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How To Understand Faxes

By Dan Handle, 22 Jan 16:04



Faxes, or facsimile copies, have evolved greatly since they began appearing on the market.

The large, cumbersome fax machines that first came on the market could take over five minutes to receive a single page of a fax. Today's models are advanced enough to simultaneously send and receive faxes, usually at a rate of several pages a minute. Now, because of e-mail, many business people believe that faxes - or at least fax machines - are already in danger of going the way of the dodo.

Faxes originally were sent only via telephone lines, meaning at least two lines were needed in order to keep one free for incoming calls. Today, faxes can be sent via the Internet, which can help eliminate paper waste and troubles such as paper jams and busy signals, as well as keep down the cost of the phone bill.

Faxes vs. E-mail:

It may seem that having e-mail would eliminate the need for a fax machine. Not true. While the two communication methods are similar in many ways, both have additional unique advantages.

Advantages of Faxing:

- Provides an immediate hard copy of a document, often necessary in legal matters.
- Often considered more personal and professional than e-mail.
- Lessens the likelihood that documents will be altered by the destination source.
- Requires only a fax machine and a phone line, which are sometimes much easier to use than e-mail programs.

Advantages of E-mail:

- Eliminates the need for paper.
- Does not require leaving the work station.
- Easier, faster and more reliable method of delivery.
- Document can be printed if a hard copy is required.
- Quality of resolution does not diminish in the transmittal process.

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-Documents sent via e-mail can also be sent in a form that allows for editing.

-Can be received as attachments to your e-mail account, streamlining your messages into one location.

-Because it is faster than a fax machine, more documents can be sent at once.

-Does not require paper, so there is no worry of a fax transmission being stopped due to a paper jam or shortage. Also, tone cartridges for printing faxes can be expensive, as well as cause a problem with transmission if the toner runs low.

How Faxes Work:

The technology involved in fax machines is very similar to that in photocopy and printers (thus the hybrid machines that are becoming increasingly popular on the market. For this reason, you may want to consider buying a multipurpose machine - a fax that can also operate as a computer printer/copier. Make sure the fax machine has all the features you need, however, such as printing envelopes and labels). When connecting to one another, fax machines perform what is called a "handshake" - an electronic agreement of how to send and receive the information. (This is that annoyingly screechy sound you hear when someone tries to send a fax over a regular phone line.)

When the handshake is completed, the sending machine begins to scan the document, breaking it down into 1078 thin horizontal strips of information (approximately 100 rows per inch), each one containing 1728 pixels. Some machines offer a feature that will double the amount of rows per inch.

As the document is fed through the machine, the information on the page is changed into binary information: 1 for white, 0 for dark. These bits are then transmitted through the modem to the receiving machine, which interprets the data in the reverse manner.

Because fax machines and computers use roughly the same technology, including modems, fax software and applications can be integrated into computers. This gives you the ability to send files - spreadsheets, data tables, word processor documents, etc. - directly from your computer to a fax machine, where the electronic data is made into a hard copy. Conversely, hard copy documents can be turned into electronic documents, although these documents are often difficult, if not impossible, to edit or amend.

Keep in mind that, like computer modems, fax machines come in different speeds. Because they also require the use of phone lines, slower machines may end up costing you more in the end when you factor in the price of your phone bill. Most machines today transmit at a speed of 9600 baud or bps (bits per second), which translates into one page every 15-60 seconds. The most commonly used V.17 machines transmit at a rate of 14000 baud, but can also send and receive from slower faxes.

Older printer models, and some of today's cheaper ones, use thermal paper. While this allowed for less breakable parts, the paper tended to be disliked in offices. Not only did it fade over time, but its glossy surface was hard to write on and it often curled up after print outs (thermal paper comes on a roll). Newer models use the same paper as copiers and computer printers, so if you run out of paper for one, you can use the paper from the other. The most common model for plain paper is the inkjet, which tends to print rather slowly. Laser or LED faxes use the same technology as a laser printer, right down

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the internal toner cartridge, and print much faster than inkjets. They also tend to be much more expensive, although much more reliable.

Features & Terms:

Although they can be quite different, fax machines and Internet fax programs share a lot of the same features. The following are just a few of the more basic ones available:

Confirmation Page. Once your fax has been delivered, your system (fax machine or computer) will create a page with the end result of the transmission. If the fax was sent successfully, the page will say "Okay." If there was a problem, the page will show that the fax did not go through and may even show the reason (i.e., "No answer," "Transmission Interrupted," etc.). Keeping track of successful and unsuccessful fax transmissions is useful for your records. If the transmission was not complete and the problem was on the receiver's end, you will have a record of the fact that an attempt was made. This is a feature that can often be turned on or off, depending on your needs, so that paper and toner can be conserved.

Redial. If a fax cannot be transmitted, many machines and Internet programs will continue to try automatically until successful. The number of automatic redials can usually be programmed.

Fax Log. You may need to keep track of all the outgoing and incoming faxes. For example, if you want to see who has been sending the most faxes to you, look at the fax log, which usually has this information. The log will also allow you to keep track of transmissions - both successful and not - on less paper than if you were to save every confirmation page.

Copier (fax machines only). Because fax machines use the same technology as photocopiers, most machines these days allow the fax machine to make photocopies as well. While a fax machine usually copies much slower than a real photocopier, it's often useful to have the option available (i.e., if the copier breaks down or is in use by someone else).

Speed Dial. On fax machines, just as with telephones, there are often buttons that can be programmed for quick dialing of often-used numbers. With a fax application, this usually is not necessary as the program will likely have a built-in address book.

Out-Of-Paper Reception (fax machines only). Fax machines with this feature will store incoming faxes in memory if the machine should run out of paper. Once the paper is refilled, the machine will continue printing the fax.

More Features & Terms:

Additional Memory Cards. Both quick scan and out-of-paper recognition require higher memory capacity. You can add additional memory cards if you find your machine often running out of memory or if you anticipate needing the above two features for larger documents.

Delayed Transmission. Some models can hold a fax in memory until a certain programmed time. This can allow you to send faxes at night when telephone rates drop, or for sending overseas.

Telephone Handset. A separate handset for voice communication can be helpful, especially if you dial a voice line instead of a fax line. You can then pick up the handset and avoid having the receiver hear the annoying high-pitched squeal of the fax.

Broadcasting. Allows the machine to send a fax to multiple machines at once - convenient if you often send out a newsletter to several different offices.

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Quick Scan. By allowing the machine to scan a document into its memory before sending the fax, you can reduce the amount of time you have to wait to retrieve your document from the machine.

The Latest:

Multifunction machines are great for small or home offices that scan, copy, fax and print.

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