

# 10 RULES YOU SHOULD KNOW TO KEEP YOUR THERMAL PRINTER OPERATIONAL

BY THE MIDCOM SERVICE GROUP



BY TIMMY THERMAL™



## ***from the desk of Ken Feinstein***

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Dear Reader,

So many times we repair printers that we feel a service call could have been prevented. We've compiled a list of the most common preventative maintenance procedures to help reduce services needed on your thermal printers.

Here at the MIDCOM Service Group we've been repairing thermal printers, line printers, dot-matrix printers, laser printers, and HP plotters since 1982. We've been offering great services including onsite next day repair, no-fee guarantee service center repair and the fastest response annual service plans. All of our services are done by friendly certified technicians.

Why are we offering this information for free?

We believe that to be a great service company you need to help your customers before they need a service call. "We Keep You Running!" is our motto and that includes pre-service, during service and post-service.

We recommend you post these tips so they are accessible for whoever maintains your thermal printers. I'd be glad to answer any questions and I can be reached at (800) MIDCOM4 Service (800-643-2664) x1222 or email me at [kfeinstein@midcomdata.com](mailto:kfeinstein@midcomdata.com). On behalf of our great team here at MIDCOM – we are here to help!

All the best,

Ken Feinstein, General Manager



Here are the 10 rules you should know to keep your thermal printer operational.

#### **RULE ONE**

One of the greatest failures occurring in thermal barcode printers is due to the printheads not being cleaned regularly. A good rule of thumb is to clean the printhead on each of your thermal printers every time you replace a ribbon or roll of paper. It takes only about a minute and this action could save you thousands of dollars over the life of the printer. Follow the instructions in your User's Manual as to the type of cleaning solvent to be used for your specific model.

#### **RULE TWO**

If you feel you are burning out printheads too often on your thermal printer, you may want to check your User's Manual for the recommended heat and darkness settings. An incorrect setting often will reduce the printhead life and could cost you thousands of dollars over the life of the printer.

#### **RULE THREE**

Dust residing on the Media Sensor can cause major service issues. The Media Sensor is the mechanism that insures that the gap between the paper and the printhead remains constant. Most people purchase a bottle of "canned air" and simply give the Media Sensor a few quick blasts of air, which will usually clear out any dust residue left over from the roll paper. You should consider doing this regularly, every time you change the ribbon or a roll of paper. It will only take a few seconds and it will ensure more up-time.

#### **RULE FOUR**

If you are using a ribbon in your thermal printer, be sure that it is a good quality ribbon. Lower cost ribbons are often not manufactured to the exact wax and/or resin specifications of your printer and could cause a wax build-up on the platen. Wax build-up can cause poor print quality resulting in barcode reliability issues.

#### **RULE FIVE**

If you are using a thermal printer that does not use a ribbon (typically called a Direct Thermal printer vs. a Thermal Transfer printer that does use ribbons) and you are constantly having problems with defective printheads, you may want to consider either changing your printer to a Thermal Transfer printer or using a better quality paper. A Thermal Transfer printer, due to the position of the ribbon between the printhead and the label paper, can greatly extend the life of thermal printheads, as paper is not directly rubbing against the printhead itself and causing friction.

#### **RULE SIX**

A good rule of thumb, when purchasing new ribbons on thermal transfer printers, is to purchase a ribbon that is slightly wider than the actual labels that you are using. For instance, if the label



that you are using is 4.1" in width, then you may want to consider purchasing ribbons that are 4.33" in width.

#### **RULE SEVEN**

Are you wearing out printheads? If so, here is something you may want to check. Be sure that you are not using low grade label paper if you are using Direct Thermal printers. Often bargain priced rolls of paper really are not a "bargain". Why? Because low grade paper often is coarser and can cause more wear on the printheads. We have seen situations with even as high as 50% more wear on the printhead. As you may know, printheads in thermal printers are very expensive. It may make sense to pay a little more for paper, as it is a fraction of the cost compared to replacing printheads more often. Remember, the manufacturers of thermal printers consider the printheads as consumables that the end-user is responsible to replace. These consumables run into the hundreds of dollars each.

#### **RULE EIGHT**

Do you have burned-out printhead elements on your thermal printer? Here is how to tell with a PAUSE TEST. There may be situations where it looks like information is missing on your labels and/or barcodes when they are being printed. There is always a chance that one or more of the print elements in your thermal printer printhead may be burned out. Before calling someone for thermal printer repair, you may want to try this simple test that only takes a few moments to see if in fact it is your print elements. Keep in mind that some manufacturers considers printheads as consumables and they must be replaced from time to time. Typically, this is performed by a qualified printer repair technician. This self test can be used to print test labels when you make adjustments to the thermal printer's mechanical assemblies to determine if any of the printhead elements are not working.

#### **RULE NINE**

What are printer and print server alerts? Should you pay attention to them? Alerts give you the ability to proactively manage your thermal printer and print server. If the printer or print server has an error, you would be sent an alert notifying you of the situation. The manufacturer Zebra uses ZebraNet Bridge that gives you control to monitor your bar code printers from anywhere, and documents the alerts to a log file. As soon as ZebraNet Bridge receives an alert, the alert appears in the Events tab. If you have not viewed the alert yet in the Events tab, the box in the status bar at the bottom of the application shows:

- New alert
- Alert type
- Alert severity by color

You can configure ZebraNet Bridge to notify you by blinking the application tab in the task bar. Remember, ZebraNet Bridge only logs alerts that occur while the application is running. A good Zebra repair company sees this issue often and will be able to supply you with a new Zebra printhead and will also fully check out your Zebra printer. A steady program that includes Zebra printer maintenance will help you keep your printer up and running longer. Check with the manufacturer of your thermal printer to see what they offer to manager your thermal printer.



## **RULE TEN**

Clean the exterior and interior area of your thermal printer often. To keep your thermal printer running optimally, remember to clean the interior and exterior of the printer. When these areas are dirty, the chance of debris getting into the wrong area is increased. To clean the exterior surfaces of the printer use a lint-free cloth. Do not use harsh or abrasive cleaning agents or solvents. If necessary, a mild detergent solution or desktop cleaner may be used sparingly. You should inspect the interior area after every four rolls of media. Remove any dirt and lint from the interior of the printer using a soft bristle brush and/or vacuum cleaner. A good thermal printer repair company sees this issue often and will be able to supply you with a new thermal printer printhead and will also fully check out your thermal printer. A steady program that includes thermal printer maintenance will help you keep your thermal printer up and running longer.

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Let us know if we can be of further assistance.

We hope these rules will help keep your thermal printers up and running longer. The MIDCOM Service Group repairs many thermal printer brands including Zebra, Datamax, Intermec, Printronix, Sato, and many other brands and types of printers.

If your thermal printer does go down, we offer two great service options. **Onsite Next Day Service** (a technician will come to your place of business) and our **No-Fee Guarantee Service Center Repair** (ship it to one of our National Service Centers and we'll repair it or you don't pay). Also, ask us about our **Fastest Response Annual Service Plans** for the quickest response to get you up and running.

## **Bonus!**

Get our easy response stickers absolutely free! Call us now and we will send you our easy response stickers that have our toll-free number on them to place on all your printers. These stickers make it easy to request service from us when service is required. We always answer our phones when you call toll-free **(800) MIDCOM 4 Service** (800-643-2664) and are ready to help.