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Gartner predicts rapid near future growth for the 3D printer market with 2016 shipments reaching 496475 units, a 105% increase over the 244533 units forecast to ship in 2015.



Such growth will continue over the next few years, as the analyst says shipments will "more than double" every year between 2016 and 2019 before global shipments grow to over 5.6 million.

"Rapid quality and performance innovations across all 3D printer technologies are driving both enterprise and consumer demand, with unit shipment growth rates for 3D printers increasing significantly," Gartner says. "The 3D printer market is continuing its transformation from a niche market to broad-based, global market of enterprises and consumers."

Material extrusion printers lead 2015 shipments at 232336 units, a total to grow to 5.5m units in 2019 (97.5% of the total) through sales of low cost ($1000-$2500) entry-level material extrusion printers.

Interestingly, the primary driver for low-cost consumer 3D printers are not households but schools and universities. On the other hand finished-piece quality and material advances drive enterprise 3D printers.

"Enterprise 3D printers can not only prototype new products and produce tools and fixtures that are used to make other items, but also print high-quality, short-run finished goods," the analyst concludes. "This multifaceted ability is driving their growth worldwide."

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