

Office print use suggests return to work has slowed

A company which spans a huge section of Scotland's business sector has revealed how multiple metrics suggest the nation's post-pandemic return to work has slowed.

With almost 13,000 office print devices deployed to over 4000 clients across every sector, Capital Document Solutions, which has its HQ in Edinburgh, is in a unique position to act as a barometer of how businesses are resuming.

The company has detailed metrics, from the number of copies and prints being made and the amount of toner being used, to the number of installations being carried out, as well as the scale of service calls and engineer field visits.

Tom Flockhart, managing director and founder of the business, said: "Perhaps more than any other business, we get a very clear insight into what is happening in workplaces of every size, in every sector and every corner of Scotland.

"What our KPI's are telling us at the moment is that the return to work has settled very stubbornly at around 40% of the pre-Covid levels. As the lockdown continues to ease we had expected to see that figure climbing.

"Research in our own industry is predicting that any recovery to pre-Covid copy and print volumes may not get beyond 65%, which is a fairly stark analysis. However, we are still a very long way from even getting to that."

As the biggest independent copy-scan-print expert in Scotland, Capital Document Solutions dominates its field. Significant numbers of its printers, copiers and other multi-function devices (MFDs) are remotely monitored – in effect giving the firm “smart meter”-type insights into device usage.

Since the firm also operates a transparent and metered pay-per-click system for most of its clients’ devices, it knows the exact copy/print usage across Scottish business as well as the Public/Voluntary sectors, and how those fluctuate month-on-month and year-on-year.

Tom added: “Of course there are variations across different businesses and sectors. But the overall picture is very clear and consistent, particularly on our metered volumes. January and February figures were very similar to those of 2019. However, in March we immediately saw a 31% decline.

“During the height of the lockdown in April and May the year-on year decline was catastrophic, respectively 81% and 82%. There was a slightly improved figure for June, when the decline was just 75%.

“As the lockdown started to ease in July the figure was 60% – and we expected to see the percentage decline continue to get smaller as the return to work accelerated.

“However, that simply has not happened and for each week of August so far, the year-on-year decline in usage has been stuck at 55%.

While the metered click analysis monitored by Capital Document Solutions is its most detailed insight, Tom stressed that the firm has witnessed the same pattern across a range of other metrics.

He added: “It’s the same story when we look at the numbers of installs of new machines, help desk calls, engineer field calls and toner deliveries. All the metrics paint a similar

picture.

“Beyond that, I’ve also been speaking with our major manufacturers and suppliers – Ricoh, Canon and Konica Minolta and been consulting with other dealers. Everyone is reporting similar figures.

“It seems clear that the main return to work has happened and that any further changes look likely to be slow and incremental.”