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## **Office-equipment dealers: No duplicate for service**

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Copiers and printers are among the common appliances taken for granted by the average office worker. But that can quickly change when such office equipment is unavailable.

“Everything kind of rests on these machines today,” said Greg Blagden, the sales manager at Copy-Pro Inc. in Woburn. “Everybody is doing their printing and copying in color today for marketing and presentations and sales calls, and if the machines go down, you’re taking down a company’s ability to market or communicate with its customers.”

For those reasons, when it comes to choosing the right dealer of copiers, printers, faxes or all-in-one multifunction machines, top considerations often include the quality of service a dealer can offer.

Blagden said businesses want to work with authorized dealers with given brands — Copy-Pro is affiliated with Canon and Kyocera, for example — and with firms that can quickly provide service when something goes wrong. Being authorized to work on equipment is especially important now that most printers and related devices are connected to a company’s computer network, he added.

Randy Rezek, operations manager at Town Business Systems Inc. in Norwood, said the company has a same-day response policy when it comes to calls from customers.

Just as importantly, TBS hires and retains experienced technicians. “We want to make sure we can fix the problem in one visit as well. It doesn’t do any good to get there quickly and then have to come back,” said Rezek, adding that many TBS customers sign maintenance and supply contracts. “People like the idea of a one-stop shop.”

Industry insiders say the rising dominance of fully networked multifunction machines that print, scan and copy is changing the office equipment landscape, as is the sharp drop in pricing for digital color copiers. Meanwhile many businesses that

buy or lease such machines may be underutilizing their equipment's capabilities, said Bill Brikiatis, director of corporate marketing at eCopy Inc., a Nashua, N.H., maker of document imaging software.

"A lot of companies don't even know how much the scanning function can do. A good office equipment dealer will talk to companies about scanning, especially when those companies are taking documents to off-site locations for storage," Brikiatis said. "In a lot of cases, companies spend a lot to transport documents back and forth from storage when in reality, for very low cost, you can get that storage and the ability to retrieve instantly."

One of eCopy's clients saved more than \$140,000 a year by scanning documents rather than sending them off-site. Digitizing documents can also boost security, Brikiatis said, because the process makes those items easier to track and secure.

Given the slowing economy, a business might also want to work with a dealer that can offer flexible options in terms of buying, leasing or — in the case of short-term projects — even renting equipment.

Copy-Pro also actively buys and resells used equipment with full warranty and service protection. Blagden said economic slowdowns bring a glut of barely used office equipment onto the market that companies can get at steep discounts.

"Those discounts can be considerable and, at times like these, people are looking to cut costs wherever they can," he added.

A good dealer can also help a business make smart long-term financial decisions about its office equipment, evaluating options such as leasing terms and whether it makes sense to delay upgrades to get more use out of an older machine.

"We generally don't steer a customer one way or another on the lease or buy decisions," said Rezek of TBS, which is an authorized dealer of Panasonic all-in-one machines. "Our role is to give them good advice and be their experts and help them make the best decisions for them."