

Copier Careers®

2020

A RETROSPECTIVE

Pivot, Adapt, Accelerate



Disruption might be the best word to describe 2020 — and the great disrupter was the spread of COVID-19, which caused a worldwide pandemic and changed everyday life in big and small ways — for everyone, everywhere.

“Unbelievable, unprecedented or every ‘un’ word you can come up with,” said Paul Schwartz, president of Copier Careers, describing how the social distancing, stay-at-home orders and other pandemic responses upended the business world. “It’s unreal and unlike anything we have seen before,” he said, noting that the pandemic’s effects on business have eclipsed the the worst of the 2008 recession.

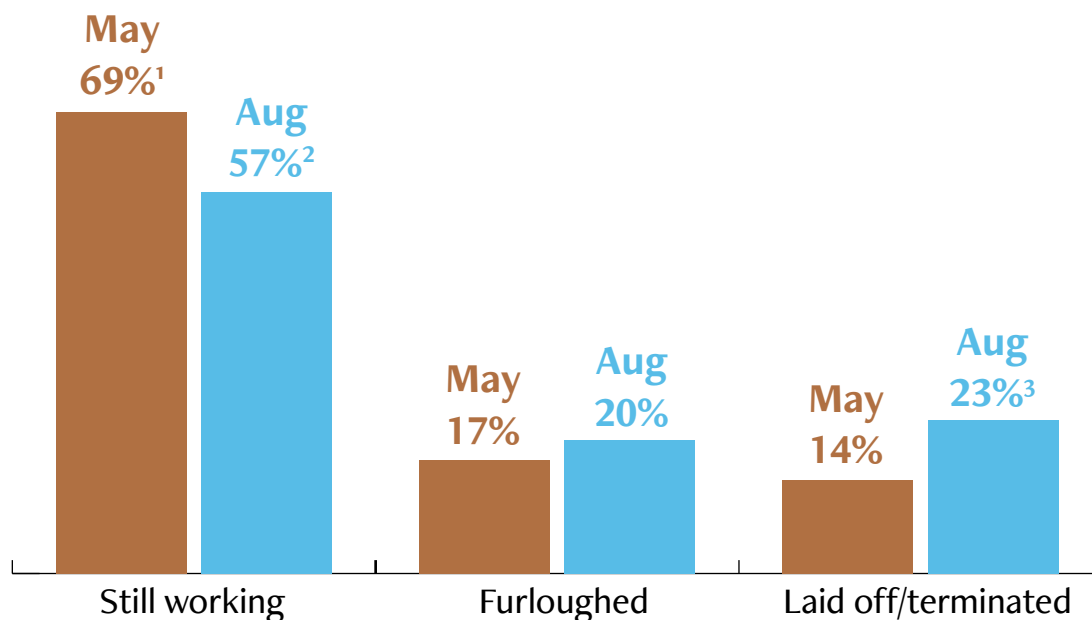
For Jessica Crowley, senior vice president at Copier Careers, the industry-changing effects of the pandemic on Copier Channel employment “seemed like the recession times 10.”

In November, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported the [U.S. unemployment rate](#) was 6.7%. That is nearly double the 3.7% rate in February 2020, a month before the U.S. reported its first COVID cases. At its 2020 peak, the unemployment rate reached 14.7% in April. It was the highest recorded unemployment since the Great Depression. Since then, the rate has gradually fallen as businesses began to reopen safely, when possible.

Because of the incredible upheaval in the business community — including massive effects in the Copier Channel — we paused our annual [Salary Surveys](#) in 2020. We knew that any data gathered or analysis made during this difficult year would have little bearing on the industry or its opportunities and challenges when the pandemic wanes.

In the ensuing months, we have kept our finger on the pulse of the industry with monthly polls and a forum for collecting pandemic stories. Even though a birds-eye view of the industry isn’t possible this year, we can offer insights and anecdotes about what we and the industry experienced during this pandemic year. It is a testament to the durability of the Copier Channel to see forward-thinking managers addressing difficulties at hand and adapting their teams to tackle changing needs now and after the pandemic.

Poll: 19,000+ Copier Channel pros share pandemic experience*



* Poll numbers are anecdotal and not scientifically rigorous, but reflect broad industry trends.

1 Included: 17% working from home, 17% working socially distanced, 15% reduced hours, 14% reduced pay, 6% no changes

2 Included: 46% full time and 11% part time

3 Included: 13% job hunting and 10% waiting to look

Anecdotes from the field

In online polls we published in [May](#) and [July](#), Copier Channel workers told us how the pandemic was affecting their work and employment status. Respondents reported the changes in how they worked, including working from home, a reduction in hours, reduction in pay, [furloughs](#) and layoffs. From May through July, the hurt deepened, as more respondents reported layoffs. While our monthly polls are not scientifically rigorous, with more than 19,000 responses to each poll, we can see broad industry trends.

