

New Lexmark monochrome laser printers, electronic forms software and warranty support services help Suburban Propane increase printer uptime, reduce hardware help desk calls and decrease overall output costs.

## Suburban Propane reduces hardware help desk calls by 33%

### The Organization

Suburban Propane Partners, LP, is a publicly traded Master Limited Partnership listed on the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE:SPH).

Headquartered in Whippany, N.J., Suburban markets propane gas, fuel oil and related products and services to approximately one million residential, commercial, industrial and agricultural customers through more than 370 customer service centers in 30 states. In fiscal 2003, Suburban reported sales of \$735 million.

With annual growth of the propane market pegged at a modest two percent, Suburban relies on outstanding customer service and operating efficiency to increase its profitability.

In late 2003, the company expanded its operations by acquiring the assets of Agway Energy Products. The acquisitions helped the company expand into heating oil, natural gas and electricity sales, plus expand its customer base for heating ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) services.

From a technology perspective, the company is in the process of upgrading its propane retailing software to seek greater efficiencies among its more than 370 retail locations. The new software, called ADD/Energy, makes it easier to forecast the company's propane needs and deliver, track, and bill its customers for its products and services. But, the new software upgrade illuminated some printing challenges the company had overlooked, including its old laser printers that were slow, prone to break down and had poor print quality.

Between the software upgrade, market pressures and the acquisition, Suburban began looking for other technology upgrades to improve efficiencies and customer service at its store locations. Dale Amabile, Suburban's Director of Field Support, immediately looked to the number one culprit in her hardware help desk queue for cost and efficiency gains - the aging printers.

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## Suburban Propane

—Dale Amabile  
Director of Field Support  
Suburban Propane  
Whippany, N.J.  
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### The Challenge

“Suburban had an aging group of laser printers,” said Amabile. “In fact, most were more than seven years old. We rely on printed materials to document product deliveries and other critical business activities. But, greater than 40 percent of our printers were prone to failures which were costing us a lot of time and money.”

As the printers aged, Suburban's third-party printer service vendor was having a hard time getting replacement parts for them. These aging



printers led to a lot of help desk calls. In fact, about one-third of Suburban's hardware help desk calls were printer-related, according to Amabile.

"If the printer is not working, the store loses some of its reporting and financial capabilities," Amabile said. "That reporting gap hinders the stores, particularly during the busy winter heating season when accurate forecasting and ordering are essential to good customer service."

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—Dale Amabile

At the same time, the company was also pursuing a name change in some markets due to its Agway acquisition. Some locations used the new software while others used the old Agway software. As a result, Suburban needed printers to accommodate both applications and the flexibility to represent a different company name in some regions.

### The Solution

Suburban solicited bids from multiple printer vendors, seeking robust printing solutions that might reduce help desk calls and paper consumption costs, improve store level efficiencies and facilitate the company's name change in specific locations.

Lexmark responded with a solutions approach that showed Suburban ways to print more efficiently and reduce help desk hardware calls while improving the stores' productivity. The proposal included Lexmark T630dn laser printers, Lexmark Optra Forms software, warranty and other services to support the customer throughout its technology transition.

Lexmark helped Suburban build a series of electronic forms for its national account customers using Lexmark's Optra Forms software. Suburban's national accounts typically have multiple locations across the country with invoicing being consolidated and printed at the corporate location.

The new system allows Suburban to automatically roll up all outstanding accounts receivable for its national accounts and cut a single invoice for that customer.

These forms are also stored on the Lexmark printers and allow staff at corporate to easily print documents, such as invoices and statements, with the new company name. Since the forms reside electronically on the printer, Suburban has been able to eliminate the inventory of pre-printed forms.

Lexmark's offering also included LexOnsite warranty support, an onsite printer exchange warranty that replaces printers needing repair within 24 hours of a reported failure at all of Suburban's store locations.

### The Results.

Amabile says that the new Lexmark printing solution has dramatically lowered printer failures, reduced the burden on her help desk and improved productivity at the stores.

"We previously had 50-70 printer-related calls in our help desk queue," Amabile explained. "We were always running at a deficit. With Lexmark, our hardware calls have been reduced by one-third. Now we can concentrate more aggressively on other technology issues and our employees can focus on customer service."

"The LexOnsite Exchange has been extremely successful," Amabile said. "If a printer has a problem, a technician shows up and swaps out the equipment within 24 hours. It's a great solution for our business requirements because our stores just can't be without their printer for very long."

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

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