.2 for Canon's inkjet skill; 3.3 for Sharp's copier skill; and 3.4 for Epson's printer skill.

Print with Alexa. Perhaps realizing these vendor-developed Alexa printer skills were going nowhere, Amazon two years ago released Print with Alexa as a standard capability on its Echo devices *(The MFP Report, Sep 20)*. Print with Alexa works with all existing voice-enabled Brother,
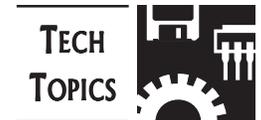
Nearly every consumer inkjet printer and many low-end laser printers sold in the past three or four years works with the vendor's Alexa printer skill. The challenge has been that these printer skills don't really do much, and what they can do is not very useful or practical. All one can print is a shopping list; a to-do list; coloring book pages; three games (i.e., Sudoku, Bingo cards, word search puzzles); or a few stationery items (e.g., ruled paper, graph paper, calendar). Or one can use Amazon's own Print with Alexa capability to print very selected content from a total of three web sites, and also monitor in or toner levels.

Amazon: Failing at Print ⤺ *... from p. 17*

Canon, Epson and HP mass market printers.

Print with Alexa brought three new things to the market. First, setup was simpler. A user could just say, *"Alexa, discover my printer."* Previously, one had to find and type the e-mail address of the printer in the Alexa smartphone app. Amazon also changed its command for printing from *"Alexa, ask my printer to ..."* to a more direct *"Alexa, print ..."*

Second, Amazon used the Alexa skill connections it introduced in 2019 to print content from three web sites. One could print kids's worksheets from JumpStart Academy; the daily crossword puzzle or Sudoku from the *Los Angeles Times*; and some recipes from *AllRecipes.com*. And lots more web sites were supposed to be coming. Print with Alexa could also print a shopping list or to-do list from the Alexa app.

And third, Print with Alexa could monitor the supplies in a printer and reorder more OEM ink or toner from Amazon *(with a 10% discount)* based on a user-defined threshold level. Amazon called this feature "smart reordering."

Amazon's grand vision was that lots of web sites would implement skill connections so users could print specific content from those sites. But it never happened. Not a single new web site has supported Print with Alexa since the launch two years ago. While Amazon still maintains a Print with Alexa web page, it would appear to be all but dead. Nonetheless, Amazon currently designates 331 printers of various types as "Works with Alexa."

Smart Sticky Note Printer. Then early last year, Amazon announced the $89 Smart Sticky Note Printer. The company's first and only branded printer was one of three "Day 1 Edition" concept products from a new Kickstarter-like program called Build It *(The MFP Report, Feb 21)*.

Amazon's idea was that these Day 1 Edition products would only be built if they got a sufficient number of pre-orders. Amazon got enough pre-orders in just three days to go ahead and build the Smart Sticky Note Printer. Amazon never said what the pre-order threshold was; only that it had sufficient pre-orders. But that was not the case for Amazon's Smart Nutrition Scale or its Smart Cuckoo Clock.

The Smart Sticky Note Printer was a simple black box measuring 4.7" wide, 4.7" deep, and 3.2" high. Most of the space inside is taken up by a roll of thermal sticky note paper and a 203 dpi direct thermal printhead. The AC-powered printer has a slit on top where the paper comes out; an LED "action button" on the top; an eject button on the left side; and a power port on the back. One tears off the printed note from the slot since there is no built-in cutter. And for connectivity, it had Bluetooth LE 4.2 and 2.4 GHz WiFi. The Smart Sticky Note Printer only works with Echo devices.

Despite those pre-orders, the Smart Sticky Note Printer was not a very compelling product. When it shipped a year ago, sales were lackluster and so were the customer reviews *(The MFP Report, Oct 21)*. The printer had a mediocre average rating of 3.2 out of 5: 49% rated it a relatively 4 or 5; and 38% gave it a decidedly low 1 or 2. And the pre-order price had also been replaced by a regular price of $114.

A lot of customers had two big complaints. Many customers had a lot of difficulty setting up the printer, and a lot of people were not happy with the apparently poor thermal print quality. Some customers also complained it was difficult to find rolls of the Post-It type paper for the printer. Amazon apparently did not sell any branded paper, nor did it provide links to third-party paper that worked with the printer.

Nonetheless, Amazon kept selling the printer — at least for a while. In recent months, however, Amazon shown the printer is *"currently unavailable."* We now take that to mean the Smart Sticky Note Printer has been discontinued. ◨
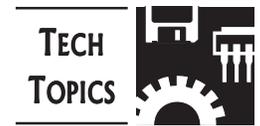
Despite mediocre to poor reviews, Amazon kept selling the Smart Sticky Note Printer for several months. More recently, Amazon has said the printer is "currently unavailable." We now take that to mean the Smart Sticky Note Printer has been discontinued.

HP's Old Accessibility Assistant Is Now the New Printing Voice Assistant

On April 25, at its Amplify Executive Forum in Palo Alto, HP relaunched the Accessibility Assistant device it had first announced more than four years ago *(The MFP Report, Aug 22)* and rechristened it the Printing Voice Assistant. However, it appears nothing has changed except the name. It could be that the Accessibility Assistant did not sell so well, and HP believes that what it needed is a new name.

