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Even as professional accountants continue to move toward the ideal of the paperless office, printers remain an integral component of all practices. Try as we might, some things still need to be on paper, whether because various local, state or federal entities haven't quite gotten everything set up to receive electronically, or because a contract or other agreement feels more official in three dimensions. Or maybe just because there is something more fulfilling about holding and reading a document than looking at it on a monitor.

Whatever the reasons, printers are a workhorse for professional services firms, especially for accounting practices, where document output demands can be very high. While the specific needs depend on the size of the firm, most require high volume output and specialized capabilities such as MICR printing functions.

And while there is still a need for a centralized print and copy location, especially in larger firms, many offices are opting to place multi-purpose machines on the desks of most staff. These machines enable printing, copying and scanning, without the user having to go to another room or hand the task off to someone else. While these are an excellent addition to a practice and certainly assist with productivity, they have their drawbacks. Most of these models are ink jet printers, not laser, which can diminish the quality of the end product and costs more per page of printing than laser ink models, which can cost as little as a penny per printed page of text. This is not a major concern for most printing tasks, but certainly is for more formal documents, when printing checks and when cranking out voluminous reports.

SOHO-LEVEL PRINTERS

rated printer in this category, costing around $200.

SMALL FIRMS
(Three to 10 staff)

When the number of staff connected to a network printer increases, the demands on that printer require a more hardy model capable of the workload. The SOHO-level desktop printers just aren't made for this level of work. But there are several models from Dell, Brother, HP and Samsung that offer increased paper capacity as well as other features many firms need. These models generally run in the $250 to $400 range. A couple of good performers in this market are the $299 Brother HL 5150DLT, which holds a full ream (500 sheets) and has output of 21 ppm with a monthly workload capability of 20,000 pages; and the $299 Dell Laser 1700N, which boasts 25 ppm and a 15,000 monthly capacity.

MID-SIZED & LARGER FIRMS
(10+ staff)

Larger firms and those that produce higher-than-average document output need heavy-duty printers that offer advanced features such as hands-free duplexing (printing on both sides of a sheet of paper). These products generally can load at least a ream of paper and have multiple input trays, allowing several different paper stocks to
be loaded simultaneously. Pricing varies widely depending on features, the amount of memory a printer has, the output speed and the monthly workload. On the lower end, the HP LaserJet 1320 costs $399 and is rated at up to 10,000 pages per month, with 22 ppm capacity. The HP LaserJet 2400 costs $549, with output at 30 to 35 ppm, and monthly output up to 75,000. Dell offers several models as well. From this point, price increases with increased speed, capacities and memory (which speeds up processing and printing time).

The needs of a practice should be evaluated before starting the process of finding a

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Technology