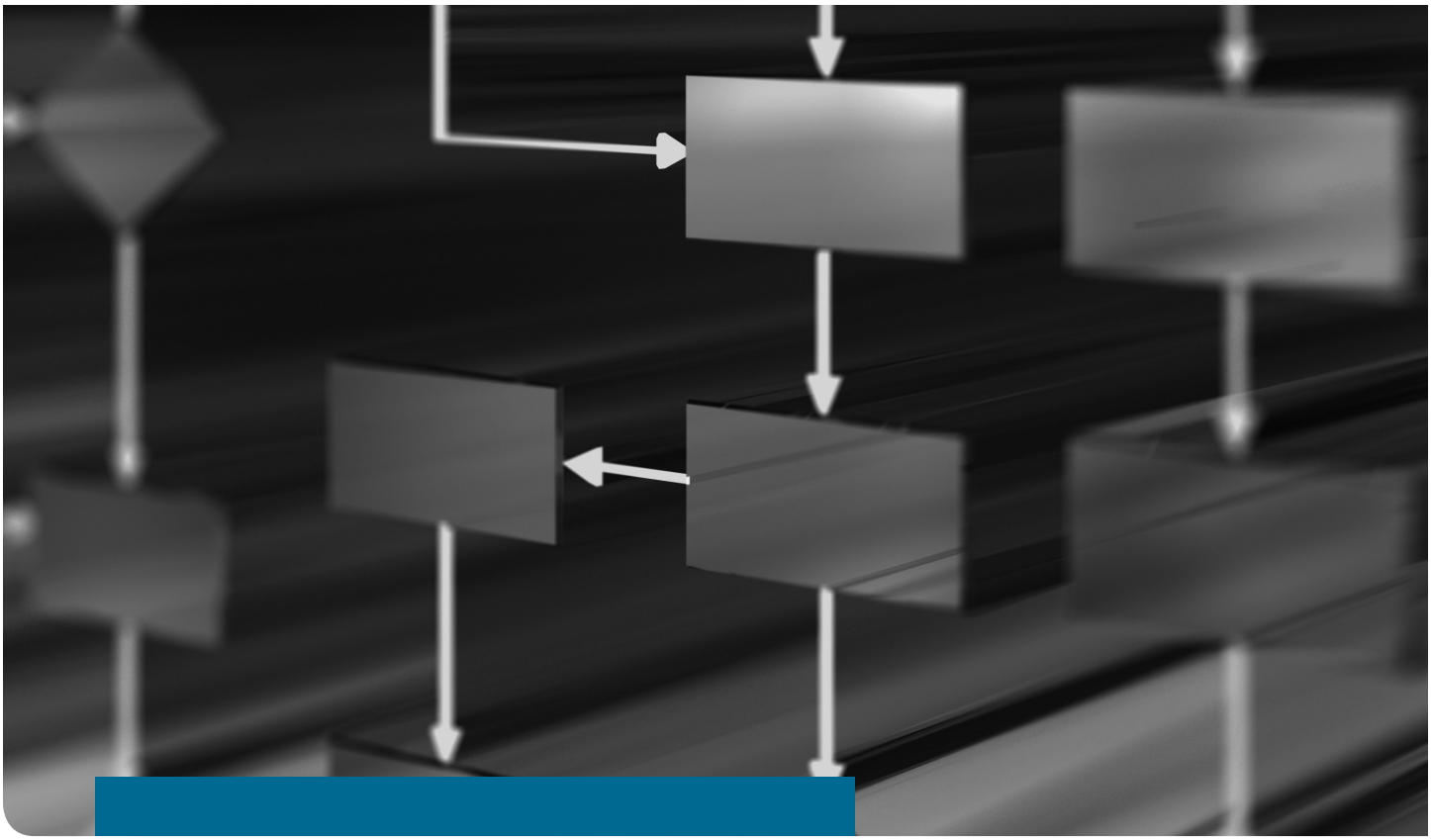
Consider Post-Sales Support When Purchasing Postpress Equipment



Consider Post-Sales Support When Purchasing Postpress Equipment

A white paper from MBO America

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Far too often, shops purchasing new postpress equipment focus on the specs of the machine to the exclusion of all other factors. And while it is important to purchase equipment that can handle the types of jobs a shop wants to produce, ignoring the post-sale support structures can leave a shop in the position of having great equipment they can't use, for a wide range of reasons.

