



## 10 Questions to Ask

# Before Buying Your Next Inkjet Printer





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## Whether you're buying a new inkjet printer for the first time,

looking to upgrade or are simply interested in getting into the inkjet printing business, there are a number of critical questions to consider before making a purchase.

### In this guide, we'll help you think about the following questions and more:

- ✓ How does inkjet solve the printing problems I'm facing?
- ✓ Is there one solution or are there several solutions for my business and needs?
- ✓ How much volume is "a lot" for an entry-level inkjet printer?
- ✓ Will I be able to scale up when my business picks up?
- ✓ What's the difference between the warranty packages offered by various providers?

As a company that specializes in inkjet printers, we guide our customers through this buying process all the time. We've learned a lot in our 20+ years about the most important questions customers should ask to make the best-informed decisions.

**Ready to get started?**



## Question #1

# Is an inkjet printer the right printer solution for my business' needs?

**The first question to ask when considering a new inkjet printer, especially if it would be your first one, is: Does my business need a commercial inkjet printer?**

If you're currently distributing or selling products and your printing is coming from an outside printer, you may be looking at inkjet as way to bring printing services in-house. Smaller outfits can get the run-around by large third-party fulfilment printing operations and may fall to the back burner as they deal with larger orders from other customers. This is one reason many companies make the transition and bring printing capabilities in-house. It's a lot easier for you to be in production with inkjet than it would be with traditional analog style printing.

Having control of the printing process instead of going through a wholesaler brings with it obvious benefits, but also some challenges to consider.

 <b>Printing</b>	<b>Benefits</b> Control of the process Control of production Cost savings	<b>Challenges</b> Printer & printer supply inventory Staffing, file handling, printer management
 <b>Distributing</b>	<b>Benefits</b> No printer or printing supply inventory needed	<b>Challenges</b> Longer lead times No control of production schedule Upcharge by using a third-party printer

## You can achieve massive cost savings by handling your own printing needs, but now you're a printer.

You have to be ready to commit to being in production. This means a new workflow, additional digital file handling, equipment operation, finishing, etc.

Inkjet printing brings with it a lot of benefits that differentiate it from analog, offset and the screen-printing processes, namely: a simplified workflow for short run, on-demand, multi-color, and variable data printing.

Screenprinting or commercial offset presses are much larger, more factory-oriented and not office-oriented like inkjet printers are. The digital workflow is much easier and less messy with fewer harsh chemicals. Smaller entry-level machines can also make it easier to scale up later.

Inkjet brings with it a high quality that you just can't get with screenprinting, and a short run customization that you can't get with analog printing. These days, people are coming to expect a certain level of quality. High resolution print quality and customization are what they expect, so that's what you should be able to offer and deliver.



### Benefits of Inkjet Printing

- Simplified Workflow
- On-Demand
- Multi-Color
- Variable Data Printing



#### Pro Tip

The barrier to entry in the printing world is much lower with inkjet, due to the full range suite of printers available. You can start small with an entry-level machine like a small integrated printer/cutter or table top UV curable printer.

## Question #2


# What do I hope my new printer will do (or do better) on a daily or weekly basis?

**The most important first step once you know that you're in the market for an inkjet printer is to determine what your printing priorities will be.**

If this is your first printer, instead of making a laundry list of all the things you'd like to be able to do, make a short, prioritized list of the “bread and butter” needs that you'll be depending on your new printer to meet on a very regular basis.

