

SHARP – OUTSIDE THE BOX

By Andy Slawetsky

Sharp has just announced the first in a series of new products that will utilize their new touch screen user interface platform. It takes a lot to get me excited about a copier. As far as I am concerned, there isn't a lot that machine "A" can do that machine "B" can't do and as most of you reading this will probably agree, it's less about what brand your customer buys and more about who they buy it from.

Well here's a product that is finally taking advantage of their technology and putting it to good use. Sharp makes great LCDs. They took a killer crystal clear LCD and created a very nice and unique layout that will no doubt make people think of buttons or icons (not IKONS) on their iPhone or Droid smart phone.

You can see our very short video as we were treated to an early demonstration by clicking the link at the bottom of this article.

With all of the solutions that are available, Sharp has an opportunity to market them as Apps, just like you'll find on the smart phones I just mentioned. No decisions have been made to our knowledge on this topic and as they are just rolling out the first generation, it may be a bit early for this conversation, but I can definitely see putting App icons on this screen for eCopy, for Equitrac, for anything and everything. Maybe trial versions or demo videos...anything that a customer can check out on their own without their lovable sales rep in their face, asking if they want pricing. HP has brought Apps like this into people's homes with their new ink jet products and they're awesome. Now Sharp looks like they're about to do this to the office.

Think about it. If you have a smart phone, what was the first thing you did after you left the store when you bought it? Once you were out of reach of the sales person that sold it to you, I bet you explored. I bet you went right to the App store and looked at what was available. What could you try for free? Maybe you even bought an App. After all, these Apps are what make an ordinary mobile phone something that we can't put down, turn off or live without. I have found so many Apps that have made my life easier. A parking lot finder that gave me a map of New York City when I was there for the Ricoh briefing provided me with \$12 parking half a block from the event in Times Square. The Google App that allows me to speak search queries (instead of typing) and the Nuance App that translates my speech for use in e-mails and text messages. And it goes on and on.

The point is I didn't know I needed these Apps and I found them myself because they were there and they were easy to find. What a great way to sell a solution. Sharp's new touch screen is so cool it begs for users to explore it. If that machine is sitting in a customer location for five years and there is an icon called "Apps," do you think there is any customer that won't tap it just to see what's there? No way!

Sharp is the only company that offers a pull-out keyboard on most of their product line. I can't tell you how useful that feature is. Can you say "innovative?" Their touch screens were already some of the nicest looking and now they just blow

everyone's away. If you were a customer considering two products, which would you buy? The washed out blue screen with every feature known to man crammed into one place (you all know who I am talking about) or something that looks truly different and is highly organized and just plain "cooler" than anything else available?

In the end, these are just copiers and as I said, they all do the same things. But these copiers do it with style.

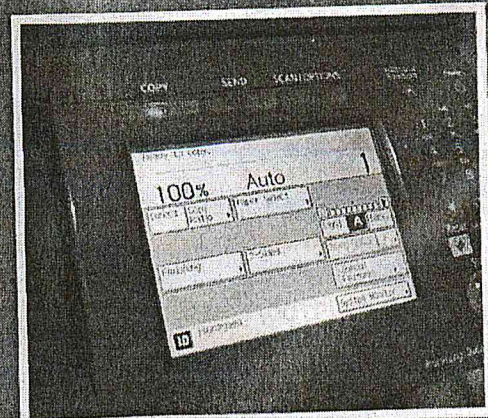
Sharp is a really interesting company. Their dealers report the best margins on their MFPs, their products are truly groundbreaking and they obviously put considerable effort into the engineering and the thought behind their business equipment. If Sharp had pockets as deep as some of the larger copier companies, the sky would be the limit. My hat is off to them. This new touch screen has raised the bar on a product segment that has been quite boring for many years. Well done. Visit our blog at www.industryanalysts.com if you'd like to see video of the display taken during our analysis. ♦

Andy Slawetsky is President of Industry Analysts, Inc. Much of the company's research and testing results can be viewed on their website www.industryanalysts.com.



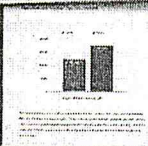
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