Printers might not be enterprise best sellers, but that does not mean customers haves stopped buying them-- the "paperless office" is still some time away, and until then printers retain a mission-critical place in just about every business.



According to a recent IDC report , printers and MFPs are on something of a decline in W. Europe, with negative performance on the inkjet side even if laser printers are on the increase. This is a trend seen throughout all mature markets, and is at least in part due to the different way employees of different ages work. Millennial-aged employees prefer using digital devices, while older workers continue to use papers, leading to offices where some rarely print while others want to print just about everything.

In a report on the printer market in CEE, IDC repeats such concerns, stating "the ongoing digitalisation of paper-based processes in business, together with the increasing preference for electronic documents among both businesses and consumers, are expected to be the major inhibitors for sales of printing devices in developed CEE countries."

The analyst does point out one growth segment-- multifunction printers. Most businesses prefer MFPs to single-function printers, and companies are capitalising on the trend by adding more MFPs to their product lines. One example is Xerox, who recently launched the ConnectKey portfolio of 29 printers and MFPs , all with mobile and cloud connectivity features to "move easily between the physical and digital worlds."

Another opportunity comes in devices able to handle larger sheets of paper. A3 printers are

increasingly popular, and are arguably one reason behind the $1.05 billion acquisition of the Samsung printer business by HP . Globally large format printers are still on a growth track, as 2016 shipments and revenues are up by over 4% according to IDC.

"The mix of printers continues to change as the technology and the needs of end users evolve," the analyst says. "The need to invest in the latest technology, to expand their business, to improve their bottom line, and even just to remain competitive is one of the defining characteristics of the large format digital printing market."

A final printing trend to keep an eye out on is managed print services (MPSs)-- even Gartner is doing exactly that, placing MPS in the Magic Quadrant for Managed Workplace Services (MWS). Such services are popular with SMBs, thanks to a large variety of print management software options and lower pricing. MPS providers are also looking to branch further into the rest of the IT environment, as seen with the 2011 acquisition of IT service provider All Covered by Konica Minolta.

Go Gartner Magic Quadrant for Managed Workplace Services Europe

Go IDC: Western European HCP Market, Q3 2016:Mixed Performances but Laser Shipments Made Gains

Go IDC Tracked Sales of Over 5 Million Printing Devices in Central and Eastern Europe in 2016

Go IDC: Worldwide Large Format Printer Shipments Up Narrowly in Q4 2016