

Digital Imaging REVIEW

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DOCUMENT IMAGING PRODUCTS 2005: BLI'S PICKS OF THE YEAR

"LINE OF THE YEAR"

Konica Minolta Business Solutions U.S.A., Inc.

Most Outstanding Multifunctional Product Line of 2005

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Offering a comprehensive and impressive multifunctional product line that ranges from 16 ppm to 105 ppm on the monochrome side and from 20 ppm to 50 ppm in color, Konica Minolta Business Solutions U.S.A., Inc. (KMBS) has been awarded Buyers Laboratory's most prestigious award, "Most Outstanding Multifunctional Product Line of 2005." Konica Minolta's line not only has outstanding products, five of which are BLI "Pick of the Year" winners, but it has a solid offering in every segment of the market, including some that other vendors are weak in, or others, like Segment 6, that some vendors do not play in.

By merging the complementary strengths of Minolta and Konica two years ago to form Konica Minolta Business Solutions, the company is now in a much better position to meet the needs of the document imaging market.

"Konica Minolta's product line includes outstanding products that have excelled when subjected to extensive testing in BLI's lab," said Anthony Polifrone, managing director at BLI. He added, "The past year in the imaging industry has seen office color, production units and solutions take center stage. Konica Minolta's 2005 BLI 'Pick' award winners, the bizhub C350 for color and the bizhub PRO 1050 for production, lead a strong overall lineup that also includes 2004 'Pick' winners in Segments 1 and 3 and a 2005 'Pick' winner in Segment 4, positioning the company well to meet customer needs in key growth segments."

BLI's Manager of Field Testing Pia Beddiges noted, "The strengths of the two companies that formed Konica Minolta—color and low-volume from Minolta and high-volume monochrome from Konica—have resulted in an impressive product line that's strong from



the low end to the high end and in color." In addition, the company's Simitri polymerized toner has netted toner yields that are consistently among the highest, resulting in per-page supplies costs that are usually better than the average.

"To have the bizhub line of products recognized as BLI's 'MFP Product Line of the Year' is a tremendous achievement and is testament to the significant product development effort that Konica Minolta has undertaken," said William H. Brewster, vice president, marketing, Konica Minolta Business Solutions U.S.A., Inc. "The bizhub and bizhub PRO brand of products represent the next-generation of digital imaging systems and we will continue to drive further innovation in the market with our future product introductions."

"BLI's comprehensive product reviews and ratings play an important role at Konica Minolta, both internally for marketing and product development, and externally where our customers and dealers rely on BLI's assessments and critiques during the buying process," added Brewster.

KMBS Continually Gets It Right

Regarding Konica's strategy over the years, Daria Hoffman, BLI's managing editor, pointed out, "Konica was deliberate, it took a different approach and it got it right." Commenting on Konica's entry into the digital arena with its 7050 in 1995, she said that whereas a few vendors beat Konica to market with digital products, those early digital products for the office were lower-speed devices that suffered the ills and quirks of a new technology and in some cases were merely digital copiers that could not be connected to networks. In contrast, the 7050, in addition to being truly multifunctional, was not only reliable and productive, but at 50 ppm, it was considerably faster than most units. This made it more suitable for shared use on networks than its slower competitors and more easily justified the higher cost of digital technology. It also offered a finisher, whereas some other models offered older-technology stapler sorters.

Another case in point is the company's bizhub PRO 1050. While other vendors beat Konica Minolta to market with a Segment 6 product, the bizhub PRO 1050 was well worth waiting for. Once again taking a different approach, Konica Minolta differentiated its product by building it to withstand the demands of production output. Featuring solid-steel construction, it has a manufacturer's rated maximum monthly volume of 1.5 million impressions—more than twice that of its competitors. But beyond that, with its outstanding reliability (no service other than preventive maintenance was required and only eight misfeeds occurred), unparalleled productivity, excellent ease of use, exceptional paper-handling and outstanding finishing capabilities, Konica Minolta has clearly gotten production right. Indeed, with its bizhub PRO 1050, Konica Minolta may have achieved the pinnacle in production output. BLI Senior Test Technician Samia Ghattas, who has been operating Segment 6 and production equipment from Océ, Xerox, Canon and Ricoh for almost 20 years to produce complex jobs, described the Konica Minolta bizhub PRO 1050 as "perfect."

As far as color is concerned, the outstanding LED engine from Minolta, which won a "Pick" this year and is based on an engine that won "Pick" awards in previous years, indicates that Konica Minolta has it right in color. While the market currently includes "convenience" color products, which are primarily designed for monochrome output and only occasional color output (because they generally have slower color speeds and higher color supplies cost per page), and four-drum single-pass units that are suitable for equal amounts of color and black output (because they generally offer faster color speeds and lower color supplies costs),

BLI believes that with color output in offices inevitably increasing, the four-drum, single-pass bizhub C350 is the right kind of color product—and not just the right kind of product, but specifically one of the best color products available. While the bizhub C350 impressed BLI technicians early in this test cycle, as BLI has tested more color products over the past six months, the bizhub C350 has not only held its own but has become even more impressive in comparison.

"In addition to being highly reliable, the bizhub C350 provides smoother and more consistent coverage than many other business color products, and offers strong productivity with its Fiery controller and excellent versatility in its paper-handling and multitasking. The icing on the cake is that this quality unit is also among the most economical, with a cost per color page that is among the best for color multifunctional products tested to date," pointed out BLI Manager of Lab Testing Pete Emory.

