

## Selecting and Buying Printers

Tina Nerat

Thinking about buying a new printer? Sounds easy, right? Unfortunately, most people make the decision based on the purchase price of the printer, without looking at the ongoing costs and other factors that should be considered. Cheap printers bring manufacturers captive customers who keep buying expensive ink or toner cartridges when they run out.

The factors to consider can be overwhelming: laser or inkjet, color or black/white, computer drivers, image quality, resolution, single-sided or double-sided, cartridge cost, cost per page, scan/fax capability, size/footprint, wireless or wired connectivity, and volume of printing, to name a few factors. Also to be considered is brand and whether your computer has the “drivers” for that printer. HP, Brother, Epson, and Canon are all brands that have been leaders in the market for years.

Laser printers use lasers to create static electricity on the printer drum. The static attracts powdered toner from the cartridge which then melts on the paper. While laser toner cartridges cost more than inkjet cartridges, they last much longer. Inkjet printers spray tiny droplets of liquid ink onto a page. Colors are created by combining different colored inks. Inkjet cartridges can end up very expensive; the printer may be inexpensive, but cartridges can cost nearly as much as the printer. Color inkjets may stop printing if one of the cartridges is out of ink.

Laser printer plusses: high quality, especially with black/white printing; low cost per page, faster; higher capacity; ink doesn't smear. Downsides are: cost more initially; heavier; expensive cartridge although cartridges last a very long time.

Inkjet printer plusses: inexpensive to purchase, good color quality, good for low-volume printing, and lightweight. Downsides are: more expensive per page, slower, ink can smear, and lower paper capacity.

Some general comments: Inkjets and lasers have similar footprints on a table, but lasers look much bigger because they are taller to accommodate toner cartridges. If the inkjet 3 colors (other than black) are all in one cartridge, printing will stop when one color runs out. Lasers count the number of pages that are printed, and when it meets a set threshold, it tells you the toner is running low. However, the laser cartridge usually lasts a long time after the warning. Laser cartridges can be shaken up to get more use as well.

Wired versus wireless is another decision to make. Physically connecting the printer to the router with a wired ethernet connection can be more reliable than a wireless-only printer connection. Since a laptop/tablet WiFi connects to the router, the laptop/tablet will “see” the printer.

Google is a useful tool for finding out more about printers. Try searching “laser versus inkjet printer” or “how to decide on what printer to buy”. As always, this article can be viewed and questions may be asked of OTLC at [www.oakmont-learning.org](http://www.oakmont-learning.org).