“It’s a tight industry to start with,” Schwartz said. “If you’ve read our [past salary surveys](#), you know there was essentially zero unemployment in the industry going into the pandemic. We’ve seen a little bit of a brain drain, especially of sales talent, to the point that it’s actually tighter now.”

Embracing change and moving forward

Responding to disruption and finding new ways to succeed has long been the Copier Channel’s greatest strength, and Schwartz and Crowley said they are seeing that resilience and adaptation bubble up across the industry.

Some dealers have pivoted to new services to replace reduced print business. This includes everything from enhanced document management and managed IT services to adding products such as sanitizer, thermometers and PPE to their inventory. Some are hiring more specialized techs to service the increased demand for remote support.

“That’s what had to happen,” Crowley said. “Everyone had to pivot and find how they were going to survive.”

“Employed full time (for the moment). The spike in COVID-19 cases has stirred some talk about another shutdown. I’m uncomfortable with the uncertainty.”

– Poll respondent, July 2020

Same as it ever was — for hiring

It may seem counterintuitive, but during the pandemic, there has been a strong market for hiring for all positions in the Copier Channel — sales reps, sales managers, service techs and service & ops managers. Now more than ever, it is critically important for copier dealers to build a strong bench with proactive hiring. “As dealers right-size their staff and adapt to changes in the industry, they are building teams for the future,” Schwartz said.

“Clients are open for discussions with candidates,” Crowley added. “COVID restrictions have made in-person meetings difficult, but they are talking by phone or on Zoom or other virtual platforms.” She notes that continued market uncertainty can slow the hiring process from both sides of the transaction, but the conversation is important. “It’s about the continual building of relationships and finding ways that they can still make it work.”

The pandemic slowed the wave of mergers and acquisitions that predominated the industry in 2019, for one big reason and many others. “How do you put a value on any business right now?” Schwartz said. “I suppose it just depends where this all comes out. Anecdotally, we haven’t seen any of our clients be so distressed that they’ve had to close their businesses.”

Schwartz and Crowley say small- to medium-size dealers seem to have been more adaptive to recent changes in the industry, probably because organizations with a flatter structure can be more nimble.

“With the vaccines coming, we can see the light at the end of the tunnel,” Schwartz said. “This thing keeps moving and evolving and disrupting, but it’s pretty much a consensus that office buildings are going to come back. They may be in a different form or function. Our clients tell us, business as we knew it is coming back. It’s just a matter of when.”



Looking beyond 2020

The big question really is what lies beyond the end of the tunnel.

Clearly, nobody really knows. But what we do know is that the Copier Channel is resilient, responsive and adaptive. So, what lies ahead is likely something familiar to the Copier Channel — innovation and growth.

Surely, the pandemic will leave change in its wake. But in a [recent poll](#), we asked the Copier Channel what trends it sees in 2021. The answers of 53% of respondents saw growth opportunities for solutions and support.

Of the 15,184 responses to the poll, 32% anticipate increased “health solutions services” and another 21% pointed to increased “remote office support.”

Other responses included: management turnover, 15%; proactive hiring, 15%; company and branch closures, 9%; and more mergers and acquisitions, 8%. Notably, a combined 91% of the responses were about positive growth and moving forward.

“The industry has gone through more disruption in nine or 10 months than we have seen in the preceding 10 years,” Schwartz said.

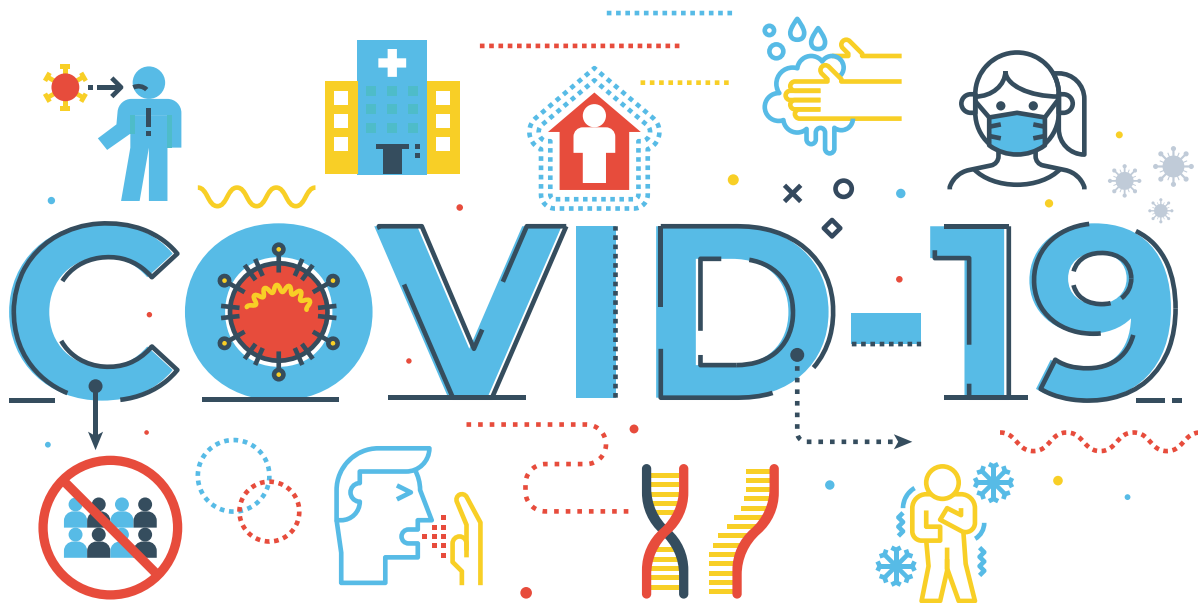
“Everyone is looking for stability of the business environment, so they can make decisions instead of operating in triage mode from day to day,” Crowley added.

