Question: I will be purchasing or leasing a new copy machine. I would also like to have scanning capabilities. When searching your site for office machines, scanners were not listed. Are you planning to provide scanner recommendations as part of your office equipment analysis? [[Do you have any recommendations regarding multi function copiers (copy, scan, fax, print) vs. buying machines for each separate need?]]

There are several different types of scanners on the market designed to meet different business and home-user requirements. For office use, you will probably want an ADF (Automatic Document Feed) scanner with a sheet feeder that can hold 25 to 50 originals. Flatbed scanners that typically sell for around $100 are designed to capture color photographs. These models may deliver higher optical resolutions than business models, but they force you to do your scanning one page at a time.

[Business scanners with sheet feeders are more expensive, but they often pay for themselves by allowing bulk scanning of documents and including OCR (optical character reader) software that can convert a bitmapped (non-text) image [[or sub the word "picture" for "bitmapped image" --LB]]into searchable, editable text. In addition to the capacity of the sheet feeder and the speed of scanning operations, you will also want to consider the image editing and document management software supplied with the scanner. A document management application allows you to create a searchable database of scanned documents or organize your scans into a hierarchical folder structure. ScanSoft PaperPort, considered the industry standard in document management, ships in a series of graded editions with different features (see below).

Hewlett-Packard's Scanjet 5550C
(http://h10010.www1.hp.com/wwpc/us/en/sm/WF02a/15179-64195-215155.html), priced at around $300, is one of the cheaper ADF models. Its sheet feeder can process 35 pages at a time, with a manufacturer-rated speed of 8 pages per minute for black and white documents scanned at 200DPI (dots per inch). (200 DPI is a "fax quality" resolution, suitable for archiving electronic copies of invoices and receipts. To archive color photographs or convert bitmapped pages to text, you will want to use one of the Scanjet's higher optical resolutions -- up to 2400x2400DPI. This is accomplished by changing the resolution settingsin the HP Scanjet software) The sheet feeder supports a maximum document size of 8-1/2" x 11,."which precludes archiving documents printed on legal-length paper. The 5550C package includes ScanSoft's PaperPort 7 LE, an older, light-featured version of the industry-standard PaperPort document management application. It has the ability to organize scanned documents in a hierarchical folder structure and automatically transfer them, in picture format, to standard image editors. Scanned images of text can be converted into true text for automatic export into word processing applications, such as Wordpad, Microsoft Word or WordPerfect. However, the IRIS OCR engine in PaperPort 7 LE does not have the same reputation for accuracy as the Xerox TextBridge or OmniPage Pro OCR engines included in fuller-featured PaperPort versions. This means that, under optimal conditions, text will be converted with 92 to 95% accuracy, instead of 97 to 98% accuracy. The bundled HP image editing tools that

come with this scanner are limited to basic features designed for casual users, such as cropping and rotation.

Other business scanners in this price range include the Visioneer One Touch 8650 (http://orders.visioneer.com/item.jsp?item=90-0438-300&category=BUSINESS) and the Visioneer 9450 (no longer sold new on the company website, but still widely available.)

Visioneer (http://www.visioneer.com) offers a series of lower-end and higher-end scanners. The Visioneer 9650 is $200 to $300 more expensive than the Scanjet 5550C with a manufacturer-rated speed of 12 pages per minute. This scanner is more suited to eliminating office "paper trails" by archiving black and white documents and less suited to scanning color photographs. (The Visioneer 9650 has a lower maximum scan resolution than the Scanjet 5550C:600x1200 dpi instead of 2400x2400dpi and does not bundle any dedicated photo editing applications.)   The 50-page sheet feeder accepts 8-1/2 x 14" paper and the bundled PaperPort 7 Deluxe document management application uses the Xerox TextBridge 9.0 OCR engine. PaperPort 7 Deluxe has the ability to create a searchable database of the text in scanned images; but it lacks the ability found in more recent PaperPort versions to scan images directly to Adobe PDF format.]

Other business scanners in this price range include the Visioneer/Xerox Documate 510 (http://www.xerox.com/go/xrx/template/inv_rel_newsroom.jsp?Xcntry=USA&Xlang=en_US&app=Newsroom&ed_name=NR_2003Nov12_DocuMateSeries&format=article&view=newsrelease&metrics=notrack) and the Visioneer Strobe XP450 (http://orders.visioneer.com/category.jsp?category=BUSINESS)

At the high end, at street prices ranging from $600 to around $1,000, the Xerox DocuMate 252 has been garnering praise from reviewers as the fastest and most cost effective workgroup scanner. The ability to scan more pages per minute, combined with the inclusion of sophisticated document management and image editing software can save both time and money. The DocuMate 252's"one touch technology" can scan from the desktop to nine different customizable applications or devices in a single step. The DocuMate 252 has a 50-page sheet feeder and manufacturer-rated speed of 25 sheets (or 50 images in duplex mode) per minute. It has a maximum optical resolution of 600x1200DPI and includes PaperPort Pro 9 Office, which uses the top-rated OmniPage Pro OCR engine and can archive documents directly into Adobe PDF format. The package also includes the ArcSoft PhotoImpression 4 photo editor which includes advanced image editing features, a point-and-click interface for applying special effects, and a series of project wizards to create slideshows.

Other business scanners in this price range include the Visioneer 9750 (http://orders.visioneer.com/category.jsp?category=BUSINESS) and the Xerox DocuMate 520 (http://www.xeroxscanners.com/default.asp?pageid=112)