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Analog / Digital Rift: The premature retirement of Analog Xerox copiers...

What's with so many analog machines being written off prematurely? Folks have begun to undervalue their analog equipment it seems. There's been a subtle shift in society's perception... almost like a fashion style; the analog copiers are being left out of the "in" crowd. For those of you who know them well and have invested a great deal of time and energy gathering knowledge in the learning curves, this isn't something to be sad about... this is an opportunity! In this article, we'll look at this phenomenon; look at why it's going this way and what it means to copier technicians and office equipment salesmen alike. We'll also take a quick peek at some of the prominent Xerox analog copier "styles" to see how things are holding up. Finally, we'll do some simple economics and see how this unusual happening in the market can work to our advantage... whether you're an Authorized Xerox Dealer or an independent technician, there's money to be made keeping the older copiers out of the scrap heap.

There are a number of Xerox brand copiers which are coming up for "End of Service" proceedings. This means that if a customer calls Xerox for service on one of these models, they'll be told that the machine is no longer supported and that there are some great new machines they can buy. Also, slowly, some of the parts will be discontinued as they run out of them although most parts will continue to be available for several years following the End of Service date.. Now many customers will move on to the next machine, but at least as many will likely be scrambling for someone else to fix their copier for them.

Xerox Corporation starts each new model of machine out with a timeline in mind. Typically, after a model's launch date, there'll be a period of around one and a half to two years during which the company and the Dealers will actively market the new model along with accompanying Field Service Maintenance Agreements (FSMA's) for the equipment. About a year and a half after that initial migration period is up, they will stop accepting FSMA's for the model and steer customers to Time and Materials (T&M) maintenance. The final "End of Service" date is also predetermined and appears to vary from model to model. Before we get the wrong idea and start being overly critical of this system, consider this: each model of machine which remains on the "supported" list represents a certain amount of resources devoted to that model. With a steady stream of new models being continuously brought to market to keep the organization running with fresh sales, there are only so many models which can be fully supported. The devotion of resources includes warehouse space devoted to the parts and supplies, as well as manpower; technical support and other logistics which are provided to the Dealers and Service Centers. They have to draw the line somewhere and like any good business plan, this plan is set before the machine is even launched. It's likely that Xerox recognized the coming sunset of the analog copiers a while ago... probably right around the time they came out with their "digital X" logo which has become so recognizable. They didn't create the current circumstances although they will certainly benefit from it,

along with other machine manufacturers, as customers dismiss their analog machines and buy new digitals.

The OEM “End of Service” policies are not enough to explain why the analog machines have dropped in perceived value so rapidly. The “End of Service” timelines are nothing new, yet in years past, copiers would age gracefully in the aftermarket... based on the reality of equipment getting older and gradually less reliable. Some models stuck around for a good long time because they were simply built better. The 1025 model for example, released in the 80’s, was actually still relatively popular up till about 3 years ago in Latin America... it was a workhorse and they ran literally millions of copies on those machines. Now things have temporarily changed... the leap from analog to digital has created a rift... we are just coming up on a point where you hear some techs saying “we’re all digital now”... shunning the analog predecessors. The jump to digital has made the perceived value of the analog machines plummet suddenly... out of proportion to the actual loss in value which age affords.

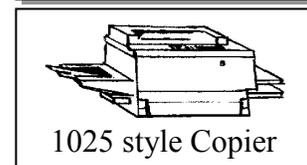
One series in particular comes to mind... the 5018 style. The most recent member of that line (the 5830) was actually still being sold on Xerox’s website as recently as 2 years ago. The 5018 model was introduced nearly 15 years ago (boy does time fly). It remained supported by Xerox a bit longer than the average model because of the continuous reintroduction of new models based on the same engine. I have a friend who has at his company’s warehouse, literally hundreds of Xerox 5328 copiers in good working order... equipped with Document Feeders. He’s about ready to trash them because no one seems to be terribly interested. This kind of blows my mind. Here is a copier which will continue to serve its intended purpose for less cost per copy and with comparable or better copy quality than a newer digital machine. Yet it is not an appreciated resource at this point in time.

