

# Buying a Printer for your Home or Home Office

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A number of my customers have asked me for advice on choosing a computer printer, so I put this guide together to answer some common questions.

## **The Razor-Blade Rip-off**

Printers are now cheaper than ever, with many costing less than \$40. But the price of printer ink is not going down, and for one particular \$40 printer it costs another \$40 to buy a new set of ink cartridges. Eventually you may be able to buy a printer for \$5 or \$10, and still pay \$40 for new ink. This is a marketing gimmick developed by King C. Gillette for his razors: sell a cheap handle that will lock the customers into expensive blades. But it's not all bad out there. Here are some ways to get the best quality printing for your money.

## **Consider a Laser Printer**

If you do a lot of black-and-white printing, you may want to consider buying a laser printer. Some quality models cost less than \$200, and the replacement toner cartridges will print up to 3000 sheets for less than \$50. Color laser and LED printers are more expensive (\$550 and up) and take up a lot of space, so they're probably not worthwhile as a home printer.

## **Getting the Most from an Inkjet**

The concept of "total cost of ownership" asks the question, "From the time that I buy this thing until the time that I stop using it, how much will I spend?" For printers, that includes the cost of the printer plus repairs, accessories and ink or toner. Always look at the cost of print cartridges when buying a printer, since you'll probably have to buy a new set at least once a year, depending on how much you print. Another important factor is that some inkjet printers have a single combined cartridge for all three color inks. This can waste ink and money, since the entire cartridge needs to be replaced even if you've only used up one color. Instead, look for models that have separate ink cartridges for each color. Finally, try buying replacement ink from independent manufacturers, but beware that some inexpensive ink can be very bad quality.

## **Photo Printers**

One of the most popular types of printers today are photo printers. These inkjet printers can print high-quality color, and with a digital camera you can make your own photos without going to a store. Keep in mind, though, that the quality does deteriorate as the printer gets older, dust collects and parts wear out. Also, the cost of printing photos is higher than that of printing text or illustrations: between ink, photo paper and the cost of the printer, you may wind up paying over 50¢ per print. Meanwhile, there are many stores and web services that will print professional-quality photos from an email or a floppy disk for as little as 12¢ per print.

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