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## Copy Paper

### *The Role of Copy Paper in the Cyber Age*

Few technologies are more ubiquitous than the printed word. Ever since Johann Gutenberg's printing press swept the western world from the Dark Ages, the printed word has been the communication media of choice. In modern times, with the perfection of the xerographic process, copy paper reigns supreme serving the printing and reprographic needs of the masses. However, enormous changes presently taking place in the landscape of the printed word are having a dramatic impact on copy paper manufacturers.

One challenge facing the copy paper industry today is obsolescence of the printed medium. Indeed, since the Internet and the World Wide Web became universally accessible in 1993, visionaries have predicted a rapidly diminishing role for paper. Their view of the "Paperless Office" seemed not only plausible but highly probable. To be sure, the Cyber Age dictates that the future of printing and publishing is digital. But, does the Cyber evolution portend the death of copy paper? An examination of the role played by copy paper in the paper industry and among end users, and a look at how the industry and allied suppliers have responded to the challenge, may shed some light on this question.

In the most simple of terms, copy paper is the communication media of choice because it is user-friendly. The user-friendly nature of copy paper embodies the following eight essential qualities:

- **Portability:** Lightweight, easy to transport / store  
Simplicity: Intuitive, easy to use easily stored and retrieved
- **Readability:** High resolution, high contrast
- **Durability:** Withstands rigors of office / travel
- **Longevity:** Paper is readable for centuries

- **Standards:** Copy paper made to standardized industry dimensions
- **Affordable:** Affordability allows even the poorest regions to use copy paper
- **Personal:** Ability to personalize documents to suit individual tastes

To successfully compete with the world of paper documents, the world of virtual documents will have to incorporate all of the above qualities into the E-document deliverable.

In a remarkably short time E-documents have closed the gap on a number of these key issues. The copy paper industry has responded well to this competitive challenge by investing heavily in research, development and innovation. The end result is that product quality and uniformity have dramatically improved simultaneously with capacity increases.

The investments required to meet this challenge are extremely high. But invest they did to meet or exceed the heightened market-driven quality and production demands.

Equally compelling is the response of the vendor community serving the copy paper industry. Through the implementation of well thought-out, long-term strategies, coupled with large capital commitments, many unique products have been introduced to the market. Nowhere is this more evident than in cross-machine actuator technology.

Cross-machine actuators like SteamTech steamshower, SprayTech spraydampers with Particle Size Management (PSM), and VIB SmoothTech curl and sheet finishing steamshower provide a relatively low cost means for copy paper product improvement and process productivity. Cross-machine actuators are the tools papermakers require to aid them in achieving their market-driven quality and production goals, and to exceed the xerographic specifications for their machines. By investing substantially in research, innovation, and development, the copy paper manufactures and industry vendors have rendered the visionary proclamations about copy paper's demise prematurely.

Evidence supporting this abounds. Visit any office and observe how the workforce interacts with e-documents. Whether an employee is reading e-mail, retrieving an e-document from a customer file, or accessing research data, invariably the e-document is sent to a copy paper based printer. The relationship between printed and digital information is, to a high degree, synergistic. The digitization of information has created a vast expansion in the volume of information available to end-users. That is, more digital information exists that can be printed. This ultimately drives the demand for copy paper.

Additional evidence is manifest in a visit to any office supply store. Traditionally, these stores catered to the large, institutional buyers. While still true, increasingly their product lines are packaged and targeted to the proliferation of small businesses (SOHO, SmallOfficeHomeOffice). Of particular note, home-based businesses now represent a significant and growing demand for office products, copy paper chief among them. This demand did not exist just a few short years ago. Enter any office supply store and it is difficult not to notice the mountain of copy paper on display. Conveniently located for both the serious shopper and the impulse buyer. In either case, additional copy paper ends up in the hands of the consumer.

At odds with the visionaries of tomorrow, home-based copiers, printers, and fax machines have opened up a new and expanding market for copy paper.

Like their large institutional counterparts, these SOHO's assign high value to paper, as it is the vehicle by which they communicate to the market. They demand high-quality copy paper that portrays their companies in a professional manner. In addition, they demand copy paper that will perform flawlessly through their copiers, printers and fax machines as they are often a very lean enterprise and must be highly productive without incurring losses due to poor performance of copy paper in office machines.

The copy paper manufacturers have heard these demands and have responded. They have invested in the development and improvement of copy paper grades to ensure that the value expectations of the consumer are met or exceeded. Through research and development, cross-machine actuator vendors have taken a leadership role by bringing innovative products to market. Actuator vendors like VIB Systems, Inc. are providing the tools necessary to continually add value, thus ensuring that printed documents remain competitive with e-documents. With the assistance of state-of-the-art cross-machine actuator technology, the copy paper manufacturers are producing an extremely high-quality core product. A product that is applicable to a broad and growing market and that, in many respects, is becoming more valuable in concert with the rapid growth of the Internet and e-documents.

Barring any unforeseen development (government regulations, environmental rules, excessive energy prices, or new imaging technology, etc.) copy paper should survive as a viable communication medium for years to come. However, if copy paper manufacturers are to survive in the 21st century, they must continue to invest in new technologies and processes.

What will benefit copy paper manufacturers most is the continuous innovation and development of their product.

Copy paper, as a tangible, highly functional and user-friendly medium, cannot be easily discarded. With these continued efforts, copy paper will continue as the mainstay of office communication media. Cross-machine actuators that aid papermakers in meeting their ever increasing production and quality goals will play a vital role ensuring the survivability of copy paper in the Cyber Age. Today, as 2007 is freshly inaugurated, the vision of the demise of copy paper no longer seems so close at hand.