This white paper examines the different types of critical post-sale support features that every shop purchasing new — or used — equipment should consider as part of the evaluation process. Specifically, Preventative Maintenance plans, specialized "school" options, and broader training offerings should all be considered just as critical when choosing equipment as the speed and types of finishing options.

THE BENEFITS OF PREVENTATIVE MAINTENANCE

When it comes to postpress equipment, in the past, many shops took the approach of running their equipment until it broke down, and then taking the time to fix it. But with modern technology comes a wider range of things that can go wrong, usually at the worst possible time. To avoid that, working with manufacturers that offer preventative maintenance packages can be the difference between full uptime during the busy season, or a loss of productivity and missed deadlines.

Automation, in particular, is a key reason for this shift. Modern equipment doesn't stand on its own; it is part of a wider range of equipment that includes prepress, press, and postpress machines, often with only one or two operators seeing it through the process, all the way out the door. The days of needing a person for each machine, and manually moving jobs from station to station have passed. This is great for productivity, allowing shops to move far more complex jobs through the doors than ever before. But it also means the equipment has far more moving parts and software that need to be running at peak performance at all times.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A PREVENTATIVE MAINTENANCE PLAN

When it comes to choosing a company to purchase your postpress equipment from, there are a few key things to look for in their Preventative Maintenance offerings.

1. Is it custom tailored?

No two shops are alike, and their Preventative Maintenance plans shouldn't be, either. Different pieces of equipment, running in different configurations, and running for different time frames and numbers of shifts all impact how much — or little — Preventative Maintenance is required to keep the shop running at the highest possible production levels. There is not a "one-size-fits-all" approach to maintaining postpress equipment, and shops should ensure they are working with a manufacturer who understands that.

2. How often will technicians need to come to the shop?

Just as the types of services provided can vary between shops, so too should the amount of Pre-

ventative Maintenance vary. Shops should be given options between quarterly, biannually, or annual checks, and in some cases a mix of all three, depending on the mix of equipment in the program. Some of the more delicate equipment should be checked more regularly to ensure none of the parts are wearing out, while other pieces can be checked once a year to ensure they are continuing to operate at full production speeds without any wear and tear.

3. How thorough will the visits be?

Odds are good most postpress equipment operators know a few basic things to watch for when it comes to their equipment. They can be on the lookout for key warning signs without needing a certified technician to come in and tell them about it. A Preventative Maintenance plan should include far more detailed analysis of each machine than an operator can perform themselves.

Ideally, as part of the original onboarding process, the provider created a custom checklist for each individual piece of equipment, detailing every item they will check every time they visit.

Here is a sample checklist for two different pieces of equipment — every individual machine will have its own list of mandatory items the technician will check at every visit:

SAMPLE MACHINE ONE:

- General inspection of the entire machine
- Inspect all safety covers and safety switches
- Inspect and adjust drive, roller drive, suction wheel and register belts
- Clean/change pump filters
- Inspect and clean rollers
- Inspect roller hangers, springs, bearings and belts (remove side covers)
- Clean and check suction solenoid valve
- Clean, lube and adjust feeder chain
- Inspect and adjust DBL sheet detector adjust as necessary.
- Inspect spring and brass piece for feeder finger (continuous feeders)
- Inspect and adjust all plates for mechanical movement, square, skew and depth stops
- Create list of recommended parts needed for next PM (if applicable)
- Calibrate rollers

SAMPLE MACHINE TWO:

- Check cross carrier unit
- Check rubber bushing

- Check belt
- Check cross carrier rollers
- Check drive belt
- Check drive roller belt
- Clean and check drive motor
- Clean / check spring / bearings and set rollers
- Clean / check over plates
- Clean machine

As for the amount of time spent at the shop, that will vary based on the number and type of machines in the program. A single folder, for example, might take a technician a single, 8-hour day to fully inspect and make any necessary repairs or upgrades. On the other hand, if a shop has a full line with multiple machines, it could take up to a week for the process. That might seem like a lot of time, but consider how much down-time that equipment would have if it failed, and had to be repaired. With preventative maintenance, the shop can schedule the down time around customer jobs, rather than have to call for emergency service on a downed machine during an important production run.

