

Color Laser Printers



Bring Marketing Printing Back In-House

Save time and
money on
short-run jobs

Martha's Vineyard is a popular Massachusetts tourist destination attracting some 25,000 visitors per day during the summer months. And if the area's Chamber of Commerce has its way, the island is going to get even more popular.

In mid-2005, the Chamber purchased a Xerox Phaser 8550/DP color printer. It has dramatically simplified and improved how the group provides informational and promotional literature for the island's visitors.

"The Xerox Phaser 8550/DP lets us print short runs of two-sided color brochures, like 'Things to Do in the Vineyard' and 'Rainy Day Ideas,' on high-quality white paper stock, in-house, in batches of just a few dozen at a time, for our members and for our Visitor's Center," says Barbara Dupree, director of operations, Martha's Vineyard Chamber of Commerce.

"The black-and-white trifold guides we used to print didn't look very compelling," she says. "Once we started printing the brochures on the Xerox Phaser, with little dashes of color, they became much more popular. For example, the pet stores on the island are asking for our pet-friendly guide, so we're now printing a few hundred every few weeks. The members are happy — they love the materials we're printing now."

Color Laser Printers Now in the \$500-to-\$2,000 Range

Collectively, medium- and large-sized businesses spend a lot of money on color print jobs. And they could be spending less, states Tom Codd, director of outbound marketing for LaserJet printers at Hewlett-Packard.

"A lot of that is for things that are sent out to be done," he says. But if you look at all those pages, a lot of them are very small runs of very simple jobs, not requiring binding or a lot of complex finishing. A good majority of these print jobs are perfect candidates to be handled in-house by color laser printers."

Bringing these jobs in-house can dramatically cut printing costs. "You can get full-color documents for up to 85 percent less than you would pay at a local copy shop, and it's more convenient," says Julie Lagesen, channel marketing manager, Xerox.

Affordable color laser printers like the Xerox Phaser 8550/DP (list price under \$1,300) are making it possible for marketing departments to offer in-house color, where employees were once limited to monochrome (black and white). They can also be used to save significant time and money on short-run color jobs that previously had to be sent out to color copy shops.

Desktop color inkjet printers, while affordably priced, typically don't have the speed or output quality for marketing literature, and the cost-per-page of consumables can quickly mount up. On the other hand, color laser printers have been coming down in price to where they are now suitable for individual workgroups within medium- and large-sized companies.

For example, in the last year or so, color laser printers from Epson, HP, Xerox and other manufacturers, have come down into the \$2,000, and even sub-\$1,000 price range, with smaller workgroup models or rebate/sale prices going below \$500. Note, laser printers here include LED (Light Emitting Diode) printers and solid-ink technologies; devices in this group include printers and also multifunction printers (MFPs) or "all-in-ones," which print while also offering copy, scan and faxing capabilities.

In the sub-\$1,000 range, Xerox's Phaser 6120 is ideal for small workgroups of up to five users, says Xerox's Lagesen. For larger groups, Lagesen suggests the Phaser 6300, which ▶

includes networking and duplexing (printing on both sides of the paper at once). Xerox solid-ink devices in the sub-\$1,000 through \$2,000 range include the Phaser 8550.

In the \$2,000 range, HP offers its LaserJet 4700. While offerings in the sub-\$1,000 range include the HP Color LaserJet 3600 as well as the HP Color LaserJet 2800 All-in-One series models.

“Before prices came down, only big-budget companies could afford color laser printers,” says Marlene Orr, senior printer analyst, for Buyers Laboratory Inc. “When they dropped below the \$1,000 level, more and more businesses began adopting them.”

Instead of having to send out brochures, presentations and other color jobs to outside printers, departments and even small companies can now save on budget and time. Software from the printer manufacturer can further control costs through managing user access and print quantities. (See sidebar on page 15.)