The advantages of continuing to support the analog machines are plentiful. For one thing, the digital machines tend to have complex logic and electronics. When something goes wrong with the logic boards or a Laser Unit or Raster Output Scanner (ROS), it can be difficult to troubleshoot the problems and replacement costs for that sort of part can be enormous. The advantage to fixing an analog copier is simply familiarity... we’ve spent a lot of time learning about them and they hold few surprises now-a-days... we know what goes wrong and how to deal with the common problems. We can approach them for service with great advantage. Parts availability in many respects has never been stronger, partly owing to the very phenomenon which we’re discussing. Surplus parts are out there, surplus supplies too. Aftermarket copier parts distributors have plenty to offer and are likely to continue to support these machines on the aftermarket front for years to come.

Let’s have a look at how some of the Xerox styles which we’ve been covering over the past few years in the ENX Magazine are doing these days.

1012 style (1012, 5011, 5012, 5014)...

The demand for parts has let up considerably, but not for lack of available parts. These were solid machines which some stalwart customers simply refuse to get rid of.



1025 style (1025, 1038)... Ok, these are aged pretty well now... but if someone wants to keep them running, the parts remain available partly because, as mentioned earlier, they were run even recently in Latin America (also in Asia under different model numbers).

1035 style (1035/2830)... These we hear very little about nowadays although the parts are still findable in a pinch.

1040 style (1040, 1045, 1048, 5042)... Mid-volume copiers... these are just about finished simply because of age.

Parts are still available out there however partly because of the fact that they share many parts with the 1050 style.

1050 style (1050, 5051, 5052, 5053, BK35, 5345, 5355)...

Similar to the 1040 style but more current... well, that is to say slightly more current. The 5345/55 models were the most recent addition to the family... those are still kicking even if the others have let up a bit. Parts availability has never been stronger in the aftermarket parts world and so far, Xerox still stocks many of the parts themselves.

2510 style (2510, 2515, 2520, 3030, 3040, 3050, 3060)...

Workhorse Engineering machines. The oldest ones... 2510/15/20

were actually among the most desirable due to their simplicity.

Nothing fancy in diagnostics, technician friendly too. These will continue to run till folks simply refuse to fix them. Parts are not a problem for these either, in spite of the OEM announcement that the machine is no longer supported with parts.

5008 style (5008, 5009, 5208, 5240, 5260, 5280, 5307, 5308, 5309, 5310)

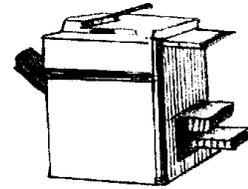
The first bunch of Sharp cross-over machines. These are still running in spite of the fact that the drum cartridges had for a while been hard to find. Folks are generally slow to get rid of these.

5018 style (5016, 5018, 5021, 5028, 5034, 5126, 5321, 5328, 5334, 5624, 5626, 5824, 5826, 5828, 5830, XC1875, XC2675)

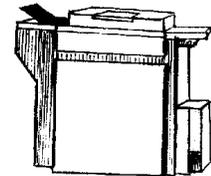
This series is one of the most prolific... there are many of them still running and so far, parts are still plentiful as are the supplies. The problems which we face on them are fairly well known now.

5312 style (5312, 5313, 5314)... similar to the 1012, owners of this series tend to want to keep them running. Aside from the occasional failing of a Low Voltage Power Supply, these machines have proven to be relatively trouble free. A good reliable box.

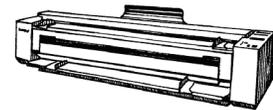
5318 style (5318, 5320, 5322)... Also a solid box. These have few inherent problems to speak of. They are aging gracefully and demand for parts has only just recently begun to let up. Xerox still offers parts for these in spite of the machine being past the End of Service date.



