

Looking under the lid

How to get the most out of your office equipment

INTERVIEWED BY JAYNE GEST

When office equipment goes down or doesn't work properly, it can disrupt the entire business. And as the industry consolidates functions into one device, it's critical to have the correct equipment that meets your business's needs.

"It truly is a lifeline in an office," says Edward Kromar, director of service at Blue Technologies. "If it's a small office, it can almost stop the processes internally, as opposed to 20 years ago when it was just one facet of many. Understanding your vendor's service protocol is absolutely vital."

Smart Business spoke with Kromar about how to maximize your office equipment.

What should business owners know before investing in office equipment?

Take time to understand your business and processes. Knowing the volume you use ensures the equipment is big enough. But if printing is most important, you may need a multifunction device that allows you to categorize your priorities in the workflow, so all printing comes before copying or faxing.

If the function is mission critical, you may want a second unit. This is mechanical equipment — failures are going to happen — so you may need backup equipment and data storage. If scanning is imperative but you have an all-in-one device, then you need to consider having another unit to provide back-up scanning. Look for an alternative that doesn't break the bank but gives the necessary insurance, which could be a desktop device. In trying to understand your needs and priorities, develop and use your relationship with your office technology salesperson, which also helps you get the right product(s).

How does the technology life cycle work?

Technology is changing monthly, so a best

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practice is having the flexibility to move into different products with your vendor. Look for a product line with options and versatility as well as a history of improvements. Not only are your business needs changing, but a feature that wasn't out six months ago could add efficiency.

While there's no rule about how often equipment needs to be upgraded, make sure the technology still meets your needs. The faster your business is growing, the faster you'll need to update. And, if you come across a broken process, don't forget to consider that your office hardware could be part of the solution.

What's problematic about switching to digital phones?

Digital phone lines are very practical for businesses that want to save money. Unfortunately, fax technology has not kept up with digital phone technology, so they don't fit reliability together, and the industry is not spending research and development funds on merging these two. So, if you are changing phone systems and your organization has a high demand for faxing, you need to keep an analog phone line for your immediate needs and begin converting your clients to email communication.

What's important to know about color?

Color has helped businesses present, at

a more affordable cost, their marketing message to customers. But some business owners have misconceptions about their device's color and the difference between business and production color. Production color, which is often outsourced to print production facilities, handles high-end color, where a red will always print the exact same shade. Business color is an acceptable quality that can be used internally and sometimes for outside marketing pieces. You can buy devices of either type, but there's a cost difference. With help from your salesperson, you can discover what color needs to be used and when, including whether the volume justifies the cost of bringing it in-house.

How can your company maximize use?

First, your equipment salesperson should understand your IT support. Additional services and training may be needed to help make the transition seamless. An established equipment dealer can even provide support for more than just your hardware needs, the dealer might also provide various network support before and after installation.

You also need to fully understand the capabilities of the equipment you've purchased and how it fits with your business. If you don't know what your equipment can do, find out. Also, as your business changes, you could take advantage of a feature you never thought you would. ●