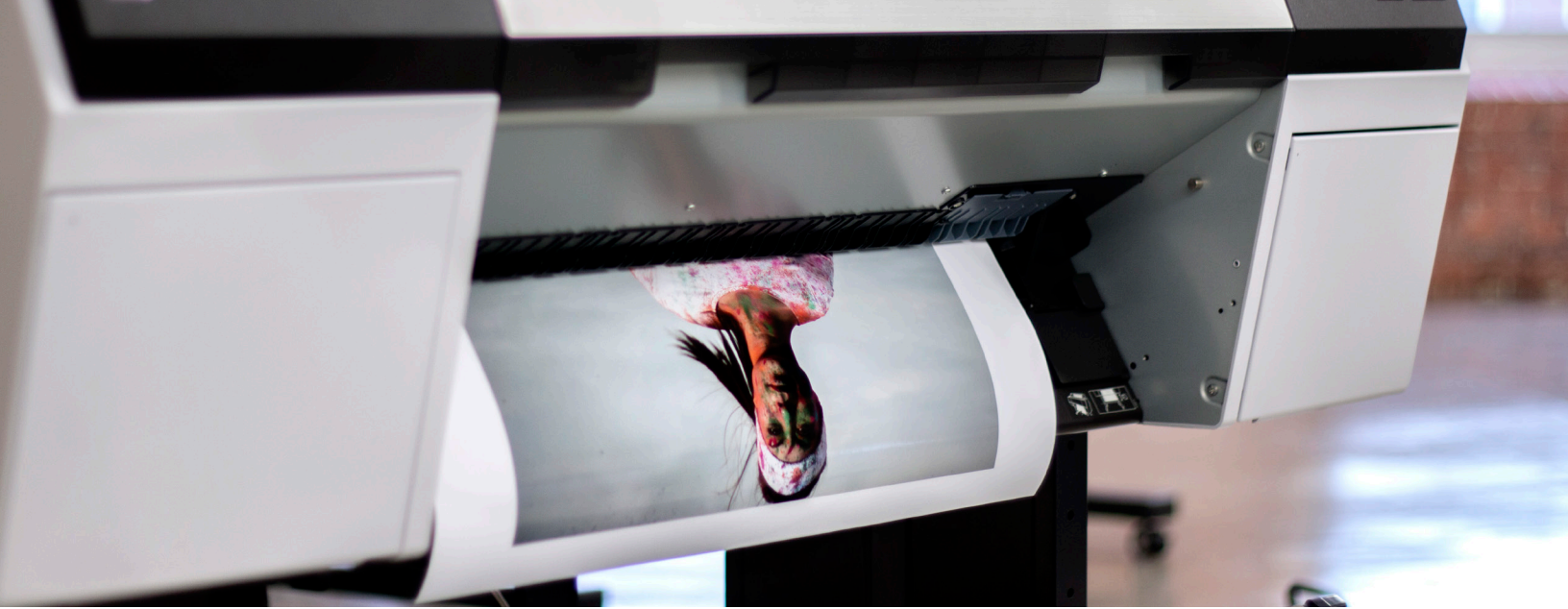
Let's say you're a small shop that needs to increase your versatility. You can start with a small affordable version and scale up over time within a family of printers. You just need to identify what the most important capabilities are for your budget.

If you're looking at a printer to replace a current one, what is your current one NOT doing that you hope your new one will do or do better? Are you looking for more speed, more quality, more substrate versatility? Or are you getting a machine that will help ensure longevity of your printing capabilities?







**One of the biggest benefits of inkjet printing is the range of customization allowed.**





**One of the biggest benefits of inkjet printing is the range of customization allowed. Here are some of the custom specs that inkjet handles regularly:**

	A specific image or several images to choose from
	Barcoding
	Serialization
	Specific text, different on each product

Make sure you're very clear about your objectives and expectations while talking to a potential provider so they can help guide you to the right solution.



### Pro Tip

Make a priority list of what you want to get out of your inkjet workflow — the top 3 or 4 things that are most important to you. Perhaps you need to expand the range of items you can print on, or are you more concerned with increasing the speed, quality or quantity of your printing. Whatever your top priorities are, it's helpful to rank them so that your new printer will meet your biggest needs.

### Question #3

## What types of materials will my new printer primarily be printing on?

**A common misconception about inkjet printers is that they can theoretically print on anything.**

The type of printer you are looking at will often be dictated by the type of materials you wish to print on or decorate. Different ink types work with different applications as well as different printers. Understanding the appropriate ink solutions, printer set-up and calibration is essential to your success.



It's true that there are some ink solutions that will print on just about any surface imaginable, but keep in mind: No single printer will print WELL on all substrates. Therefore, you'll need to pick the main applications and set up that will work best for you. If you need to print well on several different types of surfaces you may need to consider getting several printers.







Let's say you're a small business that wants to get into printing banners and vehicle wraps, and you get a printer for that purpose.

Great! Six months into your booming business, you decide to add flag printing to your services. Your printer that is set up for banners and vehicle wraps will not be able to print very high quality on polyester flag or on nylon, so your customers may go down the road to your competitor, who has a separate setup and can do flag printing at a higher quality in a more optimized way. This kind of short-sightedness can cost your business greatly. Stick to what you do well and expand as it makes sense for your business.

