

# Putting sustainability at the heart of office technology decisions

As part of the Brother  
Digital Transformation series



**Research-led**  
thought leadership report

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# Sustainability is high on the agenda – in theory

**Since 2011, the World Economic Forum's Global Risk Report has identified the area of climate-related risks as a top threat to businesses. These risks are far ranging, impacting on operations, compliance, human resources and not least company strategy<sup>1</sup>.**

The majority of SMBs believe that they have a duty to behave sustainably (**71%**) and that their future success will be dependent on managing the sustainability of their operations (**68%**). This confirms that businesses are now putting Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) high on their commercial agenda.

Office technologies - including print - are key sustainability considerations for SMBs, and many organisations are taking them seriously. However, this report demonstrates that companies must be strategic in order to act in a truly sustainable way that meets commercial objectives. SMBs should firstly consider the entire lifecycle of their printing devices, with a particular focus on procurement, which is often overlooked. Businesses can also be sustainable through repairing printer parts only as and when they break down, rather than getting rid of entirely serviceable equipment.

Another key obstacle is that whilst many SMBs believe that sustainability is important, a much smaller number actually put their ideas into practice. Changing behaviours will require efforts on behalf of suppliers, buyers and users of printers, including exploring the digitisation of some paper-based processes through technologies such as document scanning.

This report is designed to help SMB decision-makers put sustainability at the heart of their printer setup. It is part of a wider series that aims to inform decision-makers on how to best utilise digital technologies within small and medium sized organisations. The reports are based on a robust programme of research undertaken amongst SMB decision-makers in the EMEA region. The series is split up into four reports, each tackling one of the following themes:

- Digital workflows
- Implementing the right solution for your business
- Security
- Sustainability

<sup>1</sup>[http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_Global\\_Risks\\_Report\\_2019.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Global_Risks_Report_2019.pdf)

## Sustainability focus for SMBs



Recycling - 67%



Use of plastics - 42%



Packaging - 47%



Procurement - 36%



Hardware efficiency - 46%



Carbon footprint - 36%

## Transitioning to 'full life cycle' thinking

Most SMBs are now actively monitoring and seeking to improve their sustainability performance. To support this, three out of four SMBs now have a sustainability policy (**76%**). These policies tend to focus on recycling, packaging and efficiency of hardware, but their remit often extends to procurement, carbon footprint and the use of plastics. This demonstrates that SMBs are taking a holistic approach that ties together many strands of sustainability, including reduced waste and emissions, but also a wider effort towards CSR – for example by only working with suppliers that have a similar commitment to sustainability goals.

As the remit of these policies illustrates, the majority of SMBs (**71%**) agree that it is important to evaluate sustainability of hardware across its entire life cycle to truly get a measure of environmental performance, rather than at just the beginning or end of hardware lifespan. This approach is vital if SMBs want to truly make sustainability gains, rather than just nodding to sustainability without really changing their environmental impact.

The printer, with its near universal usage, is one of the key technology hardware devices that businesses need to evaluate.

Nine out of ten (91%) SMBs say that it is important to assess sustainability across their printer's entire life cycle when choosing which printer is best for their business.

Current businesses typically evaluate their printer sustainability during the operational part of its life cycle. This tends to be because of the significant costs that are incurred during use, such as the costs of ink / toner and power. This is certainly a valid area for companies to focus on, with sustainability gains here reducing costs as well as being environmentally friendly. When a printer stops working, businesses tend to try to dispose of it in a way that reduces waste.

However, the key to making a difference is to consider sustainability at every stage of the life cycle, including procurement. Careful consideration when buying a printer makes the other stages of the life cycle much more sustainable. Firstly, the printer will have been sourced sustainably and made from recyclable materials from the outset, reducing wastage at disposal.

