

insignia's guide to: Buying a Mobile Thermal Label & Receipt Printer



Many businesses move to mobile printers because they allow the printing of labels or receipts whenever and wherever they are required, boosting employee productivity, reducing the likelihood of error and improving overall efficiencies across the workplace. In warehouses they are popular for printing barcode and shipping labels, and for field-service teams they enable on-the-spot receipt printing.

The challenge with these portable printers is that potential productivity gains aren't easily compared between different mobile printers on the market.

Even the same mobile printer used in a slightly different environment or in conjunction with different equipment can present vastly different levels of productivity gains.

insignia offers a wide range of mobile thermal label and receipt printers. Our leading global brands, including Zebra, Honeywell, Datamax-O'Neil and Bixolon, each provide a choice of models within their ranges for varied printing applications. So, if you are making the move to mobile printing how do you choose the best printer for your business?

WHAT IS YOUR APPLICATION?

The first issue to address is the application – labels or receipts. Some models only print receipts, while others are capable of printing both labels and receipts.

There are a range of accessories available to further make your mobile label printing process more efficient. Popular accessories include battery chargers, spare batteries, forklift mount kits, belt clips and hand/shoulder straps.

Different models offer different accessories, so think how your team will be using the portable printer.



WHAT IS THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT?

Robustness

Ruggedness is an extremely important quality, even for mobile printers used in retail or carpeted environments, because drops, spills and rough handling are routine. Failing to safeguard against these threats will result in lost productivity, the inability to complete necessary tasks and reduced service levels.

While the design of most models will offer some protection against falls, the higher-end models will be more robust offering greater protection, and some even guard against dust and water spray (IP54-rated).

Printer Size and Weight

Mobile printers are designed to be compact. If the printer is to be worn by a team member on a belt clip or shoulder strap it needs to be light-weight enough for the operator's comfort.

Also, to keep the size to a minimum, mobile printers require media with fewer labels per roll than traditional desktop label printers, which means more frequent roll changes.

MEDIA - LABELS AND RECEIPT ROLLS

When printing labels, it is also important to consider the width of the label to be printed. Label size varies with each model of printer, some smaller models have the ability to print maximum width of 2 inches or 50mm, while others will print up to 4 inches or 102 mm. If you need to print logistics labels for major freight carriers such as Toll or StarTrack, or for Serial Shipping Container Code (SSCC) or the Australia Transport Label (ATL), the labels measure 4" wide x 6" long (102mm x 148mm).

For receipt printing, portable printers are available in 2", 3", 4" print-widths. Consider the required lifespan of the printed receipt, as inferior quality receipt paper can have a shorter lifespan.

Additionally, some low-grade receipt rolls can be more abrasive, causing excessive wear on the printhead, potentially shortening its life. Insignia recommends OEM certified receipt paper.

Insignia provides its customers with the complete printing package. We ensure your labels or receipts are fit-for-purpose, backed by expertise in thermal paper stock, adhesive, barcodes, production environments and supply chain requirements.



HOW TO CONNECT TO THE MOBILE PRINTER

Wireless Connectivity

Wireless infrastructure will be required for large warehouse-type spaces, and multiple wireless points will ensure minimal black spots or no-coverage areas. If mobile printing is required outdoors or in the field, you will need to consider a Bluetooth model that can connect to your 3G or 4G device.

ERP & WMS Software

Typically, specific mobile applications for Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) and Warehouse Management Systems (WMS) are available through your ERP or WMS provider. These mobile versions can be installed on to a mobile computer that would be used in conjunction with your mobile printer, allowing you to generate labels and or receipts as per your full ERP or WMS software.

MOBILE COMPUTERS

Mobile computers generally are the device used to assist in generating labels through a mobile printer, they hold the software which allows for mobile labelling to be successful.

Before choosing a mobile computer it is important to understand which mobile platform is required and is compatible with the WMS and ERP software. Mobile computers generally come with three different host Operating Systems (OS), these common OS's include:

- iOS (Apple)
- Android (Google)
- Microsoft WE (Windows Embedded)

Other factors to consider when choosing a mobile computer include:

- RAM memory and flash memory
- Durability or ruggedness of the device (consider the operating environment)
- Usability of the device (who is using the device and how easy is it to provide training? For instance, is a consumer device more appropriate, e.g. iPhone, Windows tablet or Android?)
- Scanner capability (Does it include an in-built scanner suitable for reading 1D and/or 2D barcodes?)

CHARGING OPTIONS

The majority of mobile printers come with Lithium ion batteries which means they can be part charged without affecting the battery lifespan, similar to most new smart phones.

Generally mobile printers are designed to last throughout an 8-hour working day. However it is recommended that you have spare batteries or charging units available so batteries can be swapped out easily, and avoid the risk of downtime.



- Dock chargers - allow the printer to be charged without removing the battery. These come in multi-bays to charge multiple units at a time, and are recommended as the printer storage point so they are continually charging when not in use.
- Battery chargers – also available in bays. The battery is removed from the printer for charging and multiple batteries can be charged at once.
- Spare battery - always useful to have as a backup for any mobile worker.
- Cigarette lighter chargers – most field mobility workers have one of these in their car/truck for easy charging.
- Battery eliminators - provides a facility to run the printer continuously from a forklift or car battery (Note an auto electrician is generally required for installation).

WHAT ABOUT WARRANTY?

Warranty is an important element to any buying decision. Each manufacturer backs their printers with different levels of warranty coverage. All printers come standard with a minimum 12-month manufacturer's warranty, though some have longer warranty periods, depending on the make and model of the printer.



- Standard warranty – includes all manufacturing faults within the printer over the specified warranty contract period.
- Extended warranty – available for most makes and models at an additional cost (and only available at the time of purchase).
- Comprehensive warranty – coverage for all manufacturing faults as well as accidental damage to the printer and its components.

ARE THERE ANY ON-GOING COSTS?

It is wise to consider operating expenses as a part of the total cost of ownership. The purchase price of a printer and the cost of its supplies are only a small measure of its true cost. Performance issues that limit productivity drive up the cost of mobile printers, so reliability and expected maintenance costs should also be considered.

Rugged mobile printers often have a higher list price than common commercial models, but have longer life cycles and are more resistant to damage, which results in lower repair costs and work interruptions. Those that perform reliably and minimize the time users spend waiting for labels and receipts will provide superior value.

Similar to replacing your car's tyres from time to time, there are some parts of a printer which will need to be replaced due to general wear and tear. The key consumable parts within any thermal printer (mobile or standard) are the platen roller (a plastic roller which ensures the label is being applied to the print head with pressure) and also the print head.

Prices on these parts are dependent on the printer make and model. insignia stocks a full range of replacement parts, and these parts should be installed by a qualified service technician either on-site or at the insignia national service centre.

Honeywell


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 **ZEBRA**

BIXOLON

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ABOUT INSIGNIA

We know how important your business is to you and how different it is from the next. This is why we work directly and collaboratively with you to understand your situation and needs, so we can create barcode and label solutions tailored to add genuine value to your operations, and help build your market competitiveness.

Since 1968, insignia have been providing identification solutions to Australian industry. Our family-owned values, our people, our products and our services are the reasons we've become the nation's leading manufacturer of labels and tags, and distributor of top-tier thermal printing, coding, marking and scanning brands, including Honeywell, Datamax-O'Neil, Zebra, Bixolon, Intermec, Datalogic, Carl Valentin, and Domino.

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