



Printers Charming

Working and studying at home means printing at home too!

Deloitte Global creates an annual [Technology, Media and Telecommunications \(TMT\) Predictions](#) report, which considers how technology advances may transform the worldwide business ecosystem over a 12- to 36-month period. While TMT Predictions is published annually each December, the extraordinary disruption caused by COVID-19 has led the team to create “mini-Predictions,” which examine the short-term effects of the pandemic on various businesses.

Deloitte Global predicts that home printer sales will grow 15% in 2020 to about \$5 billion or about 30 million units. The home printer market is mainly made up of inkjet all-in-one printers costing less than \$400 and laser/LED multifunction printers (MFP) costing less than \$500.¹ As part of COVID-19 lockdowns, hundreds of millions of teleworkers (many of whose kids are learning from home too) brought their laptops home in a bag...but left their office printers behind!

Demand for home printers in China during their lockdown saw sales surge 200% on one site, many models sell out,² and another site saw sales up 1600%.³

In early March, IDC China wrote "Coupled with the current epidemic situation, the demand growth curve of the household market shows a straight upward trend."⁴

Data for other markets is just coming in, but sales appear to be up nearly 10% in Q1, and the lockdown only really began in the last weeks of the quarter. Q2 could be even stronger, assuming lockdowns continue and the supply chain remains robust. As recently as 2019, annual growth was predicted to be only 7.2%.⁵

One key to this surge is the relatively low price for fast, full colour, high quality all-in one devices: in the US in 2019, the average price for an MFP was \$123, down from \$300 twenty years ago.⁶ A single function printer (no copier or scanner) is as little as \$20 in India. Next, setting them up is now easier than it used to be...to quote one teleworker on Twitter last month "I just setup and used a home printer for the first time in maybe a decade, and it was super duper easy. Thx, technology."⁷

Some shifts in consumer behaviour due to the virus are likely transient: sports viewing is down and news viewing is up, but in a post pandemic world both will likely return to their previous level. Nevertheless, once the crisis reaches a lower level, home printers will not just disappear in a puff of ink.

The question then becomes, are home printers more like diesel generators, or mobile phones? In previous natural disasters in the 1990s, as wires came down (hurricanes, ice storms) consumers bought generators and cell phones to replace services that used to come over a wire. After the disaster was over, the generators were consigned to the garage, not to be used again until the next outage...but consumers just kept right on using their cell phones as a part of daily life, with many cutting their landlines: by 2016 more than half of Americans no longer had a voice landline.⁸

Deloitte Global predicts that home printers will fall somewhere in between. They are unlikely to be used as heavily post pandemic as they are when both parents and kids are stuck at home. But it seems likely that more people will work and learn more days per year from home. And sometimes, they will want hard copies, with associated ongoing demand for ink, paper, service and replacement/upgraded printers. They might not print daily, but weekly or monthly seems probable. As of 2019, 62% of American households had a printer,⁹ so that market has some room to grow, but not as much as other markets where ownership is lower.

The resurgence in the home printer and the need for physical output is not without precedents. In 2010, the death of print books was forecast as being only five years off.¹⁰ But in 2019, print books were about 80% of the market and rising, while eBooks were actually in decline.¹¹ And although vinyl record sales looked like they might disappear entirely at one point, they came back: from a low of just under one million units in the US in 2006, to over 19 million in 2019.¹²

When we 'turn the page' on the pandemic, the 'flip side' will be a world where home printers matter more than they used to.

Endnotes

1. <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/global-inkjet-printers-market-outlook-2019-2027-anticipating-a-cagr-of-more-than-7-2-300905199.html>
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4. Original in Chinese, translation courtesy of Google Translate: <https://www.idc.com/getdoc.jsp?containerId=prCHC46099020>
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