



Buying Used Wide Format Printers - What You Should Know

OVERVIEW

Remember when people used to tune-up their cars, replacing plugs, points and adjusting the carburetor? Today, cars no longer have spark plugs, points and condensers so average people can no longer perform a tune up. Now a qualified technician with the proper tools and training is needed to properly diagnose and repair potential problems.

So, too, has the digitization of construction drawings, GIS maps and new workflows led to a myriad of changes in the way today's wide format printing equipment works and how quickly equipment updates occur. Today's printers need to keep pace with evolving CAD application and driver software updates. Operating systems continue to add new functionality and may not be backward compatible with older printers. Compatibility with new technology is one of the key issues to consider when buying a used large format printer - both today and for the number of years you intend to keep the printer. Functionality not commonly available 3-5 years ago like printing and scanning in color may now be necessary.



WHY BUY A USED PRINTER?

People primarily buy used equipment to save money. With the price of used printers often 50% - 60% of the original manufacturer's suggested retail price, the perceived savings can be quite attractive. However, to be sure that perceived savings turn into actual savings, the purchaser needs to be aware of various hidden costs commonly associated with used large format printers.

A used wide format printer could be one that has just come off a 5-year lease or one that has many "miles" on it in terms of print volume. In both cases, a portion of the useful life of the printer is gone. In the used wide format printer market, there are no CARFAX® Vehicle History Reports™ to provide the details you need to know to make a wise purchase

decision. To be sure you are not buying someone else's problem; the old adage of "Buyer Beware" is a good one to follow.

This whitepaper will explore eight key factors to consider that can add increased risk to purchasing a used wide format printer in today's complex digital world.

EIGHT KEY CONSIDERATIONS

1. SECURITY

To be network and security compatible with many of the latest IT requirements, a wide format printer's controller should be running a Windows® 7 operating system or higher. Most older printer controllers will not meet these requirements; however a select few may have compatible upgrades. If not, the printer could be useless in a secure environment. Be sure you do not get an operating system on the printer you buy that is "frozen in time".

Also, as information has increasingly become electronic, the protection of it has demanded changes in printer security. Whether it's overwriting deleted files to prevent them from being read by unauthorized parties, requiring user authentication prior to printing or scanning sensitive information, or needing a removable hard drive for certain IT environments, older printers more often than not do not provide these security features.

2. SOFTWARE LICENSES

As with personal computers, often some software licenses cannot be transferred to a third party. This means the software license(s) you acquired as part of the used printer may not be transferable to you. For more information, consult with your attorney to be sure that the software license is transferable to third parties (you). Otherwise, the cost savings of the used equipment could be offset by the cost of additional software license fees or even damages for infringement. The Business Software Alliance, the largest IT group formed to address software piracy issues, offers substantial rewards to end users for reports of software license violations. As a precaution, you may want to include the cost of getting new software licenses for your used equipment purchase, assuming that they are even still available.

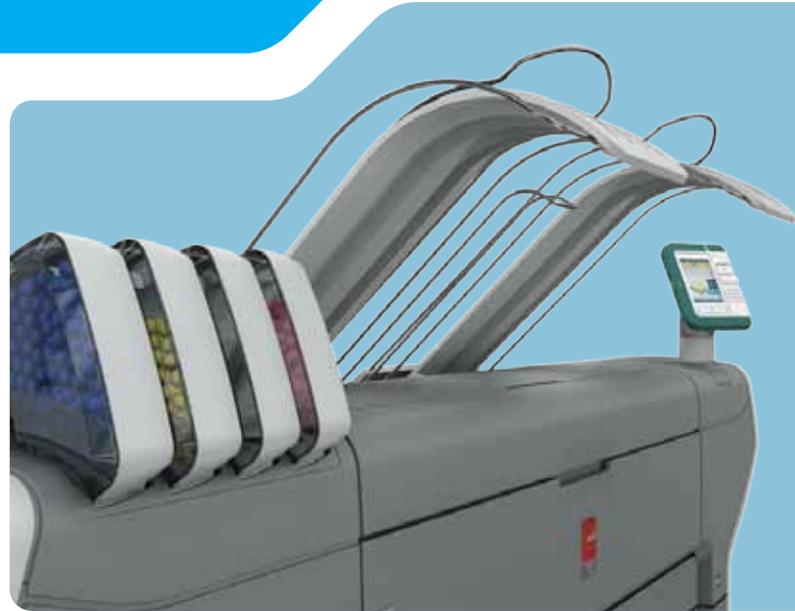
3. FILE PROCESSING SPEEDS

Due to the technology available when the printer you're considering was initially launched, some older printers have slower processing speeds and smaller memories than newer models. Slow processing speeds mean files take longer to process before printing. Network cards on older equipment are typically 10Mbps or 10/100Mbps at best. Today's systems connect to the network at 1000Mbps, which allows the movement of files 100 times faster than 10Mbps. A smaller printer memory can take more time to print today's larger multi-page PDF's, GIS or BIM files.

