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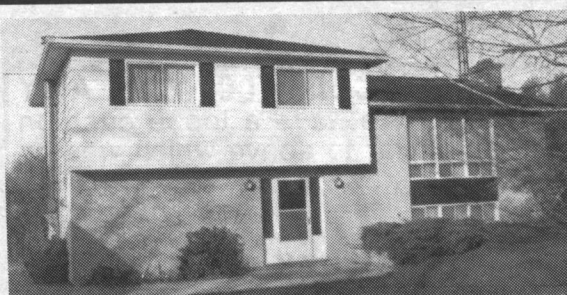
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Printers for power users

By Andy King

For users with larger budgets and a desire for very high quality output a laser printer is the probable choice.

Laser printer prices start at less than \$1,000 and rise to more than you would expect to pay for a luxury car.

Laser printer technology is moving forward at an astounding rate. Just a few years ago you would have had to spend about \$10,000 to achieve the quality of output now available from the least expensive lasers.

Lasers are completely different than the printers already mentioned. The ink jet and dot matrix print one line of information at a time while lasers print the whole page in one pass.

When you compose a page on your computer there is a little bit of time when nothing seems to happen. During this time the computer and/or the printer lays out the entire page to be printed. Once the devices are finished their calculations the page is printed at a rate of four or more copies per minute.

Laser printer output is often referred to as 'better than letter quality'. The resolution and speed of a laser is proportionate to the amount you are willing to spend on the purchase of the machine and the supplies you use.

Many lasers can produce single color pages by changing the toner cartridges. Some very expensive models can produce full color prints.

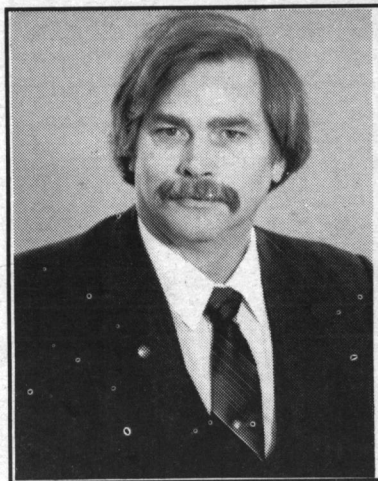
If you wish to produce full color prints there are alternatives to the very expensive color lasers.

The usual 'laser-like' choices for desk-top color output today are thermal or dye sublimation printers.

The common uses for these types of printers is for 'pre-press' proofing (being able to produce a full color representation of the layout before sending it to the print house), custom "T" shirt making, low volume production of brochures and badges and medical imaging.

Color thermal printers use a print head that transfers color from a large three or four color 'waxy' ribbon to specially-coated paper. The impressive output is accomplished by the ability of the printer

One Byte at a time



to mix the available colors.

Most of the color thermal printers on the market today offer a choice of output sizes of letter or tabloid. Many have advanced interfaces that allow use with almost any computer. Several models are available for less than \$10,000.

The emerging 'Big Daddy' in the color desk-top printer is dye sublimation technology.

The dye sub printers provide 'stunning' reproduction from a palette of over sixteen million colors. The output is referred to as 'photo realistic'. Most people I have shown this type of print to believed they were looking at a photograph. Currently dye sublimation printers are in the \$10 - \$20,000 range.

Thermal and dye sublimation printers have a shorter major component life than lasers. When I calculate the cost of producing a page, I include the value of the materials used as well as a portion of the cost of the machine service and repair.

The cost of a letter size print from a laser printer is only slightly more than that of a photo copier but generally superior in appearance.

The standard letter size color thermal prints can be expected to cost between \$2 - \$3. The dye sublimation prints currently cost between \$3 - \$4.

If there is a subject you would like me to cover or a question you would like answered please feel free to call me at 873-1056.

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