



How to Choose the Right Printer

Shopping for a printer can be overwhelming if you don't know where to start. Where do you plan to use the printer? What type of documents will you need to print? How much money do you want to spend on

Before you make your purchase, think about what your printer's primary purpose will be.

ink? With so many printers on the market, taking the time to map out your options is the best way to ensure you find the perfect fit. This guide should give you a good idea of where to begin your search, starting with the basics of print technology.

Inkjet or Laser?

Inkjet printers are a great choice if you are a casual home user or photographer. They

are typically equipped with either two ink cartridges or four, depending on the machine you own. A two cartridge set up includes a black ink cartridge and tri-color ink cartridge, while the four cartridge set up includes black, cyan, magenta and

yellow ink. Inkjets offer a variety of print solutions for a reasonable price and many are compatible with a wide range of media types. Most retailers sell either a multi-function or single function option. Multi-function machines are much more popular due to their versatility and their ability to seamlessly switch between print, scan and fax functions. If all you do is print, a single function machine is your best bet. Single function printers are a lot easier to operate and require far less maintenance. Inkjet printers are not for everyone however. Genuine brand ink costs can add up quickly if you regularly print in high volumes, your print time may take longer compared to a laser jet.



Laser printers are a nice option for home office or

small business consumers. Instead of using ink to print, they use a cartridge that is filled with toner powder. Since toner powder is dry, cartridges can last for several months in a machine. A longer shelf life means you can go on vacation and still have a working printer when you get



back! Many companies like laser printers for their speed and ability to print precise, crisp text at a high capacity. The majority of laser printers are monochrome, or print solely in black and white. For a business that prints a lot of color graphs or pamphlets, color laser printers are another option. They won't produce the same vivid photos that an inkjet printer will, but they are perfect for offices that like to incorporate a bit of color into their monthly reports. Toner cartridges are more expensive than inkjets, but their high toner capacity make them a worthy investment. If you do a lot of text heavy printing and a lot of photo printing, it might be worth your time to invest in both types of machines. You will save quite a bit on cost in the long term and get the exact sort of quality you need whenever you need it.

Print Speed

If you print at a high volume and have multiple people using the same machine, then printer speed is definitely an important factor to consider. Printer companies call a printer's speed PPM, or pages per minute, and the quality of a print can vary depending on how quickly you are churning out pages. For example, printing in draft mode may be faster but the end result isn't going to look as good compared to a print in optimal mode. Laser printers tend to be much faster than an inkjet and are the preferred machine for a business that has a need for speed.



Duty Cycle

A printer's duty cycle is the number of pages a printer can print within a given month without any issues. Duty cycle can vary across machines and if you do a lot of heavy-duty printing, it is something worth paying attention to. Heavy users should also take note of their monthly print volume, or the number of pages you typically print each month. Duty cycle and average print volume statistics are included in the specs of each machine. If you usually print 6,000 pages a month, it wouldn't make sense to invest in a printer that only handles 3,000. For users that only print a handful of copies each month, duty cycle probably won't be a concern.



Total Cost of Ownership

Owning a printer is expensive over time. Most consumers own an inkjet machine for at least five years, and a good laser printer can last considerably longer if it's well taken care of. However, the cost of consumables can add up quickly. These are just a few potential costs that can quickly drain your wallet if you're not careful:

Page Yield – A printer's page yield is the approximate number of pages that can be printed with a particular



cartridge. Page yield varies from machine to machine. It's important to compare cartridge price and page yield across machines to make sure you are getting the best overall value.

Cost of ink – Ink cartridges are pricey. Before you settle on a printer that seems like a great deal, take the time to do the math. The cost of ink is calculated by dividing a printer's page yield by the cost of the ink cartridge. For example, the price of an original HP® 61XL black ink cartridge is \$35.49* and its page yield is 480 pages. After a bit of division, the cost is 7.3 cents per page.

Switch to a reputable compatible cartridge and the cost difference is even more remarkable.

Comparatively, you can buy a genuine black Canon® PGI-250XL cartridge for \$24.99, which offers a page yield of 500. The cost per page for the Canon is only 5 cents a page, giving you more ink for a cheaper price. This is why cartridge price and page yield really play a crucial role in determining what printer you should buy. Switch to a reputable compatible cartridge and the cost difference is even more remarkable. If you were to buy a LD brand remanufactured HP 61XL black cartridge at \$16.99, your cost would only be 3.5 cents per page. A LD brand compatible PGI-250XL is priced at \$6.49. With a cost of 1.20 cents a page, the savings are significant.

Replacement Parts

Printer parts do not need to be replaced that often but if you want your machine to last, proper upkeep is essential. Printheads, drums, fuser assemblies or transfer belts all have a limited life cycle. Your printer's user guide should provide some wear and tear guidelines and most office supply stores sell replacements. Be aware, some printer parts can be just as expensive as the printer and it might be cheaper to get an entirely new machine if a part goes bad. When buying a printer, pay attention to the cost of all of the consumables, not just the cartridges. You probably won't be thinking about the cost of a new drum at purchase time but you'll be glad you checked the price knowing that you will have to replace it further down the road.



Wireless and Smartphone Printing



Wireless printing comes standard with most new machines, meaning you no longer have to be tethered to a computer in order to print. Apps like HP® ePrint® or Apple® Airprint® make printing from a smart phone or tablet incredibly convenient. Wireless printing isn't always perfect, so make sure you have a USB cable on hand just in case your connection gets spotty.

Warranty

A 1 year warranty is standard for most printers and it typically just covers factory defects. Damages caused by the improper cartridge installation or physical damage is often not covered, so if you tend to be a bit heavy-handed

Using LD brand compatible cartridges does not void your printer manufacturer's warranty.

with your machine, an extended warranty might be worth a look. Extended warranties cost extra but cover maintenance parts like drums and transfer belts. Contact your manufacturer for specifics on your printer model.

Reviews

Don't forget to read reviews! Reading the specs on a printer only tells part of the story. Be sure to read actual customer reviews to make sure other customers are satisfied too. Amazon® is a good place to start, but you can also find reputable feedback on CNET® or PCMag®.

Don't jump on a printer solely based on the sticker price.

With new printer models coming out every couple of months, there are a lot of options out there. But if you've got a good understanding of you are looking for, making a smart buy should be a breeze. Don't jump on a printer solely based on the sticker price. Owning a printer is a long term investment. Whatever you choose, make sure it fits your needs and your budget!

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