



Avoid Hidden Costs When Purchasing a Printer

Like many consumers, you may have bought a printer for a great price, only to be shocked by the cost of supplies for your equipment or to learn that you are unable to find good service. These can result in hidden costs that you were probably not aware of when purchasing your printer. In fact, many consumers are surprised and upset to find out exactly how expensive it is to buy the printer manufacturer's cartridges. Fortunately, a free market allows competition, giving you the right to choose compatible or remanufactured cartridges. The following tips can assist you in determining which printer to buy — helping to avoid the hidden costs of printer equipment.

What every potential buyer should consider before investing in new office printing equipment:

■ Features

Consider your individual (and office/family) uses and needs to determine which features you should shop for. Ask yourself the following questions: Will I be printing in black and white, or will I need color? How often will I print, and how many pages? Do I print mostly text or graphics? How quickly do I need my jobs print? How much do the ink or toner cartridges cost, and how many pages does each cartridge print? Are there any other supplies that will require replacement and what are the costs? Is service readily available in my area?

■ Cost of Supplies

In terms of long-term, out-of-pocket expense, one of the most important areas to explore is the price of supplies. Many equipment manufacturers rely on a tactic often referred to as FUD — Fear, Uncertainty and Doubt. The manufacturers try to make you believe that your warranty will be voided if you use compatible or remanufactured cartridges. That is not true, and it is not legal.

As a consumer, you deserve to have a choice of supplies. If preserving that choice is important to you, you may want to consider selecting the equipment that presents the least restrictions



and support companies that embrace, rather than stifle, competition.

Many printer manufacturers are trying to lock out competition with chips or other unfair technology. We can only hope that in the near future the United States and other countries will follow Europe's lead; directives recently passed there would potentially make anticompetitive devices (such as the lock-out chips) illegal.

For example, printer manufacturer Lexmark has a program that it calls "Prebate." Lexmark claims this is an up-front discount for consumers,

but there are many anticompetitive strings attached. Plus, according to industry analysts at

Lyra Research, a prominent printer research publication, using these "discounted" cartridges actually costs more per page than regular priced cartridges from other leading equipment manufacturers! So consider the cost of supplies (and the number of pages each prints) before buying, and you can avoid this hidden cost.

■ Availability of Service

You shouldn't underestimate the importance of knowing what service and parts are available for your equipment, and where you can get service covered by your warranty. Lexmark, for example, has recently terminated contracts with some of its authorized service providers throughout the United States, which decreases the number of companies that can provide your warranty work.

If there isn't an authorized service center nearby, you may have to send the printer elsewhere, increasing your costs and downtime, or may even have to pay for the service out of pocket at a non-authorized service center. This can really add up, so consider the service arrangements before you buy.

■ Your Best Bet

You should discuss your needs with your service and/or supplies providers before you buy. They can help guide you down the right path in determining what, exactly, each printer offers, or what disappointments (and added costs) it might be hiding! 