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OFFICE IMAGING PRODUCTS 2003: BLI'S PICKS OF THE YEAR

During the testing period for this year's awards, which ran from the summer of 2002 to the late spring of 2003, more than 120 multifunctional products, fax machines and printers were subjected to BLI's rigorous in-house evaluation. The battery of tests includes an extensive durability test during which each unit is run at the manufacturer's maximum recommended monthly volume. In addition to assessing reliability, the tests are designed to evaluate such critical factors as misfeed frequency, copy and print quality, copy and print productivity, ease of use and economy, as well as connectivity issues such as feedback to workstations, administrative utilities, print drivers and multitasking.

As is the case every year, some models performed below

the bar in one or more areas, while others clearly excelled. While many products performed well this past year, a number stood out from the rest as clearly superior to their competition. Each year, with its "Pick of the Year" awards, BLI gives special recognition in each category to the products that provided the most outstanding performances in the laboratory, as well as the vendor whose overall product line was demonstrated to be the best by virtue of its cumulative test results (of course, only units tested by BLI are eligible to receive awards). The purpose of these awards is to better guide equipment buyers in their acquisition decisions.

Among the winners is...

Minolta CF3102 w/CN3102e Controller

Outstanding Full-Color Multifunctional Imaging System for General Office Applications, 2003

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The Minolta CF3102, as tested with the optional internal CN3102e (Fiery X3e+) controller, has been named an "Outstanding Full-Color Multifunctional Imaging System for General Office Applications" in BLI's 2003 "Pick of the Year" awards based on an exemplary performance in testing that earned it BLI's "Highly Recommended" rating. "Our test of the CF3102 shows that it offers everything needed to serve the needs of office users, including strong reliability, fast 31-ppm speed in both black and full color, very good overall output quality, very good ease of use, competitive acquisition costs and lower-than-average supplies costs," said Bernard Lyons, BLI senior test technician.

The LED-array-based CF3102 completed its three-month 90,000-impression test with just one service call and three misfeeds, translating to a misfeed rate of one per 30,000 impressions, proving its reliability. Contributing to high uptime



Minolta CF3102

for the unit is its easy-to-maintain design that employs user-replaceable imaging units that contain the drum as well as developer, eliminating the need for a service call and associated downtime when the drums reach their expected life. Moreover, the life of the black photoconductor unit, at 80,000 impressions, is the highest for models in this group.

In addition, the unit's 600-x-600-dpi output at 8-bit color depth was judged to be very good, receiving BLI's highest image quality rating for color business graphics and photo-

graphs, as well as for all types of output in black mode. Colors were vibrant, and the coverage of the unit's polymerized toner was very consistent, giving output a very smooth appearance. Further, testing revealed that copiers offer good fidelity to the original and that color drift was kept to a minimum during the test, indicating the effectiveness of the unit's calibration methods, one of which is automatic.

A productive unit overall, the Minolta CF3102 employs four drums to output at 31 ppm in both color and black and white—a speed that's among the fastest available on the market for color multifunctional units targeted at office workgroups. Moreover, BLI's testing revealed that the unit's overall efficiency rates in both black and color copy modes are competitive in simplex mode and above average in duplex copy modes. Indeed, overall efficiency is well above average when outputting in black in the 2:2 duplex copy mode. First-copy times are also faster than the average for color units. Moreover, as tested with the optional CN3102e print controller, which is based on a 700-MHz Pentium III processor, first-print-out time for BLI's Word test document, as well as the raster times for nearly all the other file type types used in BLI's raster speed tests, was faster than average for color systems tested to date.

The Minolta CF3102, which is priced at \$17,395, also offers very good ease of use. Its large, uncluttered, easy-to-read touch-screen control panel tilts to three different angles and features an intuitive menu system. Particularly noteworthy are its easy-to-make color adjustments for copies. Copy output can be adjusted for color balance, brightness, contrast, saturation, sharpness, hue and density. Noteworthy is that the unit can produce a test copy showing seven different images of the original—one for the standard setting and one corresponding to each of the six different settings over which those attributes can be adjusted. Users can then simply choose the setting that best fits their needs, eliminating costly and time-consuming trial and error. Also contributing to its good overall ease of use are easy procedures for loading paper, adjusting paper drawers, removing misfeeds and replacing toner, the waste toner container and the imaging units. Ease of use as a printer, configured as tested with the optional CN3102e print controller, was also good, both for setup on the network and from the drivers, which include PCL 5c and PostScript 3, with support for Windows 95, 98, 2000, NT 4.0, Me

and XP operating systems. Support is also available for Mac OS 8.5-10.2. The ColorWise color management tools give users extensive control over color output.

Contributing to the unit's good ease of use from the desktop is the very good feedback provided to end users' workstations and the wide range of bundled utilities that give administrators extensive control over the management of the device, print jobs and color output.

The print controller tested also gives the unit the ability to scan files to the hold queue of the Fiery controller, to mailbox storage on the device, to an e-mail destination or to a designated directory on an FTP server. The Minolta CF3102 is also distinguished among color multifunctional products by the very high degree of flexibility it offers, due in part to its memory. While 512 MB of copier memory and separate print controller memory of 128 MB (expandable to 256 MB) and a 10-GB hard drive are standard, the unit was tested with the optional 10-GB hard drive for the copier function and an additional 128 MB of print controller memory. In testing, the unit demonstrated support for scan once/print many, enabling output of collated sets in copy as well as print modes even without a finisher. The unit also offers very good multitasking capabilities, with users able to program multiple copy jobs—limited only by memory capacity—while another copy or print job is in progress. The unit's paper-handling features are also versatile, noted Lyons. For example, up to 140-lb. index can be fed not only from the unit's single-sheet bypass tray, but also from the standard multipurpose paper drawer (250 sheets), both of which accommodate up to 12" x 18" for outputting full-bleed 11" x 17" images.

Options include additional paper capacity, automatic duplexing, a 100-sheet reversing automatic document feeder and a choice of finishers—including the tested booklet finisher, which can be configured with two- or three-hole punch and can fold and booklet-staple up to 10 sheets to make up to 40-page booklets.

Offering an exceptional blend of strong reliability, fast speed, good output quality, versatile functionality and competitive pricing, the Minolta CF3102 is one of the best choices available for offices in need of an all-around quality color multifunctional product and is highly recommended by BLI for monthly volumes up to 40,000 impressions.