

Xerox makes a splash with ColorQube

WILL LOWER COLOUR COSTS AND REDUCED WASTE BE ENOUGH FOR XEROX'S SOLID INK TECHNOLOGY TO PENETRATE THE A3 MFP MARKET? JAMES GOULDING REPORTS

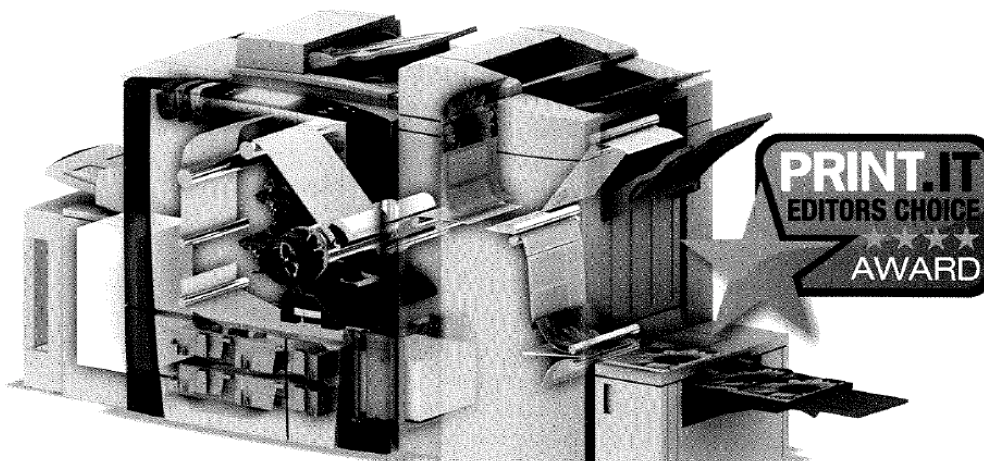
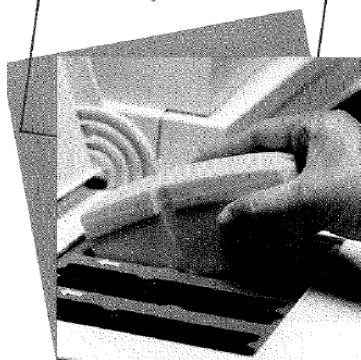
Ever since acquiring solid ink technology nine years ago, Xerox has spoken about its suitability for use in high speed, large format devices. Last month, it made good its – and solid ink's – promise with the launch of the Xerox ColorQube 9200 Series of A3 MFPs.

The development of a new printhead with twice the number of nozzles per linear inch has enabled Xerox to increase ink flow by 400% and achieve print speeds of up to 50 pages per minute in colour and B&W (85ppm in draft mode).

Throw in full A3 multifunctionality (colour printer/copier/scanner/fax), all the finishing options you would expect from a departmental MFP; and support for the customisable Xerox Extensible Interface Platform (EIP), and Xerox is confident that the ColorQube is a 'no compromise' alternative to MFPs based on laser technology.

"Over the last 9 years, solid ink products have been successful for Xerox and we felt that now was the time to bring ColorQube to market: it's a strong proposition in a market that's receptive to its key messages," explained Xerox Office marketing manager Nick Stainton.

TACTILE: XEROX SOLID INK STICKS BEING LOADED INTO A COLORQUBE MFP



EDITOR'S CHOICE: THE COLORQUBE 9200 SERIES HAS PRINT SPEEDS OF UP TO 50 PAGES PER MINUTE IN COLOUR AND B&W (85PPM IN DRAFT MODE).

KEY BENEFITS

These revolve around three key concepts: the environment, ease of use and affordable colour.

From an environmental perspective, solid ink's greatest advantage over laser is the amount of waste generated by consumables. According to Xerox, solid ink generates 90% less waste than comparable laser MFPs thanks to cartridge-free consumables (the ink sticks are simply dropped into a feeder, while the machine is still printing); and a printhead that is designed to last for the lifetime of the machine.

In other respects, ColorQube is less green. Xerox cites a study, which estimates that the ColorQube series uses 9% less energy and produces 10% fewer greenhouse gases than a comparable laser device, but it is important to note that this takes into account the production, transport and disposal of consumables and their packaging throughout its lifecycle.

It is perfectly valid to include such factors, but it does obscure the fact that solid ink MFPs are not as energy-efficient as modern toner devices. Comparing power consumption figures of the

ColorQube with Kyocera's new TASKalfa 500ci (50ppm B&W, 40ppm colour) clearly shows that the former is more energy-hungry.