Superior Reliability

And for many years, Konica Minolta has gotten it right with its monochrome products, offering a solid line that spans the gamut. A testament to the confidence it has in its products, unlike many other manufacturers, Minolta in particular has consistently, year after year, submitted virtually every product to BLI's lab to undergo exhaustive testing that was certain to reveal weaknesses if they existed. On the contrary, these engines have proven extremely reliable. In fact, current Konica Minolta products have produced a staggering 7,549,710 impressions in BLI lab testing, more than any other qualifying vendor, with an enviable Mean Impressions Between Failures (MIBF) of 580,747 impressions, which surpasses that of every other qualifying vendor. When preventive maintenance calls are added into the mix, the product line has a laudable Mean Impressions Between Service (MIBS) of 269,633 impressions. With a cumulative misfeed rate of just one misfeed per 116,149 impressions, Konica Minolta also has the best misfeed rate of any qualifying vendor.

This year's Spring "Pick" winners also include the bizhub 7255, which was recognized as an "Outstanding Segment 4 Multifunctional Imaging System" for a very strong overall performance that included outstanding reliability, excellent ease of use and very good output quality.

In addition to this year's Spring "Pick" winners, Konica Minolta's line also includes a number of previous "Pick" winners that are still currently available. In Segment 1 it offers the bizhub di2010, which earned BLI's "Highly Recommended" rating and a "Pick" in 2004. In Segment 2 it offers the bizhub di2510 and di3010, which are based on the same engine as the



Pictured from left to right are BLI's COO Mark Lerch and BLI's Managing Director Anthony Polifrone presenting Konica Minolta Business Solutions President and CEO Jun Haraguchi and Vice President of Marketing Bill Brewster with the Line Of The Year award.

di2010 and also proved to be highly reliable in BLI testing, earning "Recommended" ratings. While not tested in BLI's lab, the Segment 2 bizhub 7222 and bizhub 7228 earned five-star and four-star ratings, respectively, in BLI's field tests. In Segment 3, Konica Minolta offers the bizhub di3510, a 2004 "Pick" winner that is still an excellent choice in today's market. In Segment 5, Konica Minolta's bizhub 7272 is another solid performer that earned a "Recommended" rating for its strong performance in BLI's lab test.

Konica Minolta's product line also includes color printers from KONICA MINOLTA Printing Solutions (formerly QMS) that consistently perform very well in BLI's tests, including the magicolor 2400W and magicolor 2430 DL, which earned Spring 2005 "Pick of the Year" awards in the printer category, and fax products, including the FAX3900, which recently earned a "Recommended" rating in BLI's tests.

A Look Ahead

Looking ahead to the future, Konica Minolta's line should only get better. Notably, the company's upcoming 25- and 35-ppm models are based on the existing highly reliable Minolta engines, while the upcoming 60-, 75- and 92-ppm models are based on the existing highly reliable Konica engines in this range. The company recently bolstered the IT-friendliness of its product line with a security kit for its products (and

has announced its intention to have its entire product line Common Criteria certified), Microsoft certification for the print drivers of all its multifunctional products and printers, and plug-ins for HP Web Jetadmin, which will enable network administrators to manage and monitor Konica Minolta devices, along with their HP printers, with HP's widely used management utility. In addition, its new products will feature the enhanced security features of the recently announced bizhub C450 and, with a few initial exceptions, will all be based on the new bizhub OP (Open Platform). Announced this spring, the new platform unifies technologies from Konica, Minolta and Konica Minolta Printing Solutions (formerly QMS) to deliver a common user experience in terms of control panels, print drivers and utilities. In addition to using an all-in-one controller architecture, bizhub OP uses the Emperon print system from Konica Minolta Printing Solutions. Another component of bizhub OP is an open architecture. As of early next year, software developers will have access to software development kits that will enable them to write applications using standard Microsoft tools to enable Konica Minolta products to integrate with various workflow applications to control print and scan functions.

Buyers Laboratory congratulates Konica Minolta Business Solutions U.S.A., Inc. on having the "Most Outstanding Multifunctional Product Line of 2005."

ABOUT BLI'S PICKS OF THE YEAR

Twice a year with its "Pick of the Year" awards, and once a year with its "Line of the Year" award, BLI gives special recognition in each category to those products that provided the most outstanding performances in BLI's exhaustive lab tests and to the vendor whose overall product line is judged to be the best.

BLI's awards stand alone in that they are based on a rigorous battery of lab tests that takes approximately two months to complete and includes an extensive durability test, during which each unit is run at the manufacturer's maximum recommended monthly volume. BLI's durability test is unique among office product evaluations and uniquely qualifies BLI to assess reliability, which is a critical factor for buyers and IT directors, given that virtually all of the products are designed for use on networks.

In addition to assessing reliability, in terms of the number of service calls and PM (preventive maintenance) calls required, as well as misfeed frequency, BLI's comprehensive evaluation includes an assessment of copy and print quality, productivity, ease of use and economy, as well as connectivity issues such as feedback to workstations, administrative utilities, print drivers, multitasking and scanning solutions. Each product that successfully passes BLI's lab test earns BLI's "Recommended" or "Highly Recommended" seal and a BLI "Certificate of Reliability" and qualifies as a "Pick" award contender. Consequently, a BLI "Pick of the Year" is a hard-earned award that buyers and IT directors can trust to better guide them in their acquisition decisions.

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