The $699 device is about the size of a deck of playing cards. It connects to LaserJet Enterprise A3 and A4 MFPs and printers *(as well as selected scanners)* that utilize HP's FutureSmart controller and firmware. The Printing Voice Assistant connects via a cradle of sorts to the USB host port that is inside the Hardware Integration Pocket *(which HP calls the "HIP")* that is part of the control panel. But it can also connect to the rear USB device port on a compatible HP printer or MFP, and then be attached with tape strips to the side of the device or rest on an adjacent surface. HP includes short and long USB cables to connect the device.

HP described the "new" Printing Voice Assistant as a simpler, richer and more secure voice-directed solution than using a smart speaker to control an MFP, printer or scanner. When the user pushes the upper left button on the device, it reads aloud the information that appears on the control panel, including the available options and any information the user enters via the control panel. Pressing the large button at the bottom of the device allows the user to respond with voice commands. The Printing Voice Assistant recognizes about 170 English words and phrases, including numbers and a relatively short list of relevant commands *(e.g., copy, staple, color, letter, enlarge, tray)*.

Users can also program quicksets, which are sort of like macros. They are customized, pre-programmed voice commands that involve specific scanning, copying or printing tasks that would otherwise require multiple steps.

The other buttons on the Printing Voice Assistant are largely for navigation, including Previous/Left, Next/Right, Back, Home, and Start buttons. There is also a volume controls and a headphone jack on the side of the device. ◨

The $699 Accessibility Assistant device that HP launched four years ago is now the Printing Voice Assistant. However, nothing but the name has changed.

QBit Semiconductor Announces Sister Company to Serve OEMs in China

TECH TOPICS

QBit Semiconductor, a small Boston area developer of printer and MFP system-on-a-chip *(SOC)* processors, announced on August 11 the formation of what it described as a Chines "sister company" located in Shanghai. While QBit drove the formation of the new SynQ Technology, the company was set up and funded by New Kinpo Group *(NKG)*, which has also funded QBit since the company was formed in 2016. QBit has no ownership stake in SynQ.

Establishing SynQ comes at a time when Chinese IT companies — including China-based hardcopy vendors — are under pressure from the Chinese government to reduce dependance on foreign technology suppliers. Likewise, foreign technology companies are seeking to lessen their dependance on Chinese customers and manufacturing partners.

Right now, SynQ is a very small company that does not even have a web site. QBit's plan is to increase its collaboration with the new Chinese company over time. Initially, SynQ will take over serving existing and new QBit hardcopy customers that are based in China, while QBit will continue to work with hardcopy customers in the rest of the world.

In addition, QBit and SynQ will work as partners to jointly develop and cross license rights to new SOC integrated circuits for hardcopy devices — and conceivably for other devices — for the worldwide market. For those future chips as well, SynQ will handle China, and QBit will handle the rest of the world. However, new jointly developed chips are unlikely to be available commercially until 2025 at the earliest.

QBit was formed by a long-time group of silicon engineers with printing expertise who left Qualcomm six years ago. QBit received an initial $8 million investment from NKG in 2016. It had also expected additional investments from "a major Japan semiconductor company and a major Japan printer company," but those deals ended up getting scrapped, and NKG invested an additional $4.5 million in QBit in 2020.

NKG refers to a collection of four publicly-traded companies whose origins go back to 1973. NKG says it is a "world leader in electronic manufacturing services, original design manufacturing, and own-brand products." Its companies have locations in the US, China, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Brazil, Mexico, and the Philippines. QBit is part of one of these companies, Taiwan-based Kinpo Electronics, which reported $4.3 billion in revenue last year.

Today, QBit has around 60 employees in offices located in or near Boston, Taipei and Tokyo. In 2021, QBit had record revenue of $11.2 million, which was up 23% from 2020. But QBit has accumulated losses much larger than that.

Since 2016, QBit has had two avenues of business. It has continued to sell and support the existing Quatro SOC processors that Qualcomm acquired when it purchased CSR in 2015. And QBit has also been developing its own new SOC parts for printers and MFPs, while licensing the underlying imaging technology for those chips from Qualcomm.

QBit's first new chip is the QB6300, which debuted last year in Fujifilm's 30 ppm A4 color LED ApeosPrint C320dw printer and Apeos C320z 4-in-1 MFP. Versions of the QBit-branded QB6300 are also reportedly used in Deli's latest inkjet AIOs in China, and in the most recent laser MFPs from Lenovo and Xiaomi in China. QBit is working on two related hardcopy SOCs that will replace old Quatro chips to address a broader range of hardcopy devices.

Kinpo Electronics reported that QBit achieved record revenue of $11.2 million last year. That was up 23% from 2020, but the company has accumulated losses much larger than that. QBit's latest SOC parts are used in recent MFPs, AIOs and printers from Fujifilm, Deli, Lenovo and Xiaomi.