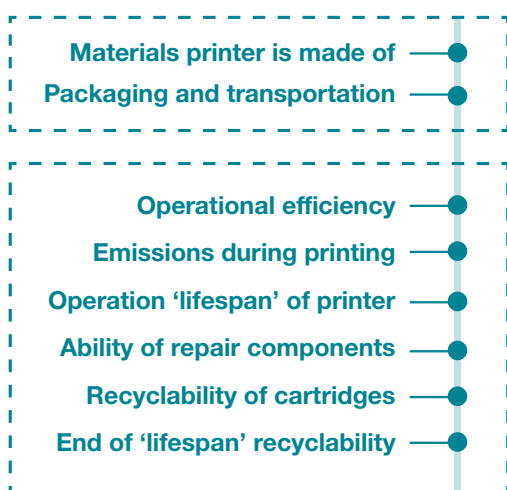
Secondly, sustainable printers are built with efficient operation in mind – meaning reduced operating costs and extended lifetime.

# Repairing, not replacing, your printer



**85%** of SMBs agree that an important measure of printer sustainability is its usable lifespan. Currently, SMBs report that on average their printers last between three and five years. However, the market's expectations are that printers should be lasting significantly longer than this to maximise sustainability – six to ten years being the preference. Such a change would have the added benefit of reducing costs for a business, not just the clear environmental benefits of reducing manufacturing and associated raw material usage.

One of the key ways to extend lifespan, and reduce waste, is to conduct modular repairs to fix faults, rather than replacing the entire machine which is otherwise perfectly serviceable. **85%** of SMBs say that being able to repair or replace individual components of a printer if they are faulty is an important sustainability criteria.



The **early stages** of the printer's 'life' are not considered as important to its overall sustainability



**In operation and end of 'life'** stages of printer life cycle considered most important to sustainability.

Understandably, businesses will want to keep up with the latest printing technology, rather than wait for the sake of printer sustainability.

Modular repairs and updates can go hand in hand with having the latest technology:

- Conducting modular repairs allows businesses to extend the life cycle of their printers, meaning that they can afford to spend more money on the best specifications, ensuring devices are as future proof as possible.
- Modular repairs can also remove and update individual components to enable the latest features, without having to replace the whole device.
- Updates can also be done remotely to ensure the printer is running the latest system and functionality.

If you are working with a printing supplier on a leasing basis, they will typically ensure they are providing these remote updates and modular repairs to maximise your sustainability. Other reports in the series have more information about leasing printers and managed print services (MPS).

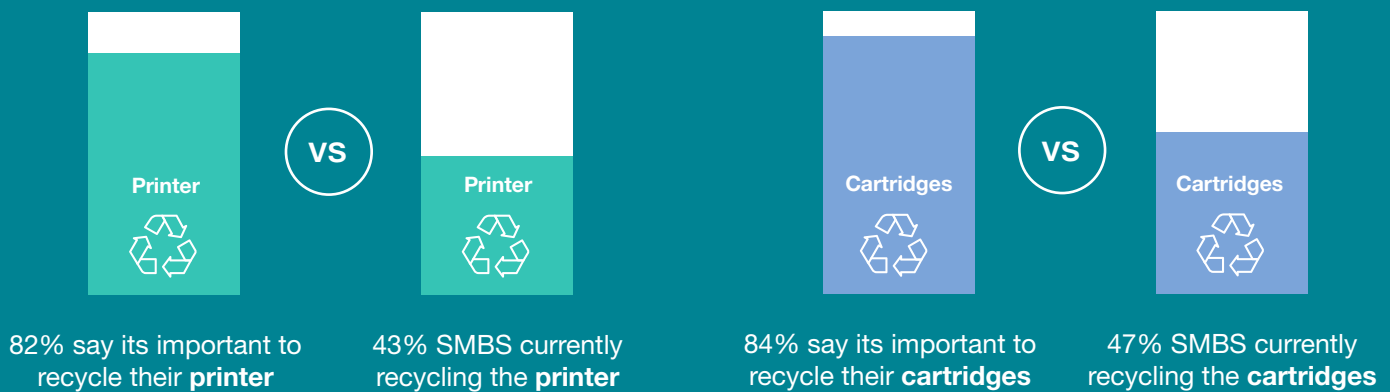
As SMBs start to demand better lifespans, there needs to be a corresponding sea change in the printing industry, with printer manufacturers taking the long-term view over short-term profit, and ensuring their printers are built to last up to a decade.

