



Working in Colors

Lexmark C500n Color Laser Printer

BY NG CHONG SENG

The Lexmark C500n is a single function, multi-pass, color laser printer designed for SOHOs and small workgroups. At a whopping 29kg, it's wise not to attempt lifting it out of the box all by yourself – an extra pair of hands is recommended. And make sure to have enough space allocated for the printer before hand – at 385 x 480 x 420mm you will need considerable clearances (both height and depth). The setup process from then on is pretty straightforward, and that includes removing a few protective tapes and foam, loading the toner cartridges via the easily accessible front panel (remember to give them a good shake), connecting up the cables, and installing the software from the bundled CD. Like most laser printers, the C500n comes bundled with lower capacity toner cartridges. In this case, both the black and color ones last about 1000 pages each (see specs table above for other supplies available).

Round the back of the printer you can find a USB 2.0 port and an Ethernet port. For power source, the common 3-pin plug is the interface used. A thoughtful inclusion in the box is a network extension cable (about 0.5m in length). This is useful if your network cable is not long enough to reach the back of the printer, or if you are setting up the printer in a tight space where it's difficult to reach for the Ethernet port. In terms of paper handling, the C500n

comes with a 250-sheet, pullout paper tray located right at the bottom. For those with high volume printing needs, an optional 530-sheet tray can be purchased and it goes right below the 250-sheet tray – thus bringing the total possible capacity to 780 sheets. The printer comes standard with 64MB RAM, and is not upgradeable. There's no duplexing included, which means that double-sided printing will require you to flip over the papers manually. At the top of the printer sits a simple control panel with a total of six buttons (the usual start, cancel and navigation buttons) and a two-line monochrome LCD. One minor gripe we have is that this LCD panel is not backlit.

The C500n claims a printing speed of 31ppm for black and 8ppm for color. The slower color printing speed is a telltale sign that color is printed on the paper on separate passes. Our benchmarks showed that the printer is indeed a speed demon when it comes to black and white printing. We achieved a speed of about 35ppm – above what Lexmark has claimed. For color, we timed a speed of about 8.5ppm. Quality-wise, text output was inline with what we have come to expect from a quality laser printer: good definition, sharp, and full-bodied. It wasn't the best we've seen from a laser printer, but it was definitely not far behind some of these high-end models. Color performance was commendable too,

but was nothing much to shout about. Still, it's good enough for the occasional printing of color brochures and newsletters. One thing we noticed was that our color photos turned out with a heavy magenta cast when we chose "Photographs" as the color mode in the driver settings. This was easily remedied when we picked the "No color adjustment" option instead.

If you print mainly in monochrome, the C500n is a fantastic choice. It may not be a very fast color printer, but at 8ppm, we wouldn't say it's terribly slow either. And remember, this printer is network-ready. So at \$699, we reckon it's quite a steal.

SPECIFICATIONS

Speed	Resolution	Memory	Warranty	Price
31 ppm/ 8ppm (mono/color)	1200 x 600 dpi	64MB	One-year onsite	\$699

Print Resolution: 1200 x 600 dpi (black and color)
First Page Out (from Ready): 13 sec (black), 19 sec (color)
Paper Handling: Standard: 250-sheet output bin, 250-sheet input tray; Optional: 530-sheet drawer
Processor: 200MHz
Memory: 64MB (standard and maximum)
Interface: Ethernet 10/100BaseTX (RJ-45), USB 2.0
Print Language: Host-based printing
OS Supported: Windows 2000, XP, Server 2003; Mac OS X, 9.x
Duty Cycle: 35,000 one-time maximum pages per month
Supplies Yield: 1,500-page color toner cartridges (CMY), 2,500-page black toner cartridge. Ships with 1,000-page black and color starter toner cartridges; optional 3,000-page color high yield toner cartridges (CMY) and 5,000-page black high yield toner cartridge
Acoustics: 50 dBA (operating), 41 dBA (idle)
Dimensions: 385 x 480 x 420mm
Weight: 29kg

HWM'S VERDICT

Physique: **8.5**
 Features: **7.5**
 Print Speed: **9.0**
 Print Quality: **8.5**
 Value: **8.5**

8.5

Out of 10

It's a tad noisy during operation – thankfully, it prints fast. The ability to print in color is just icing on the cake.

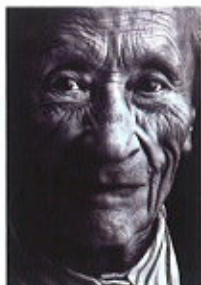


hours

At standard print quality, we observed good text sharpness and deep blacks.



Some dots could be seen up close, but that was expected. We advise turning off color adjustment in the driver settings if you encounter any colorcast problems.



One of the better monochrome photo prints we've seen from a laser printer – grayscale handling was good and subtle details were well retained.

Task	Timing
25 A4 pages of black text (doc)	43 sec
25 A4 pages of text with color graphics (doc)	2 min 56 sec
8 A4 pages of text with mono graphics (pdf)	37 sec
One A4 mono photo (tif)	3 sec
One A4 color photo (tif)	10 sec

*For print tasks, timing started when the printer started to feed paper and stopped when the last page was printed. 60gsm A4 paper was used for document printing. Print mode was set to Standard for all items, with Color mode set to Document for document prints, and Photographs for photo prints. Timings may vary with different system configurations.