4. SERVICE AND PARTS

If you do not buy a used printer from the manufacturer or one of its authorized dealers, the issue of service and parts support must be addressed. You've found a great deal online, but before making the purchase, consider the following issues:

- You will likely need service and parts support for your used machine since older equipment may experience more downtime leading to a higher frequency of service calls. Adjustments and parts do wear out over time.
- Older equipment may be closer to obsolescence, which could lead to service and parts availability issues.
- Some specialized parts can be difficult to get like electronic circuit boards, controllers, print heads and power supplies. With older equipment, there is a risk that the machine may not be repairable. If available, these parts can be very expensive – circuit boards can cost hundreds of dollars to more than \$1,000 plus the labor to diagnose the problem. Printing drums can cost \$1,500 plus labor.
- The distance to you from the closest service point could be considerable, lengthening the printer's downtime or increasing the cost of service.
- A third-party service provider may not be as knowledgeable as the manufacturer or an authorized dealer. In some cases, this could lead to excessive parts replacement vs. diagnosing the real problem.
- Service contracts often are not available on used equipment, and parts are typically more expensive without a contract. To get service from a manufacturer, it's likely the printer would have to be inspected, refurbished, and brought up to current specifications, adding materials and labor costs to your purchase.



5. PRINTER DRIVERS

Print drivers can be a big issue with older equipment. Manufacturers typically do not update drivers for discontinued equipment. As a result, drivers for older systems can be a major challenge or not work at all when operating systems are updated at individual workstations. Since drivers may be updated every 2-4 years, a 5 year old printer may be one to three generations behind in print driver technology. The result, printing from your CAD or other windows applications may not be fully supported, so your print could be missing important fonts, layers, line weights, etc. Think of the potential cost and liability implications that could cause when creating a job estimate from an inaccurately printed drawing file.

6. PRINT QUALITY AND COLOR OUTPUT

Print quality is always an important consideration when buying a used wide format printer. Older used printers may print at a lower resolution, making it more difficult to render the quality required with complex black & white and color files. Older printers may also be monochrome only, meaning it will print colors as shades of gray, even though the original CAD drawings were created in color. Tests have shown that interpreting a monochrome version of a color drawing takes more time to do correctly at best – or results in inaccurate information at worst.

7. FINANCING



As with cars, leasing used wide format printers usually carries higher financing rates. Leasing can spread the cost of your investment over several years, but it also locks you into already old technology for the term of the lease, increasing potential obsolescence issues.

8. TOTAL OPERATING COST

In addition to the purchase price of a printer, daily operating costs may be a consideration. If your print volume is low, the printer will likely be in stand-by mode most of the day. Older equipment is often not as energy efficient as newer models. For example, older roller-based wide format printers can draw as much as 1,000 watts in stand-by mode. Printers with newer technology can draw as little as 39 watts. Depending on your energy rates, that difference can add up to substantial excess energy costs over time.

SUMMARY

Many of the considerations already described have cost implications – either directly or as a result of lost time. Consider the implications of the following when deciding whether the perceived savings in the price of a used vs. new wide format printer is substantial enough to justify the following:

- Slower file processing times
- Inability to print or print correctly large, complicated files or current file formats
- Misreading files printed in shades of gray vs. color
- Parts failures or parts obsolescence
- Increased downtime
- Substandard print quality
- Unqualified service support
- Cost to bring printer up to serviceable specs
- Cost of parts without a service contract
- Cost to remedy whatever problems occur

Only you can determine if there is sufficient reward for your business by purchasing a used wide format printer. It always feels great to find a “deal”. However consider how technology has changed over the past several years and how it is likely to change in the future. Then get as much information on the used equipment as possible to enable you to determine if the initial savings are worth the risks. Is the initial savings really a savings or are there hidden costs that will use up those savings or more? Can you afford to live with outdated technology into the future?

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