THE IMPACT OF THERMAL PRINTERS

Thermal printers play a critical role across a myriad of applications

ADAM ORTLIEB

Associate Director,
Marketing
Seiko Instruments USA
www.siiprinters.com

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What are the biggest advances that you've seen in printing technology in the past few years?

I think a number of recent advancements in thermal printing have been highly impactful. Smaller/lighter designs free up valuable real estate. In retail this provides the flexibility needed at the point-of-sale to tuck away peripherals and optimize space. In mobile applications, it goes without saying that users overwhelmingly prefer less cumbersome devices. It is simply easier to perform tasks without being weighed down. In embedded applications, such as kiosks, smaller form-factor printers have helped facilitate the deployment of more streamlined designs that are better suited for hotel lobbies and retail store aisles.

Continued enhancements in the reliability of thermal printers have elevated an inherently dependable technology to new heights. Reliability ratings are typically quantified as "total printing life" or "mean time between failure" (MTBF). The design improvements, rigorous testing, and rugged component sourcing implemented by trusted manufacturers have resulted in exceptionally reliable, long-life products. For users this directly translates into lower maintenance costs, reduced downtime, and a lower overall total cost of ownership.

For manufacturers such as Seiko Instruments, ease of use refinement is another area that is continually emphasized. We strive to simplify integration, setup and operation, while at the same time incorporating more advanced features.

Along with excellent reliability, dramatically improved printing performance—while perhaps a bit underrated—has actually helped deliver a better user experience and even increased revenue opportunities. With blazing print speeds, retailers are able to speed transactions and deliver valuable content such as coupons, loyalty program, and warranty verbiage without slowing down.

How can a printer solution provider distinguish him or herself from the traditional printer dealer?

The importance of technology and application expertise cannot be overstated. I think customers need a trusted advisor who is able to diagnose, articulate, and resolve real business challenges with the right technology. I think this includes the necessity for a menu of new options that help customers tackle the issues keeping them up at night. For many, I think it is also important to consider moving towards a service-based business model, with recurring and more predictable monthly billings.

Why do you think that the printer is still such an important part of the business environment, regardless of vertical market?

Thermal printers play an increasingly critical role across a myriad of applications and markets because they help tackle critical business issues. Receipts are not just receipts. As I alluded to, retailers can use receipts as a tool to generate incremental revenue. By adding coupons, retailers can increase in-store sales and enhance the user experience. They are also an effective way to build up loyalty program participation and drive social media engagement. They can even convey important warranty information.

In mobile worker applications, printer usage continues to expand by consistently demonstrating an impressive return on investment. Mobile workers can exchange information and transact with customers on the spot in real time. These systems also increase efficiency and dramatically reduce errors. This holds true in both the private sector as well as in government applications. With mobile citations, officers are more efficient, error rates plummet, and more tickets actually get paid.

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SEIKO INSTRUMENTS USA
21221 S Western Avenue, Suite 250
Torrance, CA 90501
(877) 905-2291
www.siiprinters.com