



LEXMARK C500n

At \$399 (direct), the Lexmark C500n is one of the most affordable color laser printers on the planet. Even more impressive is that for this price, it makes no compromises on output quality, offers good speed, and has a network connector.

My first reaction when I picked up the box was that the C500n is one big, heavy beast—definitely not a typical personal printer. It measures 15.2 by 18.9 by 16.5 inches (HWD), meaning you may have trouble finding room for it in a home office if space is tight. And unless you spend your spare time pumping iron, you'll probably want some help moving its 66 pounds into place.

Once you get past the heavy lifting, setup is par for the course. Remove the packing materials, insert the photodeveloper cartridge, load paper, connect the cables, and run the automated installation routine. One welcome convenience is a short network extension cable. Plug it into the connector in the back of the printer, and it extends just far enough around the side to let you plug or unplug a network cable without having to fumble around in the back or turn the printer around.

The C500n's 16 minute 30 second total on our business applications suite (timed with QualityLogic's hardware and software) makes it the fastest color laser I've seen at this price and the second fastest at \$500 or less. Only Lexmark's own \$500 C522n, a PC Magazine Editors' Choice, turned in a faster total, at 11:19.

Comparing speeds for these two printers gets a bit tricky. Sub-\$500 color lasers come in two varieties. Some, like the C500n, print color pages by printing each color (cyan, yellow, magenta, and black) separately, literally running each page through the printer four times. That's why the C500n is rated at 31 pages per minute (ppm) for monochrome and only 8 ppm for color. Others, such the previously reviewed C522n, print all four colors at once, which is why the C522n monochrome rating is 20 ppm and its color rating is also 20 ppm. In other words, the C522n is both slower for monochrome and faster for color.

If most of the files you print include color, the C522n will be the faster of the two. On the other hand, if you print mostly monochrome text, with only an occasional Web page, PowerPoint presentation, or Excel chart, the C500n will be faster.



The C500n's output is just what I expect to see from a color laser. The text quality was one small step below the best I've seen, making the printer good enough to handle any text you're likely to print. The majority of fonts I printed were easily readable at 5 points, with crisp, well-formed characters; some were easily readable at 4 points; and even the most stylized, difficult-to-print font in my test suite was easily readable at 10 points.

Graphics were good enough, but as with many printers, you should avoid thin lines, which tend to disappear. Photos were near photo quality too, which makes them fine for things like printing client newsletters or Web pages.

One minor issue is that the driver forces you to pick a color mode manually—for documents, graphics, or photos—rather than automatically selecting the appropriate mode for the image. In my tests, choosing the right mode often improved the image, but color quality was acceptable in most cases no matter which mode I went with.

All told, the C500n doesn't offer quite enough to replace the C522n as our Editors' Choice, but if your budget won't stretch beyond \$400, and particularly if you need to attach to a network, the C500n is clearly the printer to get.

—M. David Stone

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Bottomline: The Lexmark C500n offers all the speed and quality you'd expect from a color laser printer, plus a network connector, at an unexpectedly low price.

Pros: Low price. Good or better output quality across the board. Includes network connector.

Cons: Relatively big and heavy. Doesn't automatically select the best color mode.

