

Printers and Ink!

By: G.C.Silva

I was in a local retailer this past week and saw someone struggling at one of those picture-printing kiosks. Even with the help of a store's employee, they were still having a hard time so I naturally offered my assistance. While helping them crop a photo, the person commented that they could be doing this on their computer at home but it was just too expensive. I asked them, "What was expensive about it?" and they said, "It's the ink! It costs almost as much as the printer."

After many years you would think that the manufactures of printers and ink cartridges would have figured this out by now. The thing is they have and they really don't want to do anything about it. A printer is something you buy once while the ink cartridges are something you have to keep purchasing. The manufacture know this and makes a nice profit each time you purchase ink. The cost of replacement cartridges can sometimes cost almost as much as the printer itself.

While Kodak has recently introduced a new line of printers with some of the lowest cartridge prices around and Hewlett Packard offering XL (extra capacity) cartridges on select models, the average price taken from a broad sample of different printers is an astounding 21 cents per high quality 3x5" photo. That does not include the cost of the photo paper, the photo editing software, or even the printer. That's just what it costs in ink! Chances are if your printer is over 3 years old, you could be paying more than that too. No wonder those kiosks are still so popular!

It is convenient to be able to print photos at home, but is it economical? It is if you are printing the occasional photo or two. However, if you have a dozen or more to print, a trip to the photo kiosk is a better bet. Another option is submitting them to an online printing service. Sites like shutterfly (www.shutterfly.com) and Snapfish (www.snapfish.com) are two reputable sites that have great pricing and can save you money.

So you've decided to buy a new printer? A good start is to pick up a consumer's guide on them or do some research on the Internet. CNET does regular product reviews and comparisons so that's a great place to start.

Another thing to consider when purchasing a new printer is to decide what you're going to be printing. Will you be printing in black and white or in color? Will you be printing pictures, mostly text or both? Some printers are designed for printing photos while others are built for speed. Then there is the decision to buy an inkjet or a laser jet printer. Laser jet printers print faster and provide a sharper quality print but cannot print to photo paper while inkjet printers are less expensive and can print glossy photos. Then there are the All-In-One printers. What other functions do you want your printer to perform? Printers are not just for printing these days. The All-In-One printers scan, fax, have memory card slots, can act as USB hubs, as well as print.

Spending some time to think about what you will be printing and researching the cost of ink for your printer will not only help you with your decision in buying the right printer but it just might save you some money the next time you have to buy ink.

Glenn Silva, owner of Fairhaven Computer Repair and HTE Computer Consulting+ has been servicing local individuals and businesses in the community for 20+ years. He is self-syndicated and his column can be read in numerous printed and online sources. He can be contacted at: your-computerguy@comcast.net.