It's What's Outside the Box That Counts

Understanding clients' end-to-end processes is the key to selling print and imaging

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Corporate Solutions are an integral part of the Brother brand and overseeing this division is Departmental Head, Luke Howard. Now in his eighth year at Brother Australia, Luke brings a wealth of information with an impressive line-up of past roles in product, channel and account management within the IT industry.

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Print and imaging is a highly competitive market, but to avoid becoming caught up in pure price battles, it's essential to add value by understanding clients' business needs. That way, you can design a tailored solution that does much more than just 'what's printed on the box'.

What's your key focus when selling print and imaging to corporate customers?

It's actually simple: Find out as much as you can about the client and what they are actually doing. The key thing is to ask "how and why" as often as possible so you get a better understanding of their full ecosystem.

When you do that, you can offer sound advice, solutions and methods of improving the workflow far beyond just the print device. It's not about 'like for like' anymore; it's about streamlining their workflows. If you don't ask "how and why", you become a commodity rather than a value-added solution provider.

But isn't the IT world increasingly moving toward digital document management?

Absolutely. But even in a digital document management solution, you still need to have an on-ramp to get information onto that system, whether that's a standalone scanner, or an MFD or MFC with a scanner built into it.

Print is still vitally important to most businesses, but we are seeing unnecessary printing being reduced and we are happy to help in that. From a workflow ecosystem perspective, high speed and reliable scanning is becoming as important as the print side.

Printer displays are starting to look like tablet devices in their own right!

Yes, indeed -- printers really are sophisticated computing devices. For example, on our colour lasers, a button could be set up called 'scan invoice' which has been set up by our presales team in consultation with the business, and activates the workflow for invoice processing.

Press it, and the printer will scan the invoice, OCR the text on it, send a digital copy to a document management server, email a copy of the invoice to accounts payable and email a copy of it to the warehouse manager so they can make sure stock levels are matched up accordingly. The user only sees one simple button push but the machine is carrying out a string of different functions.

We are focused on being part of the infrastructure of the business rather than just being a simple device manufacturer.

What makes Brother different from other print and imaging brands for corporates?

One of the biggest differences is that we are 100% channel. While we have a team of dedicated end user salespeople, they cannot transact business at an end user level – every piece of our business goes through a channel partner. An awful lot of partners out there are very wary about sharing end user information or projects with manufacturers, because they are worried business may be taken by the manufacturer. That is impossible for us to do. It's in our DNA to make sure everything is 100% channel driven.

What does Brother do to lighten the load for IT teams?

We partner with a lot of different resellers and managed print service providers. They are uniquely positioned to ensure problems never arise – whether that is printer servicing or just-in-time toner and ink delivery.

We also have free lifetime telephone tech support based in Sydney, which is truly rare these days. Any end user of Brother anywhere in the country can call for assistance free of charge and we will talk them through any issue.

Printers and mobile devices traditionally haven't linked up very easily. Is this changing?

We are collaborating heavily with handset and mobile OS vendors to make sure our devices work with all platforms. We are well known for our quick handshake with mobile devices. A lot of that capability has actually flowed from our strength in the consumer retail world – where home and small business users expect cutting-edge mobility integration.

Is corporate printing essentially limited to mostly A4 and the occasional A3 print?

Businesses are increasingly printing visitor labels, asset tagging, contractor labels, labelling ports in data centres, or even more unusual cases like forensic evidence collection labelling.

Brother's labelling solution and mobile thermal printers give us a great ecosystem advantage over other vendors that simply do office document printers. We have mobility printing solutions that provide everything from 2-3 inch labels through to A4/A5/A6 thermal printers. The technology advancements in thermal have been amazing – the paper is now long lasting – up to 20 years archival life – and the print quality looks laser-like.

We are really proud that we can serve that full spectrum of needs – and are one of the only vendors that crosses that gap and can provide wide integrated solutions.