



# Kyocera

It may not be entirely certain what to call itself but, finds Wendy Brewer, Kyocera has always been clear about its commitment to environmentally friendly printing

In a world obsessed with image, it figures that a business with a catchy name finds marketing its products that bit easier.

Certainly that's the theory behind Kyocera's recent change of moniker. After three years as Kyocera-Mita, the printing and ceramics giant has dropped both the hyphen and the Mita label (acquired in 2000 after purchasing the eponymous Japanese photocopier expert) and reverted to its original title.

Regardless of its chameleon-like name tag, the Kyocera product base is well established throughout the world. It's a firm that makes everything from solar cells and mobile phones to jewellery and ceramics.

This wide range explains the firm's ranking as the 272nd largest company in the world – in terms of IT, that puts them behind the likes of HP and Canon but ahead of companies such as Toshiba and Fujitsu which have a strong presence in the UK and across Europe.

## Caring Kyocera

If you have heard of Kyocera, it's almost certainly for its printers. The 'green' credentials of its network models, in particular, have been pushed heavily in the past decade. Being perceived as a caring company is way up on the Japanese giant's wishlist, alongside a reputation for producing reliable goods that last.

The name Kyocera is a corruption of 'Kyoto', the Japanese town where the company was established and 'cera', an abbreviation of the word 'ceramics'. Established by Dr Inamori in 1959, the company still follows his philosophy of 'Respect the divine and love people'.

At its UK headquarters in Reading, this ethos translates to a happy workplace, a respect for the environment and what appears to be a genuine interest in customer service. Other companies could do worse than take a leaf out of Kyocera's book.

## It's what's inside that counts

Kyocera is noticeably different from its printer-making competitors in two areas: firstly in its build technology and secondly in the importance, or rather lack of it, which it places on consumables.

While other manufacturers rely on OPC (organic photoconductive) drums, Kyocera uses drums coated with aSi (amorphous silicon). It's a technology commonly found in heavy-duty office photocopiers, making aSi drums around 30 times more durable than OPC ones, claims Kyocera.

The resilience of aSi means recycled paper, which has been known to damage softer OPC drums, can be used. The down



side is that aSi drums are more expensive to produce and this is reflected in the cost of the end product. "Although customers will pay more initially they save money in the long term by investing in a longlife product," says Tracey Rawling-Church, Kyocera's head of marketing.

In line with its environmental commitment, each part of the cartridge is replaceable. This negates the need to use a whole new drum each time the ink runs dry. In fact, Kyocera told us its aSi drum has "more or less eliminated" the need for drum changes.

A second crucial distinction from other printer companies lies in Kyocera's stance on consumables. Most printer makers' profit margins rely heavily on cartridge, toner and paper sales but Kyocera generates only five percent of its income from this market.

What's more, Kyocera's surprisingly refreshing attitude to the Smartek chip – a device intended to prevent consumers from using third-party cartridges – means the company would never stop its clients using refills. It focuses its attention instead on making parts easy to replace and recycle – as long as you buy Kyocera's approved parts in order to protect your printer's warranty, of course.

## Keen to be green

To uphold its environmentally conscious profile, Kyocera places great importance on recycling schemes and an eco-friendly production process. For example, each component in its printers is labelled so that recyclers can easily identify which parts can be reused.

But while some manufacturers have jumped on the green bandwagon purely in response to the looming implementation of the EU's WEEE (Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment) directive, Kyocera UK has a long history of commitment to the environment. It has undertaken a diverse range of environmental schemes since arriving on these shores over a decade ago.

It boasts a recycling scheme which benefits Reading's local workforce as well as the environment. Set up in partnership with a local labour group, the company collects used waste electrical goods free of

charge from local businesses and residents for recycling and refurbishing. Anything that can be reused is then sold on or given to charity.

Then there is Greencard.org.uk. This password-protected site gives customers ideas about how to reuse and recycle electronic equipment, plus other information on green issues that are important to their business.

## Strength through division

Kyocera is rather disjointed on the management front, with each region enjoying a fairly autonomous existence. In the UK there are two Reading-based offices – one for its camera division (Kyocera Yashica) and one for its printers and copiers (Kyocera).

