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The 2026 Sales Rep Market: Candidate's Game, Dealer's Opportunity

Sub-Title

By Scott Cullen

Uncertainty, pent-up demand, and shifting expectations on both sides define the current climate.

The office technology industry might not be “sexy,” as Paul Schwartz, president of Copier Careers, readily admits, but it remains a place where strong sales reps can build substantial books of business and secure stable, profitable careers. Even as technology evolves and work patterns shift, organizations still depend on the solutions this industry provides. In 2025, the demand for revenue-generating sales professionals has rarely been greater, yet hiring those reps has become more complicated than ever.

“It’s a candidate’s market on all ends,” says Jessica Crowley, senior vice president at Copier Careers. Over the past several years, base salaries have generally increased, and expectations have risen alongside them, forcing dealers to rethink how they hire, compensate, and retain sales talent as they move toward 2026.

Schwartz and Annika Palmquist, vice president of resources, joined Crowley for a detailed discussion of current industry trends. Their insights paint a complex picture: dealers are eager to grow but cautious about acting; compensation is increasing but closely linked to quota expectations; and top sales reps, while often frustrated with their current employer and frequently courted, are sometimes hesitant to make a lateral move, despite some notable exceptions.

What follows is a look at the current hiring climate for sales reps in the office technology industry and its implications for both employers and candidates in 2026.

A Candidate's Market—With Strings Attached

According to Crowley, the balance of power has shifted decisively toward candidates since 2020. “In general, compensation plans have increased, especially when it comes to the base salary,” she says.

But that higher base comes with an important caveat. Dealers who raise salary expectations also raise performance standards. “With the expectations of the higher compensation comes the expectation that they’re going to get a stronger rep and that person will be able to sell more than someone coming in at a \$35,000 base salary,” Crowley explains.

In practical terms, dealers willing to pay more want—and need—sales reps who can deliver more. That usually means:

- A proven track record of meeting or exceeding quota
- The ability to sell full solutions instead of just hardware
- Comfort selling more complex offerings, from production print to managed IT

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For candidates from outside the channel, particularly from higher-paying sectors like SaaS or IT services, the transition can be abrupt. Crowley says many clients now recognize they can't attract that caliber of talent using outdated compensation structures.

"Companies understand that, as they look outside the industry for candidates, their compensation may be higher," she says. "If they want to engage and attract individuals from outside the industry that can bring value to their organization, they will have to come up with a creative way to incentivize them to come on board."

That creativity often takes the form of higher starting salaries, more flexible compensation structures, or roles tailored to a candidate's strengths. Some dealers are also offering clearer onboarding support or longer runway periods for new hires to build a pipeline and reach performance expectations. The underlying reality, however, remains unchanged: the best sales talent has options, and they know it.

Beyond Box Sales: Solutions, Support, and Frustration

The industry's shift from selling boxes to offering solutions isn't new. "We've been saying for so long that it's not just about selling the box," Crowley states. What has changed is how openly sales reps share their frustration when their organizations fail to deliver on the solutions they promote.

Copier Careers recruiters often hear candidates express that they don't want to be limited to hardware sales. These reps aren't just chasing buzzwords; they want to sell a full range of offerings and trust their company can actually deliver them.

"The more solutions they have to sell, the happier they are," says Schwartz. "But the thing that will frustrate the heck out of them is if the organization they work for can't implement the solution. Then, essentially, what they have to do is sell it twice because they're having to resolve the problem of implementation."

Crowley sees that frustration surface regularly, particularly when support systems break down. Reps become discouraged when solutions are poorly implemented or when internal teams can't support what's been sold.

For employers, the warning is clear: selling solutions requires more than a marketing message. It demands:

- Strong technical and implementation teams
- Reliable back-office systems to track and collect recurring revenue
- Clear internal processes that prevent reps from spending time unwinding failed deployments

Top sales reps want to sell the entire value stack, but they won't stay if they feel they're selling promises their company can't keep.

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Dealers Want Growth, But Hesitate to Hire

If demand for sales reps is so strong, why does hiring feel sluggish?

Crowley has noticed clients slowing down their decision-making. “Clients haven’t been moving as quickly as they have in the past couple of years,” she says. “So, they’re starting to lose candidates again. If you want to secure someone, you have to act fast.”

Schwartz links that hesitation to broader instability. “There’s this perception of sort of instability,” he says. “No one really knows what’s going on. So, everything from economic numbers that are all over the place to the tariff situation, there’s uncertainty, and we all know that business thrives on certainty.”

Ironically, the demand is clear. “If you go on our job board, the need is obvious,” Schwartz says. “We have a record number of job orders that we’re working on for our clients.” Yet many dealers hesitate to move forward, even after interviewing and vetting credible candidates.

That hesitation comes at a cost. In a candidate-driven market, top reps won’t wait. They move on, often to competitors willing to act decisively.

Copier Careers’ advice to employers is blunt: “Hire more. Know what you want, and if you find that person, be prepared to act upon it.”

