

# Top Tips: How to Clean a Print Head

Thermal print heads on barcode and receipt printers should be viewed as consumable. Print heads range from £150 to £700, so it is critical to take care of your print head if you want to keep costs down.

How do you take care of the print head? Well it all comes down to how to clean a print head. Most users do not know when or how to clean these. The rule of thumb is to **clean the print head every time you change the ribbon** on the printer and with a direct thermal setup, **every time you change a roll of labels.**

If you find the print quality is deteriorating it is probably because minute particles from the atmosphere including paper dust from the labels falls on to the ribbon and builds up behind the print head. The buildup of residue over time requires the print head to work harder to create the image. The harder the elements in the head have to work, the quicker they burn out. A print head that is designed to print up to ten million labels can burn out after only a million if it is not taken care of. You will find that cleaning the print head will solve the problem. Cleaning the print head every time you change the ribbon will increase the life of the head and maintain the quality of the print for longer, extending the time between services and engineer call outs.



So, how do we clean a print head? Printers have a release that allows the print head to open. Once the head is open, the easiest way to clean it is with a soft lint free cloth and print head cleaning fluid. Just put a little fluid on the cloth and wipe the print head clean. It is also wise to wipe the platen roller also.

The purpose of the Platen roller is to pull the labels through the printer and keep them in contact with the print head. As it ages it will begin to lose its "sticky" quality and become hard and shiny on the surface. This causes the labels to slip and the print begins to appear squashed. If left too long the platen roller will need to be replaced. Regular cleaning with the platen roller cleaner will help to maintain the roller in tip top condition and ensure good print quality.

Occasionally labels will come off the label roll and become stuck around the working parts of the printer. Undue effort or lack of care in removing these labels can damage the delicate parts of the printer such as the print head and platen roller. The label remover spray dissolves the adhesive and allows you to remove any stuck labels carefully and without damage.

One mistake made by many when cleaning the printer is using a sharp instrument to scrape either the head or the platen roller. If the soft platen roller gets nicked or cut, then the print quality is destroyed. Every label printed will have a line or nick as the platen roller rotates. This is because this roller acts as the surface for the labels and the print head to "write" on. Similar to a desk as you write on paper with a pen, the platen roller is the desk surface and if flawed in any way, will transfer that flaw to the labels it is printing.

So in conclusion, as you clean the print head, take great care not to scratch the surface but get the entire residue off with cleaning fluid. Make sure you wipe down the platen roller, and never use a sharp instrument to clean. Keep print head cleaner kits on hand to perform regular print head maintenance and ensure optimum printer performance.

Maintaining a clean print head reduces replacement costs by extending the life of your print head and improving the performance of your printer. With proper care and maintenance, print head life can be extended without sacrificing print quality.

For more information on this topic, you can visit your owner's manual for your printer or just give us a call. Our technical experts are ready and willing to assist in your printer maintenance.

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