4. What will the next steps be?

Part of a good Preventative Maintenance plan will be to regularly replace the parts that are starting to get worn before they have a chance to fail. In some cases, those parts will be things the technicians have on hand and can easily replace as they go. In other cases, they will need to order the parts and return at a later date — and if that is the case, the follow-up visit should be included in your plan, not tacked on as an additional service charge.

The technician might also flag parts that don't need to be replaced just yet, but that will likely need replacement the next time they visit. They should provide a complete list of suggested parts you will want to have on hand for your next call, so you won't need to worry about having two visits for the same machine.

Speaking of parts, Preventative Maintenance plans won't include the costs of the parts themselves, just the checks and the labor and expertise to install them. That said, look for manufacturers who offer discounts on their parts for shops who enroll in Preventive Maintenance programs. Depending on the discount and the age of the machines, that can add up to massive cost savings, which could offset the costs of having the Preventative Maintenance plan.

BEYOND THE PREVENTATIVE MAINTENANCE VISIT

One important question to ask is about breakdowns or problems that crop up outside of the regular Preventative Maintenance visits. No system is completely foolproof, and sometimes things can and will break unexpectedly, despite regular care. Having these regular checks greatly decreases the odds that something will go wrong, but no company can ever guarantee there will never be

any breakdowns.

So what happens if the equipment goes down the week after the Preventative Maintenance visit? Each service request is carefully reviewed to determine whether or not the failure should have been prevented as a result of the Preventative Maintenance visit. If for example, a component failed that was serviced during a Preventative Maintenance visit, the return visit to remedy the situation would be covered under the Preventative Maintenance agreement. This is where working with a company that offers discounts on parts can also be beneficial — preventative maintenance customers will have a lower cost to repair the same equipment for the same failure than someone who had no plan in place.

GOING BACK TO SCHOOL

Postpress support should encompass far more than just regular maintenance, however. One piece to consider is whether or not the manufacturer leaves the shop with every operator understanding how to get the optimal results.

MBO, for example, offers Fold School, a class held 6-8 times per year that covers the fundamentals of paper folding. The goal is to ensure the operators who use the equipment understand exactly how paper behaves when it is folded. It is a narrow focus class, as opposed to just a general training session, which allows attendees to dive into the topic at hand.

Some of the fundamentals that are taught include: how the machines register paper, how it folds squares, the properties of paper, different paper formats, and the basic formats of the industry, for example. Narrow-focused classes like this are critical in an industry that no longer sees new workers coming out of trade schools with that knowledge already in their heads. This type of support allows shops to send their people as the workforce rotates, to ensure every operator has a baseline understanding of the physics of the process, which in turn ensure they can produce better quality work for paying customers, on a more consistent basis.

THE BROADER TRAINING PICTURE

But training is about more than just understanding how paper, in general, behaves in a postpress environment. A good manufacturer will also offer a range of training options on the equipment itself, going beyond just a basic introduction done at installation.

Ideally, the postpress manufacturer you choose will offer a range of training options to best suit any shop's needs. Onsite training, for example, allows a shop's operators to get even more familiar with the equipment they are working with on a day-to-day basis, giving them a much more advanced understanding of what the equipment can do in their specific conditions.

On the other hand, training at a dedicated facility offers a few benefits as well. First, it allows operators to get training on equipment they may not have access to yet — such as a new piece of equipment that has been ordered, but not yet installed at their facilities, giving them a head-start, and allowing them to cut down the learning curve and begin running live jobs that much faster.

Second is the ability to get more advanced training on what the equipment can do beyond the work the shop is running right now. Often, in-house training focuses on the types of jobs the shop

has already sold or is immediately targeting, with any features or capabilities that don't immediately lend themselves to that specific job type left by the wayside. On the other hand, off-site training allows operators to learn the full breadth of capabilities of the equipment, which in turn allows them to both offer suggestions on new products the shop can offer clients, as well as being ready to jump right in when something out of the ordinary comes through the door.

Finally, off-site training allows operators to learn outside of the stress of a production environment. Most shops can't completely shut down operations for several days during training sessions, which means that, to some degree, the operators will be "on call," with the possibility of needing to take care of something keeping their focus divided. Off-site training, however, allows them to completely focus on the task at hand — learning about what their machines are truly capable of, and ensuring they fully understand how to get the most of the equipment on a regular basis.