Schwartz offers a pointed analogy. “Could you imagine if they had some large contract, and they messed around with multiple meetings, didn’t get the proposal together right away, let it drag on for weeks and months? That would be totally unacceptable. They would fire that sales rep.”

Hiring, he argues, should be treated with the same urgency as selling. Every productive rep added to the organization represents incremental revenue, and delaying that decision only benefits competitors.

The Talent Supply—and What Actually Gets Reps to Move

One of the most persistent myths in the industry is that layoffs, particularly at OEMs, will suddenly flood the market with top sales talent. Schwartz is skeptical.

“There’s a perception in the industry that when there are layoffs or a reduction in force, especially among the OEMs, that’s going to create a flood of candidates,” he says. “But it really is just a drop in the bucket.” He also notes that OEM sales professionals don’t always translate well to SMB-focused dealer environments.

Crowley sees the pattern repeat every time a major OEM announces a reduction in force. “We’ll always get an email from at least one client saying, ‘Hey, now that this is happening, maybe we can find some candidates.’”

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The real opportunity, however, isn't usually the people being laid off. "In a layoff, it's not the people who are laid off that we target, it's the people left behind," says Palmquist. Those individuals may still have jobs, but they're often reassessing their future amid leadership changes, reduced support, or uncertainty about direction.

That dynamic feeds into a broader reality about the talent pipeline. Are there candidates out there? Yes, but engaging them is increasingly difficult.

"There are a lot of people to uncover now," Crowley says, "but can we get them to communicate and be open to a conversation, or do what they say they're going to do? That is the question."

Schwartz agrees that identifying potential candidates isn't the challenge. "We can source someone in five or six clicks in our proprietary applicant tracking system," he says. "But does that mean they'll communicate with us? Is it the right time to make this happen? We're dealing with people, not widgets."

Sales reps, in particular, present unique challenges. "The most challenging position that we recruit for is sales reps because it's subjective on all sides," Schwartz explains. "Technicians are comparatively straightforward to screen; sales reps are not."

"They're pros at not answering questions," quips Schwartz. Add to that the fact that Copier Careers works with more than 400 independent dealer cultures, each with a different vision of the "ideal" rep, and the complexity multiplies.

Crowley adds another layer: recruiters don't just recruit sales reps; they have to sell *to* them. "Unless you sell to them, they're not going to move forward," she says. "And it's not just selling the job, it's selling them on the *potential* of that job."

While most sales reps won't switch jobs solely for compensation, internal disruption can quickly change that equation. Crowley sees it when restructuring, leadership turnover, or layoffs undermine a rep's support system. "That's directly impacting the sales reps because the support system isn't there," she explains.

"When a rep suddenly loses a manager, sees support roles cut, or feels their ability to sell is being threatened, uncertainty sets in," she adds. "That is causing them to be open to a conversation and willing to make a lateral move."

Schwartz echoes that assessment. "Internal things are happening within some organizations that are causing individuals to reevaluate whether their future is there or not."

In these situations, reps aren't pursuing a higher base salary; they're seeking to escape instability. Non-compensation factors, such as company culture, leadership changes, reduced support, disrupted territories, or doubts about their sales potential, can quickly tip the balance. As these pressures grow across parts of the channel, they're prompting movement that wouldn't have happened even a year ago.

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Red Flags, Expectations, and the Quota–Comp Connection

With rising wages and a more fluid candidate market, screening is more important than ever. For Copier Careers recruiters, red flags arise at both ends of the hiring process, and most stem from mismatched expectations.

On the candidate side, frequent job-hopping remains a consistent warning sign. "We're not going to pursue a candidate who has changed jobs every year or every couple of years unless there are very specific reasons," says Crowley. While some moves after 2020 can be explained, she emphasizes long-term patterns and whether a candidate can clearly demonstrate performance, stability, and growth over time.

Another common red flag for candidates is an overemphasis on guaranteed pay. "If we get candidates who say, 'I want a huge base salary and most of my comp to come from base,' we call that a base chaser," Crowley explains. "That's pretty much a non-starter with our clients 99% of the time." In an industry where upside is tied directly to production, candidates who want most of their compensation insulated from performance are rarely a good fit.

On the employer side, unrealistic expectations can be just as problematic. Compensation plans that don't align with quotas are a frequent sticking point. Crowley's core question, on both sides, is simple: how does the base salary align with the quota?

If a rep is generating \$30,000 a month, a \$70,000 base salary probably doesn't make sense. On the other hand, when dealers plan to expand into new markets and anticipate \$100,000 in net-new revenue each month, recruiters often need to adjust expectations. Such growth can challenge even experienced reps, and many clients become more flexible once those realities are clearly explained.

This is where the idea of the "ideal candidate" often causes confusion. Schwartz describes the situation many dealers aspire to: "Clients would like, in a perfect world, to bring on a sales rep who's hit President's Club multiple years, won every award, won every trip, and brings a book of business with them."