Two things to remember about printing on a variety of materials:

	
<p><b>#1</b></p> <p>How the printer itself is going to handle the material</p>	<p><b>#2</b></p> <p>The ink chemistry: Will it properly bond with the materials you are looking to print on?</p>



Pro Tip

Tell your potential printer provider what your goals are. They will help save you a headache down the road by anticipating shortcomings of entry level printers for your current and future expectations. It's very common for people to forget about certain substrates or applications until after they've made a printer purchase. Avoid surprises by taking the time to talk through all your current and perceived future needs with your printer provider.

## Question #4

# What is the volume of printing I need my new inkjet printer to accomplish?

The volume of printing is a critical factor to consider when selecting which inkjet model to purchase.

It may be tempting to just get the base model first in anticipation of adding additional printers as your business grows. The redundancy model can be very effective, but large volume runs or un-attended print jobs may see significant savings from reduced labor costs and higher throughputs from larger models. It's worth noting that four entry-level printers have a very different workflow than one larger, faster printer.

### UV Flatbed Printers



### Roll to Roll Solvent Printers



#### Entry-level printing

11 sq/ft/hr

#### Mid-level printing

270 sq/ft/hr

#### High-volume

645 sq/ft/hr

#### Entry-level printing

108 sq/ft/hr

#### Mid-level printing

605 sq/ft/hr

#### High-volume

1140 sq/ft/hr

**Scalability is another reason to make sure that the provider you purchase from offers a wide portfolio of products.**

If a catalogue-style company that sells a variety of products to numerous market segments only has a few models of inkjet printers, they will try to sell you that one product they are familiar with. A provider that does not know the full range of options may encourage you to keep buying more entry-level products instead of appropriately scaling up to production level equipment.

You can start with a much smaller system and grow as it's comfortable for you. It might be wise to start with a machine that's at a \$20k initial price point that will produce a certain amount of revenue each month. Then as your business grows, you can buy a \$40k model and then upgrade to an \$80k printer, with greater cost savings at each level. A provider that fully understands the market segments and the family of products within each of them will allow you to grow more effectively and profitably.





## Question #5

# What potential environmental obstacles could I face?

Space, heat, power consumption, air circulation and other environmental limitations of your particular office can impact the type of printer that will work for you.



If your business is in a third-floor NYC office, do you have the extra \$25k-40k to shut down the street and crane in your new huge inkjet printer? Should you consider a smaller model, or can you get an office in New Jersey to handle your printing?

If your office is small and without windows, you may need to think twice before getting a calendar press that puts off a lot of heat and exhaust.

If your office has no windows or is in close quarters with little ventilation, a printer configuration emitting high VOCs will make it unpleasant to work there to say the least.

If your office is in an older building, will this new printer require a new electrical panel and, if so, can you afford the electrical work?



### Pro Tip

Tell your printer provider about your space — size, location, etc. As silly as it may seem, sometimes space dictates what printer you can get. A printer expert will consider these limitations and can then make sure to quote the right package for the space available. The last thing you want to be stuck with is a printer that looked MUCH smaller on the showroom floor.

## Question #6

# What is the total cost of ownership of the various printer options I'm considering?

### Don't just look at the price tag of a new printer.

Consider what the cost of ownership is over 5 or 10 years between the various printer providers you may be considering.

#### Beyond the upfront cost of the printer itself, do you have information on:

- ✓ Service contracts
- ✓ Supplies
- ✓ Parts
- ✓ Maintenance downtime
- ✓ Technician travel
- ✓ Warranty support
- ✓ Uptime
- ✓ Ink

You'll want to avoid service, part and labor costs that go through the roof because you chose a brand of printer with a lower upfront price point.

Ask your printer provider about the typical lifespan of their printer(s). If you do your part on the upkeep, a good quality inkjet printer should last you up to 10 years or more. Some cheaper models or manufacturers may be less upfront because they're only built to last for a couple of years and then be replaced.

#### Something you may not know about commercial inkjet printer warranties:

Warranties in some instances are provided directly by the dealer whom you purchased your equipment from who in turn are supported by the manufacturer, while in other instances a dealer will rely strictly on the manufacturer's service/support team. If you purchase a printer from one dealer, they will often times need to be the origination of your service and support, locking you into that provider. So make sure the provider you choose has the service capability you're comfortable with, because it will be sometime before you are able to change it.

