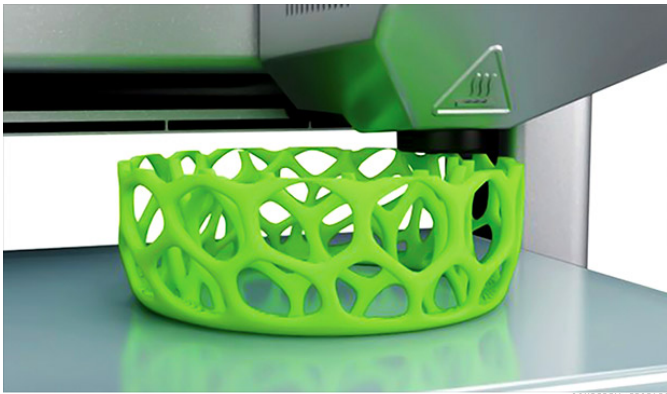


The 3D Printer Opportunity

Written by Marco Attard
03 October 2013

The idea of 3D printers (3DPs) as a growth market might sound far fetched, but not according to Gartner-- the analyst predicts 2013 global enterprise and consumer sub-\$100000 3DP shipments are to grow by 49% to 56507 units.



Shipments will only increase further in 2014 (98065 units with 75% growth) and 2015 ("near doubling of unit shipments"), while end-user spending is to reach \$412 million with 43% growth in 2013, up from \$325m in 2012, before growing by 62% to \$669m in 2014.

"The 3DP market has reached its inflection point," Gartner claims. "While still a nascent market, with hype outpacing the technical realities, the speed of development and rise in buyer interest are pressing hardware, software and service providers to offer easier-to-use tools and materials that produce consistently high-quality results."

Enterprises use 3D printing technology for the creation of one-off or small-run models for product design and industrial prototyping, jigs and fixture used in manufacturing processing and mass finished goods customisation. As 3DPs, scanners, design tools and materials grow more advanced, costs and complexity should go down, allowing the technology to expand into areas including architecture, defense, medical products and jewelry design.

Growing competition will allow a decrease in 3DP prices in the near future, even after allowing for vendors offering higher performance, functionality and quality devices.

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The analyst predicts 7 of the largest 50 multinational retailers will start selling 3DPs through physical and online stores by 2015. One retailer already doing so (together with in-store 3D object printing) is no other than office supply peddler Staples.

Looking further in the future, Gartner predicts the killer app of consumer 3D printing should make an appearance by 2016, the result of work from both enthusiasts and manufacturers developing plug-and-play tools.

Go [Gartner Forecast: 3D Printers WW 2013](#)