Depending on the model, features on these devices can include automatic document feed (ADF), capable of handling anywhere from 20 to 50 sheets at a time, as well as advanced networking capabilities, letting you attach the device directly to your local area network LAN, rather than needing a computer to act as a print server.

Epson’s AcuLaser CX11NF falls in the sub-\$1,000 and includes a 50-sheet ADF, along with built-in networking, says Dorinda Hill, product manager, Epson America Inc.

Print jobs requiring small runs of simple jobs are perfect candidates to be handled in-house by color laser printers.

In-House Color Enhances Marketing Activities

Color marketing materials are important for any business that wants to communicate with its customers, HP’s Codd points out. “Real estate offices, for example, were an early interest area that continues to be big into [printing promotional items for] their listings. We’re also seeing a lot of interest from dental and medical offices, as well as auto shops and others.”

“There’s a need for color in marketing collateral in real estate, insurance, medical, financial services and other offices,” adds Epson’s Hill. “Outsourcing color can be quite expensive. Now that the quality of affordable color laser devices has gotten very good, people feel very comfortable having literature printed on them represent their company.”

“Color is important for any customer-facing materials,” says Xerox’s Lagesen. “This includes collateral-like flyers, presentations, brochures, kiosk-output and letterhead.” In fact, using color in advertising outsells black-and-white by a whopping 88 percent, according to the Loyola University School of Business, Chicago, Ill., as reported in Hewlett-Packard’s “Advisor,” June 1999.

Other types of businesses for using color printing, according to Lagesen, include retail, financial services, marketing departments and graphic artists.”

For example, the BEHR paint and stain company uses Xerox printers in kiosks to print samples. And financial services company Edward Jones uses color laser printers to add color to the monthly financial statements it sends to customers.

“Marketing materials include trifold brochures and single-page handouts which you want to take to trade shows and events. Since this information may change, you only want to make a few hundred at a time,” notes M. David Stone, “PC Magazine” lead analyst for printers, scanners and projectors, and author of “The Underground Guide to Color Printers.” “Real-estate offices like to do ‘Let me introduce you to your new neighbor’ flyers that include a photo of the agent and other photos or images.”

In-house printing makes it easy and affordable to complete “one-off’s,” where only one or a few copies of a color object are needed.

The shelf life of collateral is typically short, which usually results in unused and wasted copies. “A lot of what gets printed didn’t need to be, either because fewer copies were needed, or information like pricing or offerings changed, making unused copies obsolete,” HP’s Codd points out. “If you send a job out, you have to guess how many you’ll need. If you can print them internally, you have more flexibility, so a lot of the waste goes away.”

Another use for color printing capability, says Xerox’s Lagesen, is on letterhead documents. “You can add a color logo to letterhead for as little as a penny a page, and still have the option of monochrome or color for the page proper.”

Today’s color laser printers will also handle the wider range of media, such as stock for brochures, postcards and mailers that marketing materials often call for. For example, notes HP’s Codd. “We’ve engineered the rollers, and the pickup and transfer mechanisms — anything that moves paper through the device — to handle and print on a wider range of paper or media types.

“And we’re introducing a new media in the spring — a thicker glossy stock that can be used for marketing brochures instead of 20-pound bond paper.” The same attention is being paid to toners, Codd notes. “We’re designing toners to be at their best on these kinds of media.”

Combining Productivity Features With Affordability

Built-in or add-on paper-handling features in these printers can include duplexing, large-format (tabloid and banner), and the ability to handle a wider range of paper and other media types and weights (for example, brochure stock and mailers). “The duplex feature is really nice,” Martha’s Vineyard’s Dupree points out. “You just start the job and you can walk away.”

“The cost per page for color on even the sub-\$1,000 devices is also coming down,” notes Buyers Laboratory’s Orr. “The price for consumables is making them more affordable and realistic for businesses. In general, if you’re printing more than a few hundred color pages a month, it makes sense to buy one.”