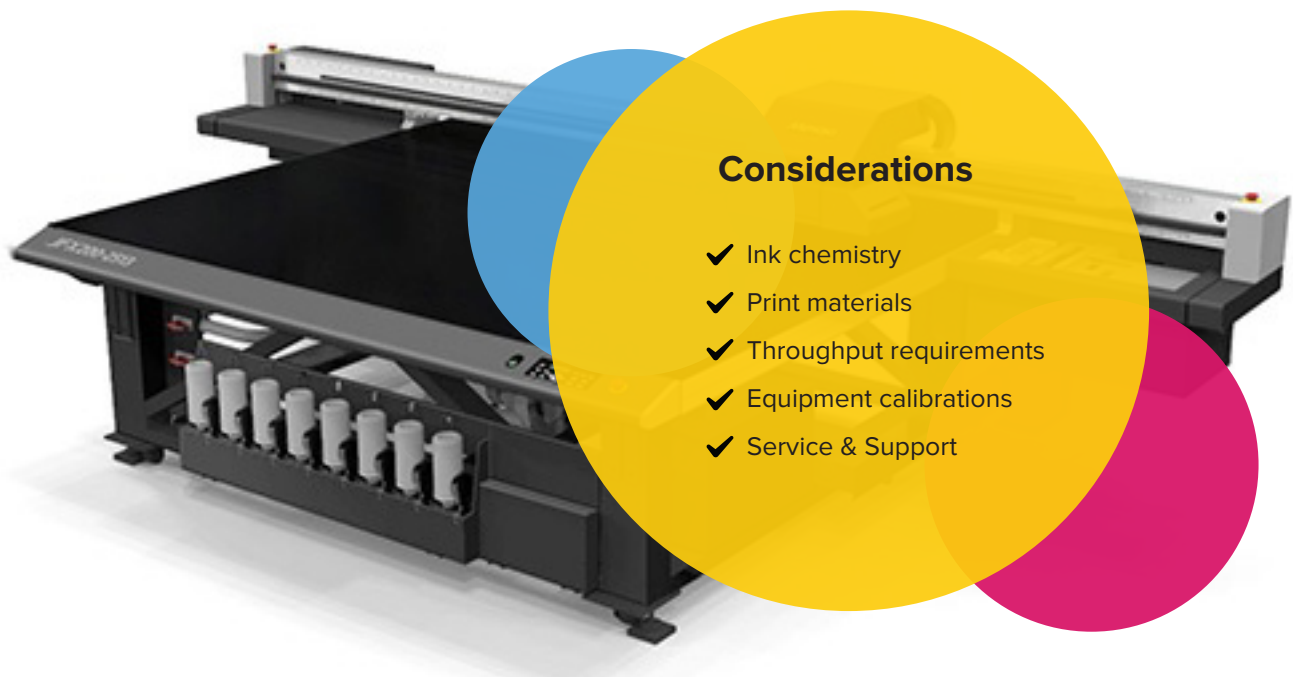
## Question #7

# When will I regain my investment in this printer?

**If you're going to be printing one thing really well, or many things with a full suite of printers, you should be sure to calculate the cost vs. profit of a reasonable expectation of sales.**

Make sure you understand the capabilities of your chosen printer or printers before crunching numbers on the estimated throughputs you'll be able to achieve on a regular basis.

If you're looking to get started by printing on a wide variety of substrates, you may be tempted to purchase an entry-level or one-size-fits-all print solution — but it might not be worth it. Be sure to take into consideration ink chemistry, print materials and substrates, throughput requirements, equipment calibrations/configurations, service and support. Investing in two printers or even three that are optimized for your targeted applications will save you tons of wasted time, which is wasted money, meaning your return on investment will be faster.



