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Lexmark C500n

TEST Center Lexmark's budget-priced color laser delivers fast, high-quality text.

PCW Rating: **79** Good



The Lexmark C500n is the new baby in the company's family of networked color lasers. It's similar to the Lexmark C510n, C522n, and C524n models we've reviewed in the past, but it achieves a lower price of just \$400 (as of 10/6/2006) by using a Windows GDI-based driver that renders pages on your PC. This lets Lexmark economize with a less powerful processor, less memory, and no licensing fees for PCL and PostScript. However, it still has a two-line LCD as part of its well-designed control panel, which competitors don't yet offer at this price. Lexmark also supplies drivers for the Mac, and the printer works with Lexmark's free MarkVision Professional, a good tool for managing a network of printers.

The C500n's GDI-based design doesn't compromise its performance. In our speed tests, it printed text at a sprightly 19.0 pages per minute—faster than the other Lexmark printers we've reviewed recently, which are all in the 14-ppm range that's average for color lasers. Color pages arrived at a more sedate 3.6 ppm on plain paper and 1.9 ppm on glossy paper, which are close to average times.

Text print quality was superb in our tests. Our panel of judges noted crisply formed characters, smooth diagonals, and consistently dark solids. Line art came out a little dark, but straight and sharp. Our grayscale image also appeared too dark, with grainy mid-tones. Color printing was a disappointment, though.

On plain paper, graphics looked oversaturated and had strange diagonal patterns in lighter tones. Unnatural colors and odd dithering patterns were also a problem on Lexmark's Glossy Laser Paper.

For paper management, the C500n lacks a manual paper tray and comes with just a single 250-sheet paper tray. At least it's a real paper drawer, integrated into the base of the printer, unlike the oversized manual tray of some low-priced competitors. It's also capable of holding up to ten envelopes. If you often print on two types of paper, or you just want to refill the tray less frequently, the optional 530-sheet paper drawer is an excellent value at \$199. The C500n isn't a good choice if you print on legal-size paper, because you have to pay an extra \$129 in order to replace the standard tray with a larger one. (The 530-

sheet drawer doesn't accommodate legal paper at all.) Lexmark offers no duplexer for the C500n. The only other option is an 802.11g wireless print adapter, which costs \$249.

The printer arrives with four toner cartridges rated for just 1000 pages each. The standard replacements yield 2500 pages for black and 1500 for color. However, the best value are the high-yield cartridges rated for 5000 pages black (\$135) and 3000 pages color (\$120). You also need to replace the photo developer cartridge (\$212) every 120,000 black pages or 30,000 color pages, the fuser unit (\$231) every 60,000 pages, and the \$7 waste toner bottle every 30,000 pages. With the standard cartridges, this gives you costs per page of 3.3 cents for text and 15.8 cents for color, which are higher than those of most other printers tested this month.

— Paul Jasper

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