Schwartz said financial indicators and the stock market in this moment show a trend toward recovery, and he and others see recovery coming within 2021.

“It is so dependent on people going back to offices, going back to work,” he said. “The vaccine and federal relief bill change that.”

Insights about the pandemic's effect on business

During this year of incredible change, we asked people in the Copier Channel to share their experiences of unprecedented business disruption and efforts to adapt. Some quotes were edited for space. All comments are from our monthly polls.



“I don’t see our industry just going back to normal, because many companies are realizing that WFH is viable, profitable and sustainable. The transition of virtual work started years ago, but ... COVID has accelerated that 100-fold.”

“Our company has already pivoted into temperature kiosks and security cameras that have the ability to take temperatures and facially recognize employees — all while still selling our regular line of equipment.”

“To have lived my life helping people understand the ... features and benefits of the newest technologies of our industry ... I have been proud to do so. And then 2020 came, and COVID-19 hit us. It simply has shifted the entire marketplace ... (and put us) in a tailspin like we, as a country, have never seen. No matter what, I am a woman very proud to have been able to say ... ‘Yeah, I sell copiers for a living. How can I help you?’”

“I am on furlough, with no idea of when I’ll return. I hope that as things gradually reopen, business will pick up and we can all get back to work.”

“As difficult as this may be, we need to try to stay focused. We need to start adapting to homeschooling/reaching out to customers by email and get more e-learning courses under our belt. This is affecting everyone and can continue to do so for a few more months. Have a plan.”

“I found working from home as tech support allows me to get more done as far as helping clients, doing remote work, etc., instead of driving a couple hours each day, I am helping people. It also gets away from office politics and constant interruptions.”

– Poll respondent, July 2020

It's Time to Pivot, Adapt and Accelerate

We can't exactly say “been there, done that” about the industry upheaval in 2020. But the Copier Channel adapts well to change. It has seen hard times, dramatic changes in products and services and the move from a break-fix industry to an IT-based one.

“If the last 15 years show us anything, it is that this industry is here to stay and it can handle just about anything that comes its way,” Schwartz said, noting that strong, innovative leadership is going to make a difference as the industry emerges from the pandemic.

“The industry needs game-changers in order to adapt and evolve, especially people to build the IT division of their organization. That's where we see the greatest need to improve,” Crowley said.

Along with strong, forward-thinking leaders, there is a growing need for hybrid techs, too. “We especially need techs who can troubleshoot extensive IT and networking,” she said.

For Schwartz, both of those skill sets are great examples of where the industry needs to accelerate to meet changing needs. That could also include more techs with the ability to service in-home devices with networked services. As the industry recovers from the bumps and bruises of the pandemic, retooling for the demands of the recovering economy will be critical.

“We know this for sure,” Schwartz said. “The industry will stay extremely relevant. It can be even stronger as industries such as hospitality, law firms and even elective surgeries ramp up again.

“We're going to see some companies that are leaner and a little meaner, and we are going to see some companies that are taking advantage of this situation, because it does present some unique advantages — and they are going to grow.”

As we greet 2021, we will apply the lessons of 2020 to find a new normal. We see opportunities for the industry to pivot, adapt and accelerate to solve problems and advance technology and service. Because that's what we always do. Happy New Year. -CC

Looking Ahead to 2021

[New Year's Resolutions for 2021](#)

[Where's My Motivation?](#)

[Tips for Successful Remote Interviews](#)

[Key Crisis Leadership Traits](#)

ABOUT US

Copier Careers® is a recruiting firm dedicated exclusively to helping Copier Channel employers find experienced service techs, copier sales reps, sales managers, service and operations managers, controllers, back-office staff and MPS/MNS experts. Learn more about our commitment to the Copier Channel at www.CopierCareers.com, or call **888-733-4868** to talk to a recruiter.