The ColorQube consumes an average of 750 watts when printing (with a maximum of 1,410 watts) compared to 1,150 watts on the TASKalfa. But the real difference is in standby and low power modes. The ColorQube consumes 360 watts in standby, 200 watts in Low Power Mode and 113 watts in Sleep Mode, compared to 210 watts in standby and 19 watts in ECOpower (sleep) mode on Kyocera's device.

These figures are significant because it takes solid ink much longer to print from low power mode and sleep modes – 47 seconds and 3 mins 30 seconds respectively – compared to about 30 seconds from Kyocera's ECOpower mode. This means that in busy offices, solid ink devices are likely to remain in standby mode or at best Low Power Mode, which still consumes 200 watts compared to 19 watts in Kyocera's power-saving mode.

HYBRID PRICING

More compelling is ColorQube's Hybrid pricing structure. Instead of

having a single colour click charge regardless of the amount of colour on the page, Xerox has a three-tier pricing plan: Black Plus Useful Colour e.g. an office document with a logo and small graphic; Everyday Colour e.g. documents with moderate colour coverage, such as a web page; and Expressive Colour e.g. estate agent property details.

At the time of going to press, there were no UK pricing details but Nick Stainton quoted US prices of 1 cent for Black Plus Useful Colour, 3-4 cents for Everyday Colour and about 7 cents for Expressive Colour. Xerox is advertising overall colour page cost reductions of up to 62%.

NOT THE FIRST

Xerox is not the first manufacturer to offer variable click charges or, indeed, a low-waste alternative to laser technology. Two years ago HP made exactly the same claims for its Edgeline series of A3 inkjet MFPs, the HP CM8050 and HP CM8060.

Like the ColorQube, these high speed MFPs (up to 60ppm mono/50ppm colour) have three colour click charges: accent colour, which is charged at 0.9 US cents compared to 0.83 US cents for a B&W page; general office colour;



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and professional colour.

This feature alone should have generated a great deal of interest, but neither it nor other benefits such as reduced energy consumption (half that of a similarly specced laser device), lower servicing requirements or fewer consumables (and therefore less waste), seem to have caught the imagination of purchasers.

HP MFP category manager John Duckworth was unable to tell PrintIT how many Edgeline devices HP had sold in the UK nor what the devices cost (they are sold on a contract basis with service and support). However, he did intimate that the take-up had been slow and that HP was only now "starting to get some momentum" behind the technology.

It is hard to tell whether this is due to the limitations of the devices, notably a slow first copy out time (12 seconds) and limited

finishing capabilities, or whether it is due to business's innate suspicion of inkjet devices.

If the latter, selling the current generation of Edgeline MFPs is likely to become harder, as the number of rival technologies with greater acceptance in office environments increases (according to Stainton, Xerox sells as many A4 solid ink printers in the UK as it does A4 laser printers).

A THIRD WAY

Kyocera recently launched a 'managed print service' for its laser-based MFPs that combines traditional copier servicing and support with the supply of a specified number of consumables as and when needed throughout the term of the contract – all paid for up-front (if necessary through a lease with monthly payments).

In this way KYO print pack

delivers the main benefits of a traditional cost per page contract (e.g. the supply of consumables and maintenance) without some of the drawbacks, such as minimum monthly page volumes and a single colour click charge regardless of the amount of colour toner used.

Because customers pay for a volume of toner rather than for each page printed, they are not penalised every time they print a colour logo and can benefit from implementing toner-saving features, such as draft-print mode, that make toner supplies last longer.

The flip side is that you pay more for pages with high colour toner coverage, as there isn't the price cap offered by both traditional click charges and Edgeline/ColorQube-style variable charges.

CONCLUSION

Xerox's ColorQube is an exciting

development, but whether it offers enough benefits to change people's preference for laser technology is a moot point. Lower running costs and reduced waste alone are no guarantee of market acceptance – if they were Kyocera would be market leader in the UK print market.

However, the combination of these factors with ease of use, attractive consumables, vibrant colour print quality and reduced servicing and support should encourage corporate buyers to look at solid ink as an alternative to laser devices and allay any fears they may have about adopting what for many will be a new print technology.

"Solid ink will be new to many people," explained Xerox Europe's Robert Corbishley. "But there's nothing to fear. If anything it's easier to use and maintain than what they are used to."