1040 style Copier



1050 style Copier



2510 style Copier



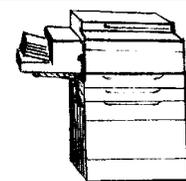
5008 style Copier



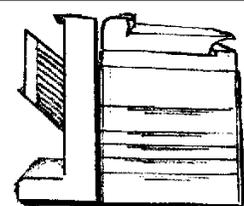
5018 style Copier



5312 style Copier



5318 style Copier



5340 style Copier

5340 style (5337, 5340, 5343, 5350, 5352, 5665, 5837, 5845, 5855)

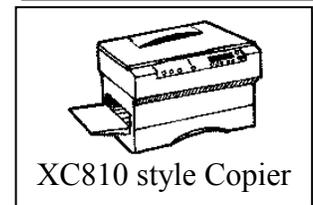
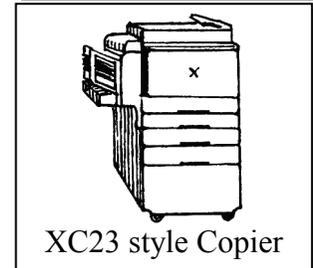
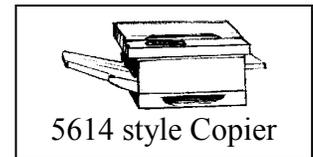
These were awfully complex machines for their size but, you know something, they actually turned out to be quite good in most respects. The learning curve is behind us now... they are reliable machines after all. Customers who own them usually think they're the cats meow.

5614 style (5113, 5114, 5614)... This Sharp cross-over wasn't the best and wasn't the worst. Many are still running just fine, but many also were decommissioned for a few common head-ache problems relating mostly to toner dispensing. Parts remain readily available as well as inexpensive supplies.

XC23 style (XC23, XC33, XC33D, XDL23, XDL33, XDL33D)

To the best of my knowledge, this series represent the final line of analog machines which Xerox made. They are good machines overall with a few odd problems to contend with. This is one series which is definitely not ready to be retired.

XC810 style (XC-810,811,820,822,830,855,865,875, XC-1020,1033,1040, 1044,1045,1245,1250,1255... Perhaps the best Sharp cross-over Xerox ever carried. This was an excellent copier... they are still running strong and customers don't want to let go of them which is probably wise. These machines outperform the XD100 series digital machines which followed handily. They simply don't have any big problems to speak of other than the Fuser Drive Gear breaking.



Ok... now for the economics of the situation. This has proven an interesting subject matter. It just doesn't sit right that machines are dismissed as "old news" simply because they are analog instead of digital. If you sit and think about it for a while, the reality of the economics will hit you (personally, I didn't really get it till I started writing this article). As the demand for the analog copiers decreases, the availability increases (because folks are dumping them) and the price goes down as a result. However, demand for quality copies, which these very same machines are perfectly capable of producing, has remained steady or risen... and the price per copy hasn't changed noticeably. So... the analog-digital rift is making it possible for those of us who recognize it, to buy and place analog machines where they're needed and make some good money, probably on a per-click basis.

A good example of a scenario where you can serve your customer well and make some good residual money at the same time is this: If you're selling a customer a higher end multi-function machine, you might convince them to also pick up an inexpensive, refurbished analog copier to serve as a backup machine for when the multi-function machine is busy with another function (or when it's waiting for service). The copier can also handle some of the larger volume copy jobs. You can place the machine inexpensively and then charge a flat per copy price. Chances are they'll rack up a whole lot of copies in the year to come. Tell'em "Give your printer a break!"

That's it on this subject. We'll get back to some meat and potatoes articles in the coming months when we explore a few new Drum Cartridges and a fuser module or two. I want to wish all of you a good and prosperous 2006... may it be balanced with digital and analog machines!

Britt works for The Parts Drop, a company who's purpose is to make available; parts, supplies and information for Xerox brand office equipment. More information can be found on their website: www.partsdrop.com. You can find past ENX articles about Xerox machines on the ENX website (www.enxmag.com)