Models in the \$1,000 to \$2,000 range, Orr says, while costing more upfront, “tend to have a higher consumable yield, which contributes to lower cost-per-page. So if you’re bringing enough marketing work in-house, it can make sense to go to one of the higher-priced models.”


For departments and companies with larger or more

complex color printing and handling needs, HP, Xerox and other vendors also have more powerful, sophisticated models, in the \$3,000 through \$10,000 and up range.

Don't worry about color devices driving up the cost of your monochrome activity, reassures Stone of "PC Magazine." "The cost per page for printing monochrome on a color laser is the same as on a monochrome printer in the same page-per-minute speed class. There's no added cost-of-ownership for the monochrome activity."

"For less than a thousand dollars, companies who would have been getting a single-function color device, or a monochrome

MFP, can get the monochrome speed they've grown to expect and good paper handling, with the value of being able to also do color," says Epson's Hill.

"Traditionally, you get a job done on offset printers based on quantity, since offset has a cost for the setup," notes Stone. "You wouldn't go to offset for a few hundred copies. But you would for a few thousand. Unless you're making enough color copies to justify offset printing, going to an outside print shop costs more than doing color yourself," says Stone. "And you aren't getting better color outside." 

Printer Software Enhances Print Production and Control

To help companies get the most value out of color laser printers, manufacturers like Brother, HP and Xerox offer free software.

Color Print Controls

"A lot more vendors are bundling in software for color controls, including templates that make it easier to put together marketing pieces," says Marlene Orr, senior printer analyst, for Buyers Laboratory.

For color pieces intended to go to outside printers, control software allows users to adjust colors before sending the job out. "You can match Pantone tables and simulate what you'll see on the printer," says Orr. "And they let you do tweaks like deepen a red or change a blue, without having to recreate the entire piece."

Xerox, for example, includes its CentreWare Internet Services (CentreWare IS) internal Web server with all its printers. By accessing a printer's CentreWare server, users and IT departments can check the status of the printer and its consumables; check job status and usage profile reports; manage job queues, including secure print jobs; and check the device's property settings. Additionally, CentreWare lets users print information pages, demo pages, color samplers and configuration pages.

HP's Color Access Control features help companies control access to color printing, by user or application. It also allows for internal department job tracking and charge-back for color printing.

"Even in larger companies, we find there is cost-sensitivity for the cost of printing color pages, so they want to manage it, [and] make sure copies are used for business purposes," says Tom Codd, director of outbound marketing for LaserJet printers at HP.

Templates and Style Guides

HP's Marketing Assistant Software provides users with a set of templates for common business marketing items like trifold flyers, presentations and postcards, says Codd. "So you don't have to be a graphic artist specialist; just drop your information into predefined layouts. We also have an in-house marketing portal which offers business templates and images, access to stock photography, logos to put into templates, along with free online classes and how-to's."

Lexmark's Color Care Technology includes seven tools for cost savings and user convenience. Proof then Print, for example, makes it easy to print a single page from a long color document, so the user can examine it, to minimize the number of pages printed while checking for mistakes. Toner-saver tools including Color Saver, Color Print Permissions, Custom Mono-only drivers, and Black & White Lock Mode reduce the amount of color toner used, or restrict access to color, e.g. for drafts where full color isn't needed. And Lexmark's Coverage Estimator tool lets employees estimate the cost to print a color page.

Epson includes its free Office Ready Essentials with its AcuLaser C1100 and CX11N devices. With a library of 150 business templates plus other features, these tools let your employees create colorful business documents in Microsoft Office applications, edit text and easily insert photos and images into Office Ready Essentials templates and convert documents into PDFs (portable document format) files.

The AcuLaser 1100N also includes the Presto! Page Manager for easier scanning, the Business Photo Index Print utility, Presto! BizCard for scanning business cards to a contact database and Creativity Suite for imaging applications.



CDW offers technology service support from all leading printer manufacturers.