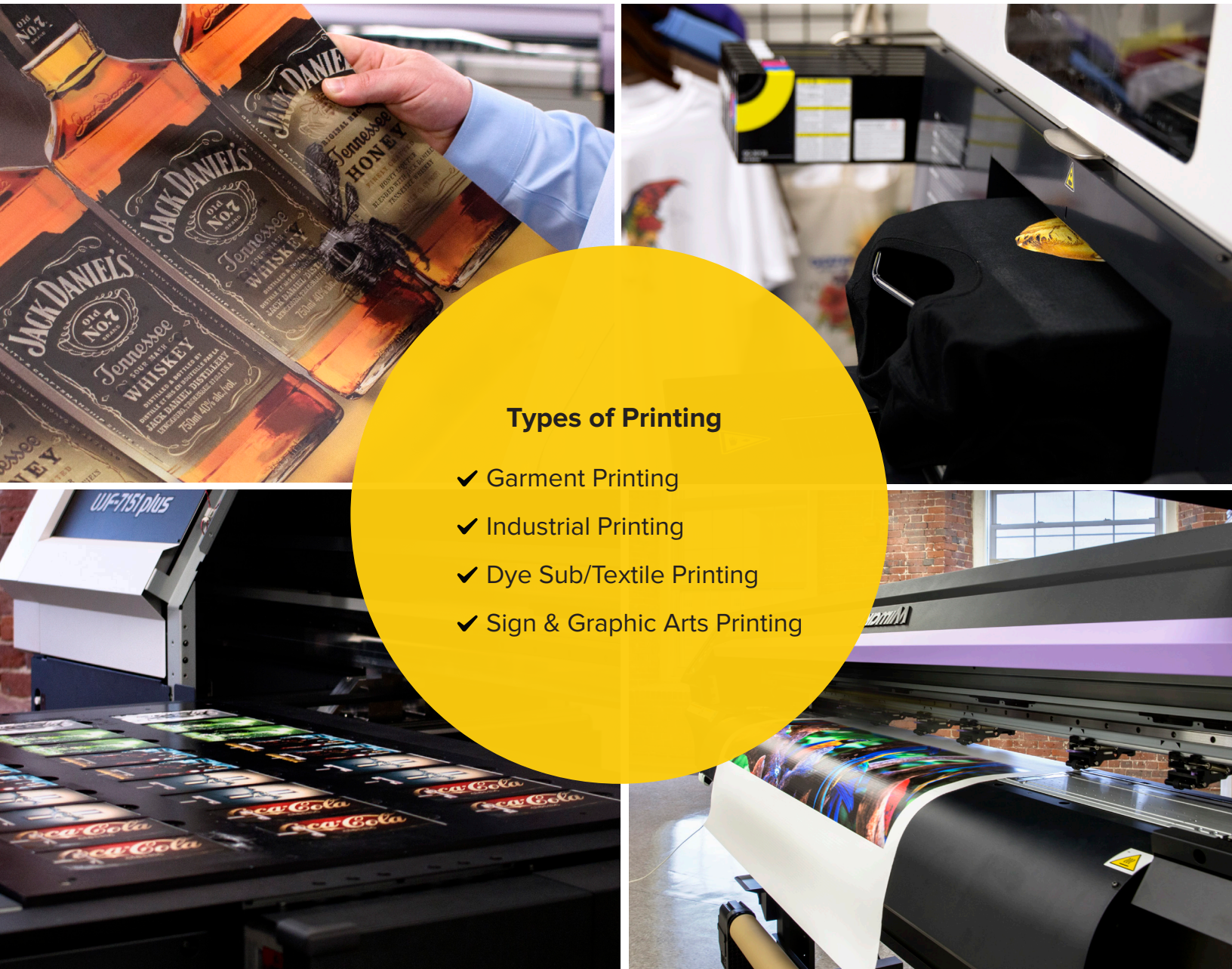
### Considerations

- ✓ Ink chemistry
- ✓ Print materials
- ✓ Throughput requirements
- ✓ Equipment calibrations
- ✓ Service & Support



**Printers are capable of making you plenty of money, but you have to sell what you make. Is there enough demand for the type of printing you are investing in?**

The ROI for consistent high-volume production jobs will be there, but for smaller short-run jobs, you'll need to do the math to see if the ROI makes sense or if those will be a losing proposition. Sampling can end up bringing in higher-volume jobs but at a cost. Those are the risks that you'll need to decide for yourself. Answering these questions ahead of time will help you better understand your current and future needs so you can be sure to select the ideal printer.



**Types of Printing**

- ✓ Garment Printing
- ✓ Industrial Printing
- ✓ Dye Sub/Textile Printing
- ✓ Sign & Graphic Arts Printing



## Question #8

# What kind of training and support will I get with my new printer?

Is this your first digital printer?