BENCHMARK YOUR POSTPRESS PERFORMANCE

Another thing to consider is whether or not the manufacturer will work with the shop to create a performance benchmark for each individual piece of postpress equipment. It's fine to say a machine is capable of a specific production speed, but different types of jobs, different substrates, and even different types of humidity levels in the shop can all impact the actual speeds.

To get a true idea of the full capability of each piece of equipment, the key is to do the benchmarking in the actual production environment, using the actual paper and automated systems the shop uses on a daily basis. Then push the equipment to show operators exactly what they can expect. If they can push a system to 630 feet per minute, for example, but they are used to running at 400 feet per minute and don't know the machine can handle the higher speeds, the shop might be losing productivity without realizing it.

Benchmarking is also a good way to keep an eye on the equipment over time. If that same equipment used to get 630 feet per minute, but lately has been stalling out at 500 feet per minute and can't be pushed any faster without problems, then it might be time to have someone come in and take a look at it, whether something is obviously broken or not. It can serve as an early warning sign that something in the machine isn't working at optimal levels, and allow the shop to deal with the issue before it becomes a catastrophic problem— likely at the worst possible time, such as in the middle of an important job.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

When it comes to choosing the right equipment, making sure the shop is working with the right manufacturer is critical. Working with a partner who offers a broad range of post-sale support options will help protect the investment, and will ensure the shop can continue to run at full capacity for many years to come.

And this type of support will ultimately impact the bottom line, as well. Ultimately, it will cost less to pay for an ongoing preventative maintenance program than it would if the machine breaks suddenly, and the shop has to pay thousands — or more — in parts. Not to mention the time lost — a shop can usually find a way to increase speeds when they need to push productivity in the busy season, but an unexpected 6-day or more breakdown, that is a big deal. That can mean the differ-

ence between finishing a job on time or not, or winning a new customer or not.

Another thing to consider is that today's operators are not the seasoned technicians they once were. Often, while they have the expertise to run the machines and handle basic maintenance protocols, they are not well-versed in the details of the mechanical operation. That requires technicians who have spent years learning the ins and outs of the machines they service, and who have seen — in both real-world situations and in simulations — every possible problem that could go wrong on a piece of equipment so they are ready to jump in and fix it.

Offerings such as robust training options are also critical to this workforce, as the seasoned operators who are still working begin to retire, and new skillsets enter the workforce. The newer equipment is far more complex than it used to be, with operators needing to know a much wider range of technology-specific skills for their day-to-day jobs. But the tradeoff is that they aren't machine technicians who can handle major repairs and upgrades as well. Working with a manufacturer — such as MBO — which offers a varied and robust range of support options to fit every potential shop's equipment and situation is a critical step to ensuring the shop is always functioning at full capacity.

ABOUT MBOA SERVICE ORGANIZATION

The MBO America Service Organization, based out of the MBO America headquarters in Marlton, NJ, is comprised of a team of factory trained Service Technicians located across the U.S. The team has a combined 250 years in the post-press industry and services customers 365 days each year. They take a great deal of pride in broad scope of services they offer, including:

- MBO Installation & Training
- Parts & Service Warranty
- Extended Parts & Service Warranty
- Phone Support
- Performance Maintenance
- Machine Demonstrations
- Job/Application Testing
- Performance Benchmarking
- Fold School (Basic & Advanced)
- Operator Training
- Maintenance Training
- Machine Evaluations
- Machine Relocation Services

ABOUT MBO AMERICA

MBO America was established in 1984 in order to bring MBO (Maschinenbau Binder Oppenweiler of Germany) to the growing US market. Through the acquisition of specialty finishing provider Herzog + Heymann in 2000, the MBO Group became a comprehensive single-source provider of postpress finishing solutions.

Strategically located in Marlton, NJ, just outside of Philadelphia, MBO America fulfills specialized needs upon request for cut sheet and web digital finishing applications, commercial finishing, pharmaceutical folding, packaging, and die cutting throughout the Americas. MBO and MBO America are internationally renowned for superior customer service and technical support, as well as for top-notch business consultation programs.

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Toni McQuilken has been writing and editing for more than 15 years. Her work includes B2B publications – both in print and online – in a range of industries, including serving as editor of Printing News magazine, working on the GRAPH EXPO/PRINT Show Dailies and SGIA Expo Dailies, as well as behind the scenes writing and editing for multiple companies, helping them craft marketing materials, write press releases and more.