

Better Printing Options

Thermal and hybrid printers are fueling the market. By Carly Bohach

In today's high-demand retail economy, the ability to deliver good customer service has never been more important. A noisy, slow printer can disrupt customer interactions at the point-of-sale (POS). Forward-thinking retailers are looking to thermal and hybrid printers to offer consumers a rapid and effective POS experience.

According to IHL Consulting, the printer market has increased by eight percent in 2005, driven by hybrid and thermal receipt printers. Thermal printers are designed to enable retailers to include high-quality bar code data directly on receipts, which expedites and simplifies merchandise return processes. These printers also assist in building brand identity through logos or creating other print enhancements that draw the customer's attention. Some thermal printers also have the ability to group similar items on the printed output, regardless of the order in which the items were scanned during the transaction process, creating a more readable receipt.



O'Neil LP3 Wireless Thermal Label Printer

Retailers large and small are realizing the advantages of the latest printers. Zagara's Marketplace, a family-owned grocer, is taking advantage of NCR's RealPOS receipt thermal printers. Zagara's recently implemented a 15-lane POS system that will handle customer service, front-end checkout, including express lanes and transactions at the deli, café and liquor store. Software includes NCR Advanced Checkout Solution (ACS), and hardware includes NCR RealPOS 80c terminals with the NCR DynaKey cashier interface, NCR RealScan scanners and NCR RealPOS thermal receipt printers. "NCR has provided us with a solution that is flexible, highly dependable and streamlines our transaction processing," says John Zagara, owner of Zagara's.

The appeal of the electronic check and check conversion (in terms of providing retailers with faster access to funds while reducing the risk of fraudulent transactions), coupled with the Check Clearing for the 21st Century Act (Check 21), has created a wider acceptance for hybrid receipt printers. These printers uti-

lize direct thermal technology to generate receipts and impact technology for the check acceptance function.

In addition, The *RIS News* and IHL Consulting 2006 Store Systems Study found that 55 percent of food/grocery and mass merchants/warehouse clubs are planning to implement check imaging in upcoming months. Goodwill Industries, for one, has selected the Epson TM-H6000II multifunction printer with TransScan digital check imaging and PC America's Cash Register

Express software as part of a 100-store, 300-register rollout. The rollout began with Goodwill's flagship division in April 2005 and will continue rolling out to four other Goodwill divisions throughout 2006.

Retailers also are taking notice of better graphics and additional functions offered by new inkjet receipt printers. With these new tools, retailers can print coupons and logos on receipts with graphics stored in the printer's memory. The challenge with these new printers is to print quickly and cost-effectively. ■

SCORECARD: Back Office and POS Printers

The chart below is a comparison guide of product specifications and functionalities in a specific category to help retailers begin their search for vendors in the RFP process. The chart is not a comprehensive resource. Please visit vendor Web sites for further information.

▶ BACK OFFICE		
VENDOR NAME/WEB SITE	PRODUCT NAME	SPECIAL FEATURES
HP www.hp.com	HP LaserJet 4350 printer series	Offers advanced networking features. HP provides support and services, including free telephone support, installation, maintenance and post-warranty support.
Intermec www.intermec.com	Intermec EasyCoder Printers	The wearable, portable printers allow for a full day of printing without recharging. Increased speed saves up to 30 minutes per day, per user.
Lexmark www.lexmark.com	Lexmark T634	Includes PDF printing and standard fonts such as bar code and OCR. Multifunction options add the convenience of copy, fax and color network scanning capabilities.
O'Neil Product Development www.OneilPrinters.com	LP3 Portable Thermal Label Printer	Prints one- to three-inch labels or paper stock, and prints on heavy stock for hang tags. Boosts increased paper capacity and battery life.
Star Micronics www.starmicronics.com	TSP800 Series	Includes logo store utility for coupons and graphic storage and barcode capabilities. Prints reports, receipts and labels from one printer.
▶ POS PRINTERS		
VENDOR NAME/WEB SITE	PRODUCT NAME	SPECIAL FEATURES
Dell www.dell.com	Dell Thermal Receipt Printer T200	Provides a triple interface (USB, Serial and Powered USB) and dual color printing. Thermal paper used for two color receipts is treated with two different chemicals that change color at the specified limits.
Epson www.pos.epson.com	TM-H6000III and Mobilink	TM-H6000III multifunction POS printer offers receipt printing and advanced check processing. Mobilink delivers wireless thermal printing.
IBM www.ibm.com/retail	IBM SureMark Printers	Provides thermal paper for accent color printing, an optional wall mount and includes check endorsing, handling and flipping.
TallyGenicom www.tallygenicom/mono	9022 and 9035 Monochrome Laser Printers	Includes RISC processor to simplify tasks.
Zebra Technologies www.zebra.com	Cameo 3 and RW 220	Provides an optional magnetic stripe or Smart Card reader for payment processing. Receipts are available with preprinted or watermarked logos.