

Just-in-time replenishment with genuine Lexmark cartridges cuts costs and eliminates costly repairs previously caused by aftermarket toner cartridges

## Proactive consumables management helps Suburban Propane cut expenses

### The Organization

Suburban Propane Partners, L.P. serves the energy needs of 850,000 residential, commercial, industrial and agricultural customers through more than 300 locations in 30 states. Founded in 1928 and with headquarters in Whippany, New Jersey, Suburban markets and distributes many products, specializing in propane, fuel oil and refined fuels, and natural gas and electricity in deregulated markets. The company reported fiscal 2009 revenue of \$1.1 billion and 2,900 employees.

### The Challenge

Suburban Propane expects the printers installed in its 300 locations to perform like a utility – instantly available, always in optimal operating condition, invisible to users, and never running on empty. Suburban operates a fleet of more than 650 Lexmark laser printers.

“Our 300 locations were instructed to obtain genuine Lexmark toner cartridges from a specific major office-supply superstore chain with which our purchasing department had negotiated prices,” said Dale L. Amabile, Suburban’s Director - IS Field Support. “It didn’t always work out that way.”

Circumventing company policy, some well-meaning staffers, believing they were saving money, opted to buy off-brand third-party toner cartridges. The impact was significant and costly.

“We started experiencing very high printer failure rates,” said Amabile. “A lot of equipment, in fact one in five of our printers, was coming back inoperable, with damage caused by aftermarket cartridges that were leaking toner. These leased units were beyond repair and we had to pay to repair or replace them.” With the depots making their own toner purchase decisions, Suburban’s toner replenishment strategy unfortunately cost far more than it saved.

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## Suburban Propane

– Dale L. Amabile  
Director - IS Field Support  
Suburban Propane, Whippany, N.J.  
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When a printer fails, the field location loses most of its reporting and financial capability, Amabile said. That reporting gap is a hindrance, particularly during the busy winter heating season when accurate forecasting and ordering are essential for good customer service. Lexmark suggested a proactive consumables management approach was needed, to eliminate any possibility of using off-brand toner, to eliminate stock piling of toner and to ensure that cartridges were purchased only when needed.



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### The Solution

With Lexmark’s proactive consumables management service, Lexmark laser printer generate an alert message when toner levels drop to 10 percent remaining. That alert prompts a toner cartridge to be ordered and shipped immediately to that specific location and for that specific device. The company also installed the Lexmark fleet management portal, empowering Amabile and her team to track usage of all of its printers.

“The Lexmark management portal offers me a realtime direct view into our fleet where I can see page counts on individual printers,” said Amabile. “We can question locations that use their printers much more or less than the overall average and we are able to manage our fleet more effectively.”

With proactive consumables management, genuine Lexmark cartridges are shipped from a central location in response to alerts, eliminating the need for field personnel to buy cartridges locally and the accounting department’s need to track those purchases. Inferior third-party toner cartridges are kept out of the supply chain and, in an added benefit, Suburban’s volume purchasing agreement resulted in more favorable pricing and cost savings.

### The Results

In the first six months following implementation, Suburban saved \$94,000. With proactive consumables management in place, genuine Lexmark toner cartridges are shipped in response to alert messages from individual devices, and costly printer failures and needed repairs due to leaks from off-brand toner no longer occur. The Lexmark fleet management portal is providing Suburban with detailed metrics on printer use that it never had before, allowing the company to make better decisions regarding printer lifecycle management.

“We have been a longtime partner with Lexmark and when they suggested implementing proactive consumables management, we saw that it was the logical next step in our relationship,” said Amabile. “We’ve stayed with Lexmark for years because they respond to our needs quickly and make sure we get the most out of our printers.”

Amabile says her relationship with Lexmark has flourished because it’s based on trust and a mutual understanding of her business objectives.

“I trust Lexmark for several reasons beyond its reliable products,” Amabile said. “Lexmark knows how to use technology to solve unique business challenges. They’re never pushy. And, most importantly, they’re always there after they deliver the product. That’s not the case with some technology vendors.”

For more than 80 years, Suburban Propane has enjoyed a well-earned reputation of delivering high-quality products and superior customer service. With Lexmark printers backed by a combination of Lexmark fleet management tools and proactive consumables management, the company is ensuring that its 300 field locations continue that tradition without interruption, even on the coldest and snowiest of days.

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