

the CUTTING EDGE:

OFFICE SHREDDER BUYING TIPS

BY SCOTT CULLEN

Whether you're buying a shredder for the first time or looking to replace an existing model that's seen better days, it never hurts to be an educated consumer. There's a wealth of manufacturers marketing shredders and numerous sources for acquiring them. With so many choices, the decision can sometimes be perplexing; and without the appropriate knowledge going in, you may end up with a shredder that doesn't meet your current needs or doesn't meet the needs of a growing business. With that in mind, we've put together some tips that will help you find the most appropriate shredder for your office.

What can it shred?

First and foremost, consider what you plan to shred. Paper is obvious, but most shredders today also accept credit cards and standard staples. Some models can even handle industrial staples and paper clips. You may find, however, that some high-security models that shred documents into extremely fine particles don't offer this capability, nor do some extremely low-end models designed for home use. Sensitive information isn't just stored on paper anymore, and you may want a model that also destroys CDs or DVDs.

Stay away from the cheap stuff

Take a stroll down the aisle of any office superstore and you're bound to see a wide selection of shredders selling for \$150 or less. But, don't do it. More often than not, these

devices, although fine for home and home office use where you're shredding a few documents a day, aren't going to stand up to the rigors of a busy office. That's especially true even if you're only shredding a few documents a day but have peak periods where you'll be shredding hundreds, if not thousands, of documents a day. What you'll find is that these inexpensive shredders will either be too slow to accommodate a heavy volume; will overheat and shut down, forcing you to wait for them to cool off before you can start shredding again; or the motors will burn out from extended use. Your best bet is a device designed to handle this kind of volume and/or for continuous use.

Where to buy

The best place to find a shredder designed for

office use is from an office equipment or office products dealer, or direct from a manufacturer if that manufacturer sells to end users. Despite what we mentioned earlier about the office superstores, you can find some quality office models on their respective Websites. Don't forget though that you get what you pay for, and the lower you go, the more likely it is that you're going to end up with a shredder that doesn't meet your needs or that you'll be replacing sooner rather than later.

Don't under-buy

The biggest mistake that shredder buyers, especially first-time buyers, make is under-buying. What typically happens is that once an office acquires a shredder, the office management finds that its workers are shredding a whole lot more than what they had

originally planned.

Pick your cut

The two most popular types of shredders are strip cut and crosscut. Crosscut models offer a higher level of security because they cut two ways instead of one, creating a smaller shred. Strip-cut models reduce the paper to, well, strips, which can be easily reassembled by an extremely patient pilferer. Other terms you're likely to hear are confetti cut, diamond cut, and micro shreds. Those cuts tend to be a bit smaller than crosscut shreds. Note that terminology can vary from manufacturer to manufacturer, and one manufacturer's confetti-cut model is another's crosscut. For the utmost in security, stay away from strip-cut models and opt for a device that shreds documents into pieces at least as small as 1/32 x 7/16 inch. Note that some high-security models reduce documents to microscopic bits of paper. This may be too much for the average office. Keep in mind too that the smaller the cut, the higher the price of the shredder.

Mouthing off

This refers to the slot where you insert the paper, sometimes referred to as the throat size or feed opening. Consider a model with a slot of at least 9 1/2 inches, although you'll find some shredders with slots as large as 16 inches. You want a slot that's larger than the paper you'll be feeding into it so that you don't waste time precisely trying to line up those 8 1/2 x 11-inch sheets of paper you want to shred, as you would on machines with smaller slots.

Think about capacity

It's also important to consider how many sheets of paper your shredder can handle at a time without jamming. The term you need to know is sheets per pass. For an office model, expect anywhere from six to 38 sheets at a time, although 38 sheets is at the upper end of the shredder spectrum and would most likely be used by an office with a high shred-

ding volume. For the average office that shreds maybe 20-100 documents per day, six to 20 sheets per pass should be adequate.

Basket case

Also consider the basket or bin capacity of your shredder. This is the place where all those shreds end up and is typically measured in gallons. The larger the capacity, the less often you'll need to empty the shred basket.

Watch your speed

A shredder's speed is measured in feet per minute (fpm). Shredders at the higher end of the office spectrum operate in the 40+fpm range, whereas the average office model will likely be in the 13-20+fpm range. A model operating at 13 fpm or less will likely be a bit too slow for the average office.

Mind the higher power

The more you spend on a shredder, the more likely you'll find a model with a higher sheet capacity and a more powerful motor, which is measured in horsepower (hp). Generally, office models are equipped with 1/2-hp to 1-hp motors, although you may find some small office models with 2/5-hp motors. Machines with less powerful motors are designed for occasional shredding and will overheat and shut off much like a hair dryer does when it overheats.

Quiet, please

All shredders make noise, which is usually caused by the vibration of the cutting head. Some machines have rubber shock mounts that can reduce the noise caused by cutting-head vibrations. If your shredder is going to be used in a busy work area where running it frequently will disturb phone conversations or affect your employees' communication, the sound level could be an issue. If possible, check the unit's dB levels before buying or try to get a demo to hear just how loud it sounds. You'll find that dB levels in the 51-56 range are fairly common with office models.

Other key considerations

If you think you'll be moving your shredder from office to office, look for a model with casters. A common feature on just about every shredder is auto reverse for clearing paper jams. Don't buy a shredder without this feature. Also look at the shredder's construction. You want sturdy, and some of the models found at the low end of the shredder spectrum aren't as well made as those models designed for rigorous office use.

Buying time

A decent office model can cost from \$300-\$5,000 depending on your shredding volume and other factors. Breaking that price range down to the various shredder segments, expect to pay approximately \$300-\$800 for a personal shredder, \$800-\$2,000 for a small office model, and \$1,000-\$5,000 for an office model that handles upwards of 400 sheets per day.

Watch the warranty

Compared to other office equipment, most shredders come with generous warranties. Although warranties vary from manufacturer to manufacturer, the most basic is a one-year full warranty. You'll often find more extensive warranties at the higher price points as well as lengthier warranties on the machine's cutters. In some instances, those warranties may be for as many as 10 years.

Service call

Shredders are inherently reliable machines, and unless you have a serious shredding volume, you don't really need a monthly service contract. Your best bet is to pay for service as needed, or if you're purchasing from a dealer who provides you with other office equipment, check into whether or not you can bundle that shredder service into a blanket service contract for all of your equipment.