LEXMARK

Lexmark C530dn
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Lexmark C534dtn
22ppm full color
24ppm black & white

Sum-up: Another Lexmark breakthrough in speed and price for color laser printing.

Three years ago, Lexmark came out with the C510 series, a very good economy model priced at $599 and up. Two years ago, the company topped itself with the C520/C522/C524 family, which printed at 20ppm in color and black-and-white, a strong performance level for such economical machines. Now these models have undergone another evolution, re-emerging as the C530/C532/C534 family, which prints at 22ppm in color and 24ppm in black-and-white. Although Lexmark hasn't raised the prices from the previous generation (in fact, Lexmark dropped the price on the C534 models by $200 each from their C524 predecessors), these machines achieve even more remarkable speed, while many of their rivals run at speeds of 4 to 8ppm in color. They also have some superior features that make them more than just minimal printers.

The six new models in the family are:

- The C532n, the base-level machine with a 250-sheet paper capacity and Ethernet, along with 128MB of memory. ($499)

- The C530dn, a retail-channel version of the C532n, also $499, and almost, but not quite, identical. The major differences: the C530dn adds duplexing but has a 65,000-page duty cycle, while the C532n has a 75,000-page duty cycle but no duplexing. The C532n also has higher supply yields than the C530dn.

- The C532dn ($699), which is identical to the C532n except it adds standard duplexing.

- The C534n, which adds a faster processor and an optional hard disk, as well as networking and also has 128MB of standard memory ($699).

- The C534dn, which adds standard automatic duplexing to the C534n. ($999)

- The C534dtn, which adds an extra 500-sheet tray ($1,299).

The C530dn/C532n engine comes with a 375MHz processor, while the C534 models have a 625MHz processor. Along with a few other vendors, Lexmark has made sure that getting into color printing at the entry level no longer means making big sacrifices in speed. PostScript is a standard feature through the whole line, which is not always the case with low-priced color laser printers.

These models have decent memory capacity.

The Lexmark C532n prints color at 22ppm speed at 1,200dpi resolution.

Lexmark C530/C532/C534 Consumables costs at-a-glance	Price	Yield	Full-color cost per page	Black-and-white cost per page
Black print cartridge	$95.00	1,500	$ 0.026	$ 0.026
Cyan print cartridge	$95.00	1,500	$ 0.040	N/A
Magenta print cartridge	$95.00	1,500	$ 0.040	N/A
Yellow print cartridge	$95.00	1,500	$ 0.040	N/A
4-color drum	$35.50	20,000	$ 0.002	$ 0.002
TOTAL PER-PAGE COSTS			$ 0.1470	$ 0.0280
			14.70	2.80

They start with 128MB, upgradeable to 640MB. That much memory may be helpful, because unlike some of their low-cost competitors, these are Postscript-based machines, making them useful for a wide variety of graphics applications. The models print at a resolution of 1,200dpi. A 40GB hard disk is an option on the C534 models.

Paper capacity is limited, based on the standard 250-sheet paper tray, a 100-sheet MPF feeder (except for the C534n, which has a manual MPF feeder), and an optional 550-sheet paper tray (standard on the C534dtn). There is a 250-sheet output tray. Duplexing is standard on all of these models except for the C532n and C534n.

USB is standard, as is Ethernet. Wireless 802.11b Ethernet is an option as well.

Lexmark hasn't published supply costs for these new mod-els yet, but we anticipate they'll be on the high end: around 2.8¢ for black pages and 14.7¢ for color. The good thing about these machines' consumables is their higher capacity: black cartridges print 5,000 pages, while the three color cartridges last for 3,000 pages.

Lexmark believes what sets its machines off from competitors' is a more extensive set of color-printing controls, much like those found on higher-cost printers. This series also allows the administrator to lock out some users from use of color, a good feature for a workgroup in which only some users really need color and where you want to keep costs down. Like other Lexmark models, there is an extensive suite of software available, with support for barcodes, and for forms creation and printing.

But where these machines have everyone else beat is in sheer speed for the price. Other low-cost models print at a relatively slow speed in color, from 4ppm to 8ppm in color. At 22ppm color printing, this family has remarkable speed, setting a new standard for low-cost color lasers. Plus it has standard PostScript, a unique feature in this price class.

As such, it competes very well with a slew of low-cost printers from Dell and others. The C532n is particularly a standout, while the C534 models are quite solid as well, if a little less unique.

Making a workgroup color printer for under $1,000 that has decent color control software is a nice plus. What's remarkable is that its 22ppm color speed makes it a creditable workgroup printer on its own. This family gets our Editor's Choice Award.