Color Printing: Just What You Need

An HP Planner

Color printing has been around for years, but until recently, it was not that widely used in everyday office environments. According to industry observers at CAP Ventures, this may be because color printers have traditionally been perceived as too expensive and complex to be of much value for everyday usage.[1] However, now that color devices are becoming more affordable and functional, that's changing. Even so, it's still entirely possible to spend too much on color—by failing to carefully match needs to capabilities. As Don Jones points out in *The Definitive Guide to Office Color Printing*, many organizations don't understand the range of options available to them for using color; as a result, they "often implement overly expensive solutions for everyday use."[2] This planner is designed to help you align printing requirements with devices in order to get just what you need in color printing—no more, and no less.

Think about it: Consider the ways in which you want to use color printing for everyday office documents.

Act on it: Determine the criteria to apply to be sure that the devices you buy are appropriate for your needs.

Work with it: Evaluate how well the devices you are considering match your selection criteria.

Get help with it: Learn more about what Hewlett-Packard can do for you.

Think about it

Once reserved for high-end sales and marketing materials and similar uses, color printing today is affordable enough for everyday printing, making even the most mundane documents more readable and compelling. As you consider incorporating color into your everyday documents, you should start by defining what types of documents in your environment will benefit from color. Use the following chart as a guide.

Everyday Documents: Candidates for Color

Type of Document	Benefit of Color
Memos, everyday correspondence	Highlight key points to get attention
Financial reports, spreadsheets	Make it easy to locate important details
Presentation handouts	Create handouts that match slides
RFPs and proposals	Make long documents more readable
Business forms (invoices, etc.)	Emphasize info, brand identity
Internal newsletters, posters	Attract more readers

Once you've identified the types of documents that are relevant to your organization, think about how color can be used with them.

For example, memos and business letters are likely to require only a small amount of color for emphasis, while employee newsletters are usually more highly designed pieces that use color more liberally. For the former, you'll want to be able to print just as much if not more in black-and-white on the printer you choose as in color. For the latter, you'll want a printer that delivers higher-quality color than you would need for something like a memo or letter.

Here are some other examples of questions to ask yourself in assessing your printing needs with regard to color.

- Are most of your documents on ordinary, standard-size paper? (Different types of color printers handle different types and sizes of paper better.)

- Do you print many documents frequently, and in large quantities? (Like black-and-white printers, some color printers are designed for heavier-duty use than others.)

- Will you need to print photographs regularly? (Some color printers are designed for photo-quality printing; others are not.)

- What kind of lead time do your documents require? Do you often find out just minutes beforehand that you need to print 50 copies of something? (Again, as with black-and-white printing, different speeds meet different needs.)

- How complex are your documents? Are they often duplexed, folded, stapled or bound? Are they large-format documents like posters or banners that require special handling? (If you don't need these types of features, you don't need to pay more for a color printer that offers them.)

There are undoubtedly other aspects of your documents that will influence what kind of color printers you buy. These examples are intended to get you started in thinking about your specific needs so that you choose color printing capabilities that match them.

Act on it

Once you've identified your needs, you can use them to define your selection criteria for color printers. This following information will help you determine what criteria to apply.

Color Selection Criteria

Performance

Printing speed

- Long, multi-page documents = high page-per-minute rating

- Short, one- or two-page documents = lower-speed, lower-cost printers *HP FYI: Some printers take longer to set up and print the first page of a run and are therefore not as well suited to short documents where the set-up has to be repeated frequently.*

Reliability

Long-term durability

- High-demand = heavy-duty, higher-end printer

- Less intense needs = lower-purchase-price, light-duty printer

Color Quality

High quality color matching, photo quality

- *HP FYI: It's simple. If you don't need these features, don't pay for them.*

Paper Support

Wide-format paper, transparencies, other unusual requirements

- Special media needs = matching to specific types of printers

- Traditional 8.5 x 11 paper = workhorse printers *HP FYI: Printers that don't handle special media are generally faster printers than those that do. So if you don't need a printer for special media, don't buy one. You'll end up paying a high price in lost speed and productivity for features you don't even need.*
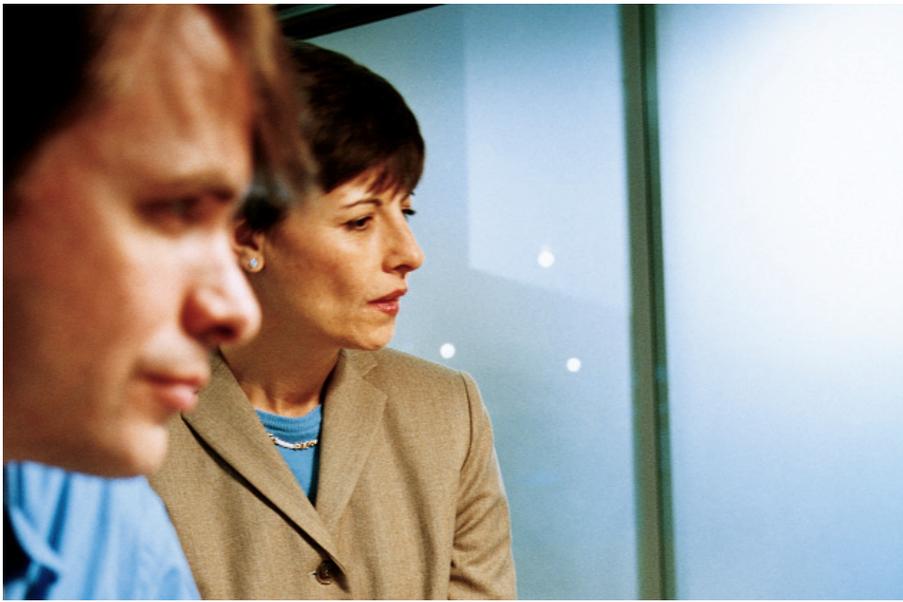
Special Capabilities
Sorting, stacking, stapling and other features