# Intentions need to lead to action

Whilst many SMB decision-makers tend to agree that printer sustainability is important, not all are taking action. For example, almost three-quarters (**73%**) of SMBs agree that printers should be refurbished / re-manufactured at the end of their service. Despite these good intentions, there is a huge gap between those who believe recycling their printer is important and those who are currently doing so.



## SMBs who believe sustainability is important compared to those who are currently acting:



Ultimately, taking actions on sustainability requires effort and a disruption of the status quo – in some sense it is unsurprising that many SMBs don't take action on recycling. However, there is certainly more that businesses and printing suppliers can do to drive sustainability initiative forward.

- knowledge of printer sustainability needs to be more widely communicated around the business community. In particular, decision-makers and the board need to be supportive
- printing suppliers must make it as easy as possible for SMBs to recycle their printers and cartridges – for example, by offering services to aid this. This process becomes much easier when SMBs lease their printing technology from suppliers, so that recycling can be taken care of at the end of the life cycle by an expert supplier.

# The Brother approach

We only have one Earth. While we set out to enable businesses to run efficiently, we want to support our customers by doing so in the most sustainable way possible.



Brother are setting high targets for reducing the environmental impact across all stages of our products' life cycles and providing customers with robust, lasting eco-conscious products.

To start with, we have committed to reduce the CO2 emissions of the whole Brother group by 2021, as the first stepping-stone to our commitment to reduce our CO2 emissions by **30%** by 2030 (from our 2015 levels).

## Cool Earth

Brother offers a recycling programme in partnership with Cool Earth, where customers can easily return their used cartridges to Brother for remanufacture/recycling, and in return Brother support Cool Earth to save at-risk rainforests in Peru and Papua New Guinea. So far working with our customers, Brother and Cool Earth, have saved 9,283 acres of rain forest, protected 5,392,686 trees whilst locking in 2,590,755 tonnes of CO2, directly supporting climate action through our partnerships.



Additionally, we are taking responsibility for ensuring your printer is running optimally and efficiently through our print services, and our printers' modular repair capabilities help ensure your organisation is not making costly and wasteful replacements of machines which are otherwise perfectly serviceable.





## Final thoughts

We are seeing that SMBs are taking sustainability seriously, with businesses recognising that it is both important and commercially beneficial.

This is reflected in the uptake of sustainability policies that cover a broad range of issues.

Intentions to take action around printer sustainability are also considerable, however, there is still some way to go in ensuring that as many SMBs are acting in a sustainable manner.

This report demonstrates tangible ways in which decision-makers can put beliefs around sustainability into practice. Thinking more holistically about printer life cycle is important for reducing overall emissions and waste and will have benefits later on when it comes to disposing of printers. Furthermore, moving to a modular repair model will mean a perfectly serviceable printer is not thrown out when parts can easily be replaced.











Sustainability is not the only consideration when it comes to implementing effective printing solutions. Printing technologies must benefit workflows, be implemented effectively and be as secure as possible. The other reports in this Digital Transformation series have more information on these topics.

