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From Break-Fix to Breakaway:

Why Skills from the Office Technology Industry Are in High Demand

By Scott Cullen

Other industries are poaching IT-savvy techs and proven sales reps, forcing dealers to compete in a broader, faster-moving talent marketplace.

It's a scenario all too familiar to recruiters and hiring managers in the office technology field: a promising candidate interviews well, shows interest, and seems like a great fit, until they accept a position in another industry. Meanwhile, office technology dealers, once able to rely on stable, long-term employees, are now experiencing increased turnover and heightened competition for talent from outside the industry.

"This isn't just a generational issue," said Jessica Crowley, senior vice president of Copier Careers. "It's affecting every age group. Professionals are open to changing industries if the opportunity offers better compensation, growth, or lifestyle benefits, and other sectors are taking full advantage of that."

According to Crowley and Paul Schwartz, president of Copier Careers, this talent migration is one of the biggest challenges the industry faces today. Knowing why it's happening and what dealers can do about it is essential to staying competitive in a tightening labor market.

Why People Are Leaving: It's About Value and Opportunity

Crowley says clients often ask why many candidates tend to change jobs every two to three years. While some of this can be attributed to generational trends, she explains that the main issue is economic.

"For a lot of candidates, the biggest way to increase their compensation is to change jobs," she explained. "That's not specific to our industry, it's true across the board. But it's definitely starting to impact office technology."

When dealers push back and question the value of hiring someone who might only stay a few years, Crowley shifts the conversation: "If that sales rep brings in \$800,000 to a million in revenue during that time, was that investment worth it? In most cases, the answer is yes."

The challenge, especially for smaller and family-owned dealerships, is adapting to this new reality. Longstanding expectations of employee loyalty don't always translate in the current labor market. "If a company has a culture where people tend to stay for a long time, this shift is very hard to grasp," Crowley said. "It's particularly difficult for smaller independents who aren't used to high turnover. But even larger dealers and manufacturers are seeing it."

4 Ways to Compete for Talent Across Industries

- 1. Move Fast** - Candidates are evaluating multiple opportunities. Waiting too long can cost you the hire.
- 2. Rethink ROI** - Even if a new hire only stays two or three years, the value they bring during that time can far outweigh the cost of recruitment and onboarding.
- 3. Invest in Career Pathing** - Show employees a future in your organization to make staying more attractive than leaving.
- 4. Stay Flexible** - Consider candidates from adjacent industries or with transferable skills. Be open to nontraditional backgrounds.

Copier Careers is a recruiting firm dedicated exclusively to helping copier channel employers find experienced service techs, copier sales reps, managers, controllers, back office staff, and MPS/MNS experts. Learn more about our commitment to the industry at www.CopierCareers.com.

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Transferable Skills

The skill sets common to service technicians and even sales reps in the office technology industry are transferable, and other industries know this. This trend isn't new, Schwartz noted. He saw it coming more than two decades ago.

"I spoke at a BTA convention in the early 2000s," he recalled. "My topic was technician compensation, and I brought a bunch of sample comp plans. But what I really wanted to talk about was how the skills our techs were developing were becoming more valuable to other industries."

At the time, IT and dot-com startups were gaining momentum. Schwartz predicted that industries outside the office tech channel would start actively recruiting copier technicians, and he was right. Today's hybrid technicians, with both mechanical and IT skills, are even more attractive to those sectors.

"Back then, our techs were mostly break-fix. Now they're closer to IT professionals," Schwartz said. "That opens the door to pharma, medical, cybersecurity, and all kinds of startups. These industries are hiring them and paying them more."

And it's not just technicians. Crowley says she regularly sees sales reps poached by SaaS companies, tech startups, and even industries like medical and dental sales.

"Startups in IT and cybersecurity were huge during COVID with the shift to remote work," she said. "Now we're seeing candidates get pulled into anything from dental to software. One of our clients recently lost a candidate to a dental company that offered significantly higher compensation."

A Two-Sided Sale—and a Tougher One

For recruiters like Schwartz and Crowley, these shifts have made their jobs more complex and more demanding.

"Recruiting is a two-sided sale," Schwartz explained. "Our clients sell a solution to an end user—they know the product, they know the benefits. We don't even have a product until we go out and find the candidate. Then we have to sell the client on the candidate and sell the candidate on the opportunity."

That complexity means deals fall through, timelines stretch, and frustration builds on all sides. Add in the pressure of a labor market with record-low unemployment, and it's no wonder that recruiting in this space is "not for the faint of heart," as Schwartz put it.

"We have a saying: time kills deals," he said. "We're constantly managing moving parts, expectations, and personalities. And until the day that person shows up to work, we don't know for sure if the deal is done."

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Retention Requires a Mindset Shift

Dealers who want to avoid losing talent, or losing out on it, must shift their thinking, Crowley said. That starts with realistic expectations about employee tenure and a focus on maximizing ROI even in shorter stints.

“This idea of cradle-to-grave employment? That’s gone,” said Schwartz. “Companies have to ask themselves: ‘What value did we get during the time this person was with us?’”

That could involve investing in a new hire who remains for three years but makes a significant impact on revenue growth or operational improvements. It may also require reevaluating internal career development and compensation strategies to motivate high performers to stay longer.

Schwartz emphasizes that not hiring, or waiting for the “perfect” candidate, can be more costly than acting decisively.

We’re losing talent to industries that are faster to invest,” he said. “They don’t hesitate to recruit, pay more, or offer growth. If we want to compete, we need to realize that there’s a real ROI in hiring the right people even if they don’t stay forever.”

Compete or Fall Behind

As the office technology industry continues to change, competition for talent will only grow stronger. Dealers must accept that the skills developed within the industry are highly sought after elsewhere, and that employees at all levels are increasingly open to exploring opportunities outside the channel.

“The industry is losing people to every sector out there,” Schwartz said. “It’s all about what’s going to best serve the individual, whether that’s compensation, flexibility, purpose, or career development. That’s what people are looking for now.”

Crowley summed it up succinctly: “There’s nothing we can do to stop candidates from considering other industries. But what we can do is help our clients compete better for the people they want to keep.”