Are you getting a different model inkjet printer than you have had in the past?

Are you used to offset printing or screenprinting?




All commercial inkjet printers require a certain learning curve. If any of the above criteria apply, you'll want to make sure that model-specific training comes with your printer.

A proper printer provider will provide extensive initial training and also be available for post-installation support. They should offer trainings and courses on not just your printer but the necessary workflow for your printing application.

Does your printer operator need to be able to explain digital artwork file setup to potential customers? If you don't have an internal art department, you'll need to consider this as well.



## Types of training you should consider

 <b>Ink Solutions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What solutions work best for scenario A, B, C?</li><li>• What are the secondary processes available to increase ink performance?</li><li>• Which ink solutions are ideal for my printer model/application?</li><li>• What should I do for maximum durability to an item?</li><li>• Which ink solutions should I stay away from for this printer?</li></ul>
 <b>Printer Setup</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What solutions work best for scenario A, B, C?</li><li>• What are the secondary processes available to increase ink performance?</li><li>• Which ink solutions are ideal for my printer model/application?</li><li>• What should I do for maximum durability to an item?</li><li>• Which ink solutions should I stay away from for this printer?</li></ul>
 <b>File Setup</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What solutions work best for scenario A, B, C?</li><li>• What are the secondary processes available to increase ink performance?</li><li>• Which ink solutions are ideal for my printer model/application?</li><li>• What should I do for maximum durability to an item?</li><li>• Which ink solutions should I stay away from for this printer?</li></ul>

**Be sure to ask what their support contracts are like and how nearby the closest support person is, not just to your current or main office, but also to any other locations or future expansion areas.**

A national support presence can be critical if you have multiple locations. Additionally, a more experienced service support team can often be more efficient in diagnosing and fixing issues than a local provider. Be sure to weigh the benefits of experience and application knowledge vs simple proximity.



### Pro Tip

Just like your warranty being tied to a specific dealer, training should also come with your printer provider. The best printer providers pride themselves on nurturing a long-term relationship and are always available to work with clients as their needs change and evolve.



## Question #9

# Do I know who will be handling artwork files for this printer?

**As previously mentioned, file setup is an important consideration in inkjet printing.**



Since the printers are getting their artwork from digital files, the setup of these files dictates how the final product will come out. Poor quality printing is not always the fault of the printer — proper file setup is just as important.

Who in your business will be communicating to your customers what types of files are needed for proper printing? If you are a larger company with an internal art department, they will often be familiar with setting up print files, but if you're a smaller operation, your printer operator will likely be the one who communicates file type needs directly to your customers.



### Pro Tip

When selecting your printer provider, ask for references from companies in your area. Remember that you'll want a provider who gives you thorough initial training (including printing file setup and specs) and is available for ongoing training and support as needed.

## Question #10

# What provider is best for the type of printer I need?

Once you have answered all of the other questions in this guide, you should be well-prepared to find the right commercial inkjet printer for you.

The final and potentially one of the most important considerations is to figure out what provider you should work with to buy your new printer.

### Printer Expertise:

If you're buying a printer from someone simply based on initial price, you could be buying from a business that is not necessarily interested in being your business partner in the printing industry. Their goal may be to simply sell a product and they may not be an expert on certain models and why they may be better or worse for your business. This also means that your long-term business doesn't really matter to them.

Solution providers that make their living building lasting relationships with their customers by living and breathing printing every day will ensure your business is on firm footing. This will result, not only in a more informed purchase process for you, but it also means you'll be supported over the long haul.



