



HOW KNOCK-OFF CARTRIDGES ARE DAMAGING YOUR BOTTOM LINE MORE THAN YOU MIGHT KNOW

Going off-brand for savings introduces risks that can cost you more in the long run

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The allure of a great deal can be intoxicating to anyone — whether buying a sleek, new gadget for personal use, striking a bargain on supplies for your whole office, or cutting costs from your supply chain by switching vendors.

The problem with “deals” for printing supplies, however, is that they can easily be red herrings. What initially might have seemed like a steal by buying knock-off or imitation ink or toner cartridges can actually lead to higher long-term costs and lower print productivity.

Even more consequential? These imitation supplies could also impact your reputation as a service provider. MPS providers, whose job as trusted advisors is to help clients make smart decisions, simply cannot afford the long-term risk of supplying their clients with knock-off cartridges that can lead to damaged printers, decreased quality, and increase service calls.

Due to a lack of information about the business and safety risks associated with imitation ink and toner, office decision makers are also falling for the allure of cheap knock-off supplies. In a recent 20,000-participant global [survey commissioned by HP](#), almost 35 percent of office supply decision makers admitted purchasing knock-off supplies and nearly 45 percent said it was possible they could have unknowingly purchased counterfeit cartridges. ¹

It is clearly incumbent on MPS providers to break the cycle of misinformation and the enticing mysticism of cheap knock-offs, for their sake of their own businesses and those of their customers. At HP, we have gone to great lengths to educate our customers and analyze the implications of using such knock-off supplies in HP printers, and we’ve learned quite a bit about the associated hidden costs. Here’s what MPS providers should know about the consequences of cutting corners with printing supplies:

When Cost-Savings Quickly Turn South

If you’re looking for a good print experience, cheap may not mean reliable. Imitation toner cartridges consistently produce poor print quality—and sometimes, they don’t work at all. This year, HP asked an independent lab to test the performance of a range of knock-off cartridges in HP printers. Its most surprising finding: 5 percent of imitation toner cartridges failed right out-of-the-box while the remaining 95 percent resulted in low print quality. ²

¹ HP Workforce Sustainability Survey, Global Insights Report, Conducted by Edelman Intelligence, April 2019: <https://press.ext.hp.com/content/dam/hpi/press/press-kits/2019/earth-day-2019/HP%20Workforce%20Sustainability%20Survey.pdf>

² 2019 Monochrome Cartridge Reliability Comparison Study, HP LaserJet Toner Cartridges vs. Non-HP Clone Brands in North America. See: <http://www.spencerlab.com/reports/HPReliability-NA-NBC2019.pdf>

Additionally, studies showed that 21 percent of non-HP toner cartridge users experience problems with those cartridges, and that using these cartridges increases the chance of experiencing a printing problem by 50 percent. They also increased the chance of a print quality problem — including streaks, smears, or dots — by 50 percent and the chance of experiencing cartridges that fail, leak, or run out of toner prematurely by 70 percent.³

The takeaway is clear: relying on knock-offs is risky business. Knock-off cartridges can ultimately cost 10 percent more than Original HP toner cartridges when you take problem cartridges and reprinting into account.⁴

The Bottom-Line Benefits of Original Supplies

The prudent alternative is investing in original equipment manufacturer (OEM) supplies. For instance, HP's research and development teams invest up to five years of engineering into each new ink and toner cartridge to deliver a high-quality printing experience, and those cartridges are specifically designed to function as part of the overall printing system. We often point out that when you replace an HP toner cartridge, [it's as if you're replacing 70 percent of the printer](#). Put a knock-off in its place, and who knows what might happen, not only to your prints but to the printer itself?

However, it can be a battle to encourage MPS providers and office supply decision makers to look past the price tag and consider the true cost of their buying decisions. Choose wisely, however, and the benefits become immediately apparent.

When ManagedPrint Inc. of Columbia, SC offered remanufactured cartridges, it ran into hidden costs including poor print quality and a large number of service calls. After converting all its major clients to Original HP supplies, the company [reduced its print quality-related service calls by almost 40 percent](#) and increased its profitability by 11 percent. And when MCPc Imaging & Printing of Sandusky, Ohio replaced remanufactured toner cartridges with Original HP supplies, [service calls fell more than 40 percent per printer](#). Any time a service call can be avoided, costs are cut, and all parties can dedicate that time to more proactive ventures.

Keeping Sustainability Top-of-Mind in Supplies Procurement

The use of knock-off cartridges also introduces other complex, challenging issues of sustainability. Sub-optimal knock-off cartridges [perform relatively poorly](#). Therefore, people must print up to 29 percent more, which causes avoidable waste. That extra printing can contribute to 40 percent more energy, consume 54 percent more fossil fuels and create a 55 percent larger carbon footprint.⁵

Business today cannot afford to be lax about sustainability, particularly in the supplies they procure. Fifty-eight percent of respondents in [HP's global survey](#) said sustainability is key to engaging the workforce of the future, and 46 percent said that top talent only want to work at companies that implement sustainable business practices. Even more interestingly, nearly 65 percent of consumers globally said they're willing to pay more for products from companies that demonstrate their commitment to reducing their environmental impact.

We also learned that nearly 55 percent of buyers were unaware that knock-offs cannot be recycled or reused the way HP cartridges can, and 97 percent of knock-offs end up in landfills.⁶ It's an issue HP has been addressing through its free [Planet Partners](#) recycling program for decades, and one that matters to the half of U.S. workers, especially Millennials, who expect their employers to embrace sustainable practices.

³ 2019 NA Market Strategies International study commissioned by HP. To be published May 2019.

⁴ HP calculations based on results from a 2019 SpencerLab North America Monochrome Reliability comparing two brands of imitation cartridges for the HP Pro M402 and Pro M521 printers, HP 26A and 55A cartridges. See: www.spencerlab.com/reports/HPReliability-NA-NBC2019.pdf. Calculations include paper, cartridge replacement and labor for reprints. Page use assumes 29% external, 46% internal, and 25% individual use. Labor rate from a 2018 Mercer Global Pay Study. Purchase price for HP cartridges is \$163 and a 50% lower price for non-HP. Actual prices, costs, and savings may vary.

⁵ 2018 Four Elements Consulting LCA study, commissioned by HP, compared Original HP 80A and 83A monochrome toner cartridges with a sample of NBC alternatives across eight environmental impact categories. See: hp.com/go/NA-LJICA-NBC-2018.

⁶ InfoTrends, 2018 North America Supplies Recycling study, commissioned by HP. Findings are based on average results of interviews with 7 remanufacturers, 2 NBC manufacturers, 3 empty collectors and 3 distributors. See: www.hp.com/go/NA-2018InfoTrends.

The hallmark of any MPS provider is their operational expertise, helping clients to make the best possible printing choices. When it comes to choosing the right supplies, the case is no different. To be truly trusted advisors, it's imperative that MPS providers counsel their customers, "You get what you pay for." Original supplies might have a higher cost upfront but are ultimately the key to long-lasting and trusting customer relationships.