That combination, however, is rare, especially in markets where non-compete, confidentiality, or proprietary information agreements are enforced.

Schwartz is blunt about the risk of waiting for perfection. Employers holding out for that kind of candidate, he says, are "hunting for purple squirrels. Yes, it'd sure be something if you caught them, but is it likely? Nope."

In the current job market, successful hiring isn't about finding perfect resumes but about aligning expectations early on, covering compensation, quota, territory, and realistic growth potential. When these elements match, both dealers and candidates are much more likely to find a lasting fit.

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Why the Industry Still Attracts (and Loses) Talent

From the outside, many candidates never consider the office technology industry. “When I tell people what industry I recruit for, they’re like, ‘I never even thought about that,’” Crowley says.

What draws them in once they look closer?

- Stability: Organizations still need these solutions.
- Uncapped upside: Many roles offer commission without hard ceilings.
- Long-term earning potential: Strong performers can build significant income over time.

The downside is that base salaries often start lower than what candidates from other industries expect, making the risk-reward story harder to sell.

Internally, there’s also a steady outflow of talent. Crowley notes that many reps with three to five years of experience leave for other industries, not because they’ve aged out, but because other sectors offer higher guaranteed compensation.

Schwartz sums it up succinctly: “The office technology industry is a good training ground that other industries poach from.”

A Possible Reset: Consolidation, Fracturing, and What Comes Next

Another trend shaping the 2026 landscape is what Schwartz sees as the beginning of a familiar cycle: consolidation followed by fragmentation and realignment.

“We’re maybe a little ahead of the curve on this,” he says, “but it looks like we’re about to see a pattern again that we’ve seen before, possibly some new upstart organizations.”

The overriding idea is that this industry tends to snap back when consolidation reaches a certain point. “Every time everyone writes that ultimately this industry is going to consolidate and become one giant dealership, or there’ll be three giant dealerships and that’s it, it never happens,” Schwartz says. “Peel back the onion some more, and there’s another evolution.”

What makes this moment significant is uncertainty. Leadership changes, rumored defections, and shifting market share could either slow hiring or accelerate it, depending on how dealers respond. For candidates, realignment often creates unexpected opportunities.

“It feels like one of those times when the pendulum is swinging back,” opines Schwartz.

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2025 Lessons and a Pent-Up 2026

Looking back, 2025 was marked by hesitation. Hiring processes dragged out, and strong candidates were lost.

Yet Schwartz is cautiously optimistic. “I actually do think 2026 will be a good year,” he says, “if for no other reason than the hesitancy has created a pent-up demand.”

For reps, 2026 is likely to bring more of the same: strong demand, cautious employers, and increasing complexity in what they’re asked to sell. Those who stay flexible, understand how their pay relates to quotas, and evaluate employers’ ability to deliver on promises will be best positioned to succeed.

For dealers, the stakes are just as high. In an industry where growth often acts as a defense mechanism for an unstable market, the choice is clear: treat hiring as an extension of sales, or risk losing your accounts to competitors who hire the reps willing to take them.

Crowley has already noticed a positive change. Clients are becoming more flexible, more open to discussion, and more willing to tailor compensation to fit the right candidate.

If dealers can pair that flexibility with decisiveness and clarity, 2026 could be a strong year, not just for hiring, but for growth.

Advice for Employers: Treat Hiring Like Sales

For employers, Copier Careers recruiters’ core message is simple: be decisive and intentional.

1. **Know what you want.** Be realistic about experience, comp, and non-compete limitations. Don’t chase purple squirrels.
2. **Move quickly when you find the right person.** Don’t let interviews drag on; don’t “slow walk” an offer. Top reps won’t wait.
3. **Sell your company.** An employer’s first job is to sell the company to the sales rep they want to hire. If you’re not actively selling the opportunity, you’re losing ground.
4. **See hiring as a value-add, not a hassle.** A rep with a \$45,000 monthly quota—half a million a year—is a pure revenue engine. If that’s the case, aggressively work with that individual to bring them on board.

In a market where “there’s always room for another sales rep,” dealers who lean into growth while others hesitate are positioning themselves to dominate their territories.

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Advice for Candidates: Answer the Phone and Keep Your Bridges Intact

Schwartz doesn't understand reps who won't even listen. "Sales reps are supposed to be the freewheeling personalities, be open to a deal, looking for every advantage to improve themselves. When we call, it's because there's an opportunity you should consider. That doesn't mean you have to do anything, but you should have situational awareness of what's happening in your marketplace. There's leverage in knowing your market value. What rep doesn't want that?"

He reminds candidates that Copier Careers sends them directly to decision-makers. "Nine times out of 10, we're sending them directly to the hiring manager or even sometimes the owner of the company. So why wouldn't you be open to a conversation?"

1. Answer the phone
2. Don't burn bridges.
3. Be open to a conversation and follow through.