- Special document handling = feature-rich printers

- Straightforward, one-sided color = lower-cost, less-frills printers

Networkability
Networked printers

If your printers are networked, you will need to consider these factors:

- Printer languages

- Connectivity

- Network protocols

- Operating systems

- Software applications

- Document creation application and client operating system (OS)

  The document creation application and client OS must be considered to determine what printer language and OS support is required. For example, if the client is using Quark on a Macintosh computer, the printer must support both the application and the operating system.

Manageability
Ability to easily manage printers

- Distributed print environment = software for detecting and configuring printers remotely

- Multiple types of users = software to control who can print in color

Now, take the information you've come up with in considering the criteria for selection, and rank the criteria based on what is most important to you.

For example, suppose you have a high priority on adding color to internal employee documents—including a newsletter that you send out every quarter to 1,000 people; weekly one-page memos to post sales results; and occasional large posters to announce additions or changes to employee benefits. If that's your situation, you will weight the criteria differently than someone whose main priority is to crank out long RFPs that go to thousands of prospective vendors.

In both circumstances, if the printers are going into a networked environment, networkability will be a top priority. After that, you'll value speed more than color quality in the second scenario, and special capabilities or paper support more than long-term reliability in the first.

Once you've identified your needs and ranked the criteria based on them, you can determine what kind of printers will meet your needs without exceeding them.

Work with it

There's a wide range of color printer models from which to choose to meet your selected criteria, but one of the main points of differentiation—if not *the* main one—is inkjet vs. laser printing. Both are capable of providing outstanding results cost-efficiently, if they are appropriately matched to printing needs. The following table outlines some of the characteristics of each that will help you match the technologies to your own needs

Color inkjet printing	Color laser printing
Accommodates specialty and wide-format papers and other unique media types	Works best with standard-size (8.5 x 11) paper, but may also accommodate 11 x 17 and other sizes
Delivers photorealistic imaging	Delivers good (but not high-end) color quality and color matching capabilities as well as water-resistant printing
Incurs no laser-specific costs for fuser or drum replacement	Uses high-yield consumables and may have a lower per-page cost than inkjet printing
Generally comes in a smaller, more streamlined footprint with limited input or finishing options	May require more space, in part due to presence of options like multiple high-volume paper trays and finishing features available to meet specific needs

Paper Compatibility

One of the main areas in which inkjet and laser printer technologies differ is in paper compatibility. Look at the needs and criteria that you defined previously, and use the following checklist to help determine which type of technology will best meet your needs in this particular respect.

	Inkjet printer	Laser printer
Digital copy paper	•	•
Business copy paper	•	•
Multipurpose paper	•	•
Office paper	•	•
Recycled paper	•	•
Printing paper	•	•
All-in-one paper	•	•
Matte/gloss papers	•	•
Mailing labels	•	•
Transparencies	•	•
Postcards	•	
Tri-fold brochure paper	•	
Banner paper	•	
Greeting card stock	•	
High-gloss film	•	
High-gloss photo paper	•	
Cover papers		•

Get help with it

HP offers an extensive line of color printers in a variety of categories to meet your specific needs for everyday office printing. Go to the **HP Color Printing Center** to learn more about:

• HP Business Inkjet Printers

• HP Color LaserJet Printers

• HP All-in-One Printers that combine printing, scanning and faxing

• HP Designjet Printers for wide and large format output

Want to know more?

At HP we understand that knowledge is the most powerful business tool. **Click here** to visit our dynamic repository of informative white papers, business cases and hands-on training resources. You'll find everything you need to know to understand what's going on in your printing and imaging environment and what you can do to get the most from your investments.

Notes

[1] "Workgroup Color: The Next Frontier," CAP Ventures *CAP Stats*, 13 May 2003.

[2] Don Jones, *The Definitive Guide to Office Color Printing* (realtimepublishers.com, 2004), 9.