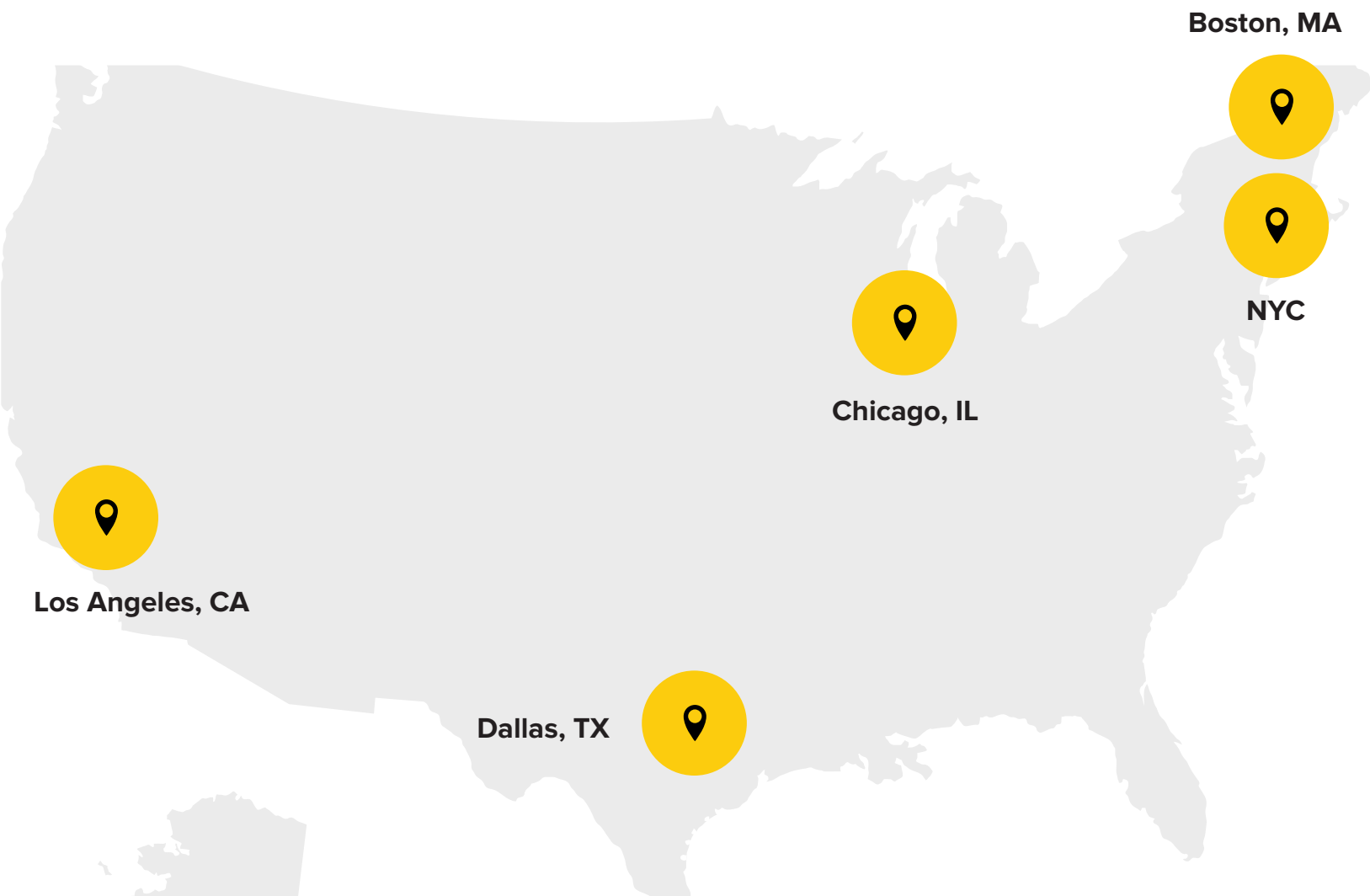
**The right solution provider  
will ensure your business  
is on firm footing.**

## Product Offerings:

If they don't sell a variety of printer models, then it could be harder to get the right solution for you and scale as you grow. Only having a few models, they'll try to sell you what they have, fitting the printer to your application not the application to the printer.

## Network

Do they have a support network that covers everywhere you need to be? If you have multiple locations, you should consider a provider that has a large national network of technicians. Many smaller operations only cover a small region and have limited market experience.



### Final Tip

Make sure the provider you select is vested in your interests and your industry. Make sure their sales team members are more than “box of donuts” salespeople. Are they just bringing you donuts occasionally, or are they checking to see how your business is performing and if there is something that may benefit you and your needs?

## Conclusion

**Now that you've asked and hopefully answered these 10 questions, you're ready to start shopping for real and connect with printer providers.**

**Like any big purchase, doing your research ahead of time ensures a more positive shopping process and outcome.**

Those handy lists that you generated while reading this guide will be very helpful. And as you move forward, be sure to over-communicate your goals, objectives and expectations to all printer providers you contact.

Best of luck, and if you have any questions, find us at [itnh.com](http://itnh.com) and all over the country.

Happy shopping!