The divisions operate independently. Who the company employs and what projects it undertakes is decided at the discretion of its UK managers, with Japan acting as a helpful big brother keeping an eye on the figures but playing little part in day-to-day business. It may be this autonomy that makes it difficult for Kyocera to focus on global branding.

Its printing headquarters was established just over 11 years ago. The nondescript prefabricated building houses 80 staff making up its sales division, corporate customer help centre and marketing department. There are just three internal sales members, four customer relations assistants, one corporate sales agent and a promotions officer. The rest

of the staff consists of clerical workers, technical officers and Kyocera's rather large marketing team.

## Customer support

The company's customer base has traditionally been confined to the corporate and SME (small to medium-sized enterprise) sector rather than consumers. This is due to the higher price of its technologies compared to its OPC drum-reliant competition.

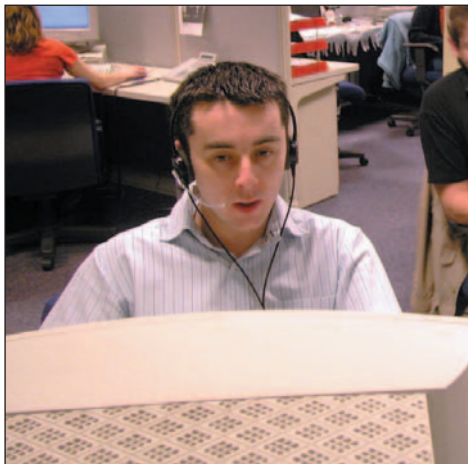
Its customer service operation is split across two locations in Reading and Derry. At its Reading headquarters there are four customer service centre staff, each dedicated to a specific area. So one person will handle queries

## Dedicate a tree

All customers that signs up to one of Kyocera's support packages is entitled to join its 'dedicate a tree' scheme, under which the company plants a new tree in a forest in the UK. The customer receives a kind of 'birth certificate' for their tree, which they can go and visit at any time. "It's just our way of giving something back," says customer relations manager Pat Pascoe.







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solely from public sector customers, while other staff concentrate on queries from different types of businesses.

Aside from its modest size, the first noticeable difference between this and the many other call centres I have visited is that there are no phones ringing. Kyocera's customer relations manager Pat Pascoe puts this down to the company's looping system.

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Around 90 percent of queries are resolved during the first call. More technical queries are sent on to Kyocera's ground-floor labs or referred to specialists in Japan. Reading staff are backed up by those at the Derry centre, which provides support for printer products across all English-speaking European countries.

The 12 operators (Reading's four, plus eight in Derry) answer around 2,600 calls per month. Email queries and telephone calls are split fairly evenly with all technical queries passed back to Reading. The national-rate helpline is manned



between normal office hours with a 24-hour voicemail service in operation for emergency calls out of hours.

Surprisingly, telephone staff do not receive any official customer service training. To keep them up to date with product developments they are given practical training by internal technical employees plus regular product demonstrations from each department. To ensure good continuity of service, the Reading team meets every three months to discuss ideas about how to improve the helpline operation.

### Two born every minute

All the company's printers and photocopiers are made in one of its three Japanese plants. The factories have a monthly production volume of 26,000 monochrome and 5,000 colour printers, which equates to one printer every 30 seconds or so. Its Tamaki factory is also responsible for producing part of the company's consumables range, pumping out 400,000 toner bottles per month.

All staff are recruited from the local area and undergo different in-house training schedules tailored to their specific roles. Employees are placed on a sort of 'buddy training programme' before beginning on the assembly line. This gives them a chance to put what they have learned into practice and pick up tips from other workers.

### Sell, sell, sell

Hardware is vitally important to Kyocera and the idea of using other people's components sends a shudder down its spine. All its printer products are built in-house and sold directly to customers through its internal sales channels, with servicing handled by one of Kyocera's appointed third-party firms. The camera division is the exception to the rule: its photographic goods are sold through a number of large resellers including PC World. ☒

↑ Tamaki is one of Kyocera's trio of manufacturing plants in Japan. The factory produces part of the company's consumables range, pumping out 400,000 toner bottles per month



## Kyocera at a glance

**Founded:** 1959, Kyoto Japan  
**Turnover:** approx £5m  
**UK products:** photocopiers, printers, ceramics and digital cameras

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