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## Xerox sights on 'cowboy' salesmen

By Andrew Griffiths

RANK Xerox, the leading photocopier manufacturer in Britain, has responded to complaints about "cowboy" salesmen after admitting that their activities are damaging its business.

It has announced a new customer code after similar guidelines were launched by the Finance & Leasing Association. The trade association of the photocopier industry is considering a third.

"There is a danger that we are going to get swamped with codes," admitted Rank's director of business management Jim Havard. But he said the company, which claims a 33pc market share, expected to gain a competitive advantage by indicating its commitment to customer satisfaction and quality. "The awareness of cowboy dealers has knocked consumer confidence which is no good for anyone," said Mr Havard.

Rank has removed half the words from contracts covering photocopiers, printers, and facsimile machines and clarifying what customers can expect in terms of rental, maintenance and service agreements in an updated code of conduct. The com-

pany hopes to set a new standard for the industry, which has been criticised for failing to restrain unscrupulous salesmen who trick customers into signing contracts containing hidden extras.

The Campaign to Clean Up Copier Contracts, which has highlighted the activities of companies offering misleading contracts, has welcomed the move, but critics argue that for any code to be effective "cowboy" companies must agree to be bound by it. Rogue salesmen have flourished as a result of the structure of the copier industry where dealers are in the main independent of manufacturers and are free to use a wide range of finance houses for leasing agreements.

This means a business may buy a branded machine from a dealer over whom the manufacturer has no quality check on a deal financed by a finance house, which has no interest in the equipment.

Rank directly controls its sales network and consequently has not been the main focus of complaints, while the industry as a whole is moving further towards the independent dealer structure.