

Long Island Business NEWS

Without Training Tech Devices Can't Fulfill Their Promise

By Claude Solnik

Richard Lindner, major accounts manager for office equipment leasing and sales firm US Business Technology in Garden City Park, has seen a growing technology gap. But it's not the one between the technology haves and have-nots. It's between the equipment and the users' knowledge of it.

As technology has advanced and the multi-functional product (or MFP) has caught on - scanning, printing, copying and converting files (doing everything but cleaning the virtual kitchen sink) - training hasn't kept pace, creating a disconnect in the digital age. But it's not for lack of trying. As for the free training offered by US Business Technology: "They turn it down. Management doesn't insist they accept it," Lindner said. "I can't put out equipment and expect people to be happy with the results and come back to me again if I haven't made it useful to them."

You don't need to be a Mensa member to use these machines. But Lindner said manuals being provided on CDs, although searchable, often are complicated. A live trainer, however, can be a great guide - if people listen.

"People who make the decision to buy equipment should ensure that the people using it get trained," Lindner said. "Otherwise, the investment in this equipment is diminished. They're losing their money."

Trainers find employees typically opt to do their work for the day rather than learn about a new device, turning a tech purchase into a glorified paper-

weight.

"It's not bought or leased for the purpose of some guy in an executive office or purchasing department," Lindner said. "If it's not valuable to the people who get it, it's not valuable."

Marc Hamroff, managing partner at Garden City-based law firm, Moritt Hock Hamroff & Horowitz, said companies need to train employees with all new technology from computers to copiers. "The gap in the training is something the supplier should offer and the customer should take them up," Hamroff said.

But companies are changing devices more frequently, as leasing becomes the norm and the speed of technology advancement increases, creating a more frequent need for training.

"More than 95 percent [of office equipment] is leased," Lindner noted, "and somebody isn't giving them good advice."

Lindner also said training itself has to be appropriate for the user, rather than causing confusion. "Some companies come in, show everything the equipment can do," Lindner said. "By the time you walk away, you don't know how to do any of it. People need to be trained to do what they need to do, not the 9 million things the machine can do."

He said the key operator in charge of the machine needs to learn how to change ink, give access codes, change defaults and set scans to come out in PDFs rather than tiffs, or whatever the preference.

The second level is the casual user

who typically turns to a device for one or two purposes. Knowledge is power, but only if it will be used.

"I ask people to bring their actual work. Let's do what they do," Lindner said. "Bring your most difficult jobs. Let's figure out how to do it on your new equipment. If you can get somebody past their worst, most difficult problems, the rest is easy."