



INSIGHT

Konica Minolta Takes an Aggressive Stance on Sustainability with Its Clean Planet Recycling Program

Keith Kmetz

IDC OPINION

The Clean Planet Recycling Program from Konica Minolta Business Solutions U.S.A. Inc. (Konica Minolta) for its printer and MFP consumables (e.g., toner cartridges, drums, and developer units) is not just another recycling program but thoughtfully offers customers important benefits that encourage participation. Key benefits include:

- There are no costs to the customer for participating in the program.
- Transportation costs are minimized by utilizing multiple locations across the country to process the Konica Minolta consumables.
- A "no landfill" guarantee eliminates any concern about a Konica Minolta toner cartridge or part processed in this program going to a landfill facility.
- All consumables used in all Konica Minolta printers and MFPs are covered — not just select models in Konica Minolta's product portfolio.

IN THIS INSIGHT

This IDC Insight analyzes Konica Minolta's Clean Planet Recycling Program for toner cartridges and other imaging consumables.

SITUATION OVERVIEW

Over the past several years, many companies have pushed sustainability initiatives to the top of their business operations' priority list. This has been done to validate good corporate citizenship, but a company's sustainability programs have also been shown to make good business sense. Such sustainability initiatives are often influential in maintaining or winning opportunities in today's business climate. Companies want to demonstrate their sensitivity to the environment with their own internal processes, but it is also necessary to extend this sensitivity throughout their business supply chain (e.g., customers and suppliers) to demonstrate a truly sustainable operation.

Printer and copier companies have come under scrutiny in recent times because this market has been viewed (unjustly, in my opinion) as a violator of the sustainable movement. Much of this negative view is tied to the recurring use of toner and ink cartridges associated with printing/copying on paper.

Printer/MFP toner cartridges run out on a regular basis, but many users are unaware of how to dispose of them. Unfortunately, the easiest approach is to just throw the cartridge into a trash receptacle. This usually means that this cartridge will end up in a landfill and take literally hundreds of years to decompose. Obviously, this isn't the most environmentally sound decision, but it is the easiest and least time-consuming one to make.

We have noticed several recent efforts to address this challenge with recycling programs. However, we have observed problems with some of the more typical approaches to toner/ink cartridge recycling:

- ☒ **The customer pays to ship used cartridges for recycling.** Some vendor recycling programs include charging the customer for shipping and/or other essential elements of the recycling process. In these cases, the customer not only has to endure the process for recycling cartridges but also must incur the full cost of doing so. Obviously, this is not a strong motivator for being environmentally responsible.
- ☒ **The recycling program only includes select consumable components.** While other programs offer postpaid labels to return cartridges in an effort to eliminate customer costs, the cartridges eligible for this coverage may not span the entire product line. Thus, the customer may have to find other avenues to recycle consumables not covered in the program, and this usually includes a cost to the customer. While this is an improvement over having the customer pay for all shipping costs associated with recycling, this route is not comprehensive enough to maximize participation in the recycling effort if it doesn't cover all products in the vendor's lineup.
- ☒ **The carbon footprint impact of sending all cartridges for recycling to one location could be significant.** Some recycling programs require all customers to ship cartridges to one centralized location. The problem with this offering is that this one location could be a few miles away from one customer and thousands of miles away for other customers. Local-level shipping incurs minimal impact to the carbon footprint as the fuel used for trucks/airplanes to ship the product to the one location is small. However, the carbon footprint impact could be substantial for customers that ship the used cartridges over long distances.
- ☒ **Some product pieces or components of the cartridge cannot be recycled ... what then?** For example, some metropolitan areas won't accept toner bottles for recycling (e.g., traces of toner residue remain in the bottle). These parts could end up in landfills, defeating some of the intent behind the recycling effort.

We believe that most individuals want to do the right thing by properly disposing of their toner cartridges, particularly if doing so has a positive environmental impact. However, if the process of doing so is cumbersome and difficult, few will participate. Thus, IDC concludes that the keys for a successful toner cartridge disposal program are to make it simple, so that more users are encouraged to participate in the process, and eliminate any customer costs to participate in the program.

Konica Minolta's Clean Planet Recycling Program for Its Toner Cartridges

We believe that Konica Minolta is taking a bold step in addressing the challenges of getting customers to participate in toner cartridge recycling programs. In IDC's view, Konica Minolta's Clean Planet Recycling Program is attractive for a number of reasons:

- ☒ **There are no customer costs to participate in the program.** Konica Minolta is absorbing all the costs for the program, so that customers won't have to make any financial investment to participate. Depending on the size of the customer, Konica Minolta offers a variety of easy processes for toner cartridge recycling:
 - ☐ Home offices and small companies can print a postpaid label from a Web site (www.cleanplanetus.com) to ship single consumable items for recycling.
 - ☐ Midsize customers can order a recycling box from a Web site (www.cleanplanetus.com) to collect Konica Minolta consumables in the office. The box holds approximately 10–15 items. When the box is full, the customer can print out the same label as noted for home offices and small companies and attach it to the box.
 - ☐ Large enterprise customers can arrange for the delivery and pickup of recycling pallets that hold a larger quantity of Konica Minolta consumables.
- ☒ **Lower shipping/transportation costs.** Rather than having customers ship cartridges to one centralized location, Konica Minolta has partnered with several approved facilities across the country. This approach minimizes energy and fuel use associated with transporting and shipping these items, thus limiting the carbon footprint impact. The company has also automated the process so that it is easy for the customer. When a Konica Minolta customer prints out a shipping label, the closest recycling facility is automatically chosen.
- ☒ **A bold "no landfill" guarantee.** Konica Minolta guarantees that no Konica Minolta toner cartridges or related parts processed in this program will go into any landfill.
- ☒ **Comprehensive coverage of all Konica Minolta consumables.** All Konica Minolta toner cartridges, imaging units, toner waste bottles, developer, and drums are included in this program and span the entire printer/MFP product line, from desktop to production-level devices.

FUTURE OUTLOOK

Konica Minolta's Clean Planet Recycling Program offers several compelling reasons to drive increased customer participation in toner cartridge recycling. Certainly, participation in such a program is a more appealing alternative than just tossing the used cartridge into a trash receptacle. However, the key to changing wasteful behavior will be in the simplicity of the program. We are hopeful that Konica Minolta customers will view the Clean Planet Recycling Program as a simple and appealing way to recycle used toner cartridges, resulting in greater participation in this process.

IDC research has shown that environmental programs and corresponding benefits do have influence on vendor selection and technology procurement choices. We believe the unique benefits of the program could lead current and prospective customers to consider Konica Minolta as their supplier for printers and MFPs. This could lead to brand-new Konica Minolta business in competitor accounts or result in some displacement of other brands that do not offer a similar easy-to-use "no cost" cartridge recycling program within existing accounts. Additionally, the program could have an influence on vendor selection for emerging managed print services (MPS) engagements and drive home new sales opportunities for the company as well.

Konica Minolta appears to be betting that it can cover its program costs with new business wins. IDC applauds the company's confidence in the program by its willingness to take on the cost risk.

Copyright Notice

This IDC research document was published as part of an IDC continuous intelligence service, providing written research, analyst interactions, telebriefings, and conferences. Visit www.idc.com to learn more about IDC subscription and consulting services. To view a list of IDC offices worldwide, visit www.idc.com/offices. Please contact the IDC Hotline at 800.343.4952, ext. 7988 (or +1.508.988.7988) or sales@idc.com for information on applying the price of this document toward the purchase of an IDC service or for information on additional copies or Web rights.

Copyright 2010 IDC. Reproduction is forbidden unless authorized. All rights reserved.