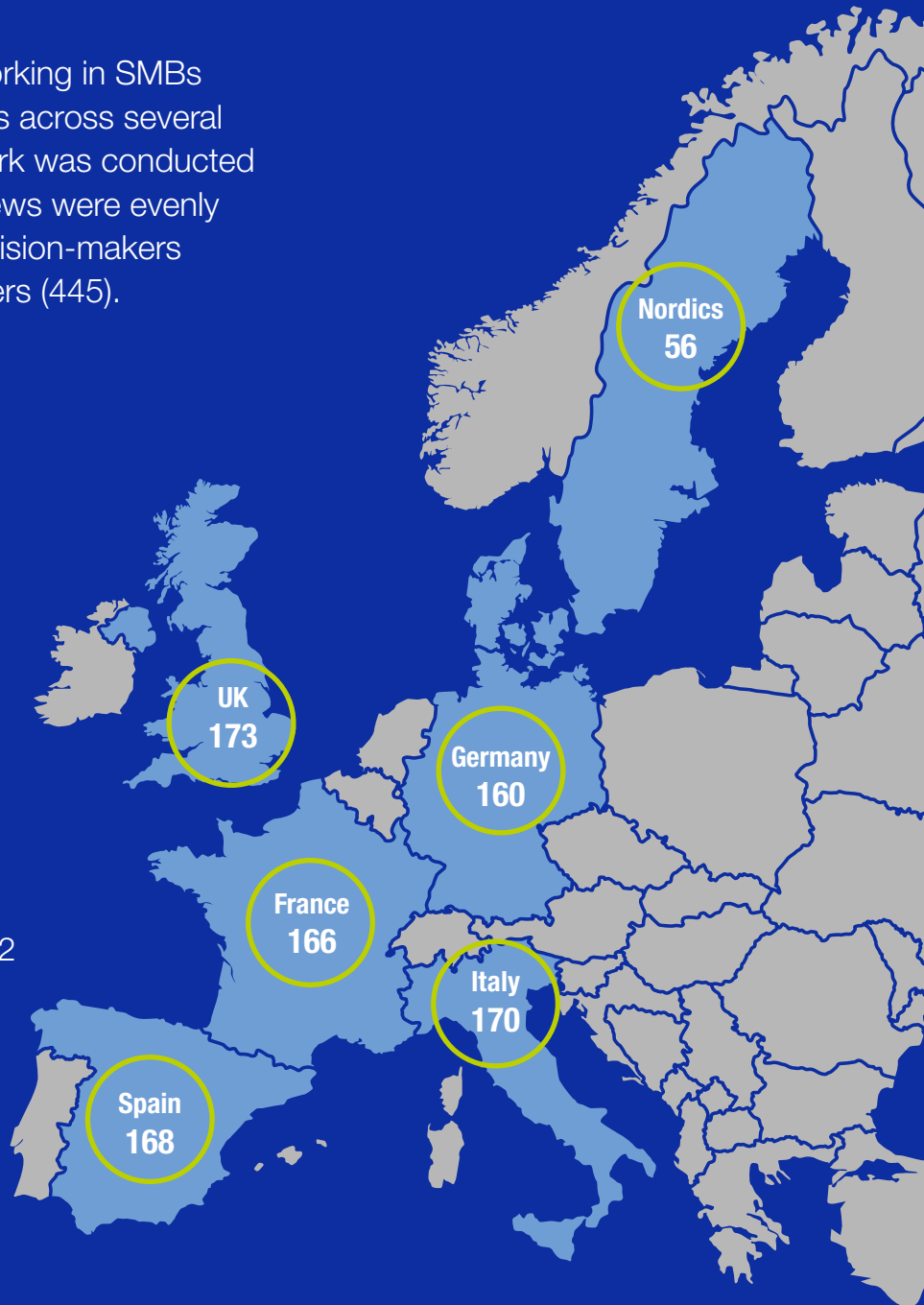
# Our methodology

This report is based on 893 online surveys with IT and business decision-makers.

IT and business decision-makers working in SMBs with between 10 and 499 employees across several Western European markets. Fieldwork was conducted across 2019 and early 2020. Interviews were evenly split between strategic business decision-makers (448) and business IT decision-makers (445).

## Key industries interviewed:

-  Healthcare - 152
-  Retail - 117
-  Logistics - 113
-  Hospitality - 81
-  Transportation and storage - 62
-  Professional services - 65
-  Manufacturing - 54
-  Financial services - 53
-  Education - 51
-  Construction - 39



Additional interviews were from other industries, including energy, pharmaceuticals, agriculture, defence, property & real estate, sports and entertainment.



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