

# Is Your Printer Stealing From You? Here's How to Tell

**Whether through exorbitant ink prices or through flimsy construction, your printer may be robbing you of money or time. Here are five ways to tell whether you're being cheated.**

Melissa Riofrio, PC World

Jul 29, 2009 11:00 pm

Recommends

Don't let that blank, boxy look fool you: Printers can steal your money and your time if you're not careful. Printer manufacturers have come up with a few creative ways to drain your wallet through ink and toner cartridge costs. Other printer models just make you waste precious minutes fooling around with complicated menu systems or stupidly designed hardware.

How do you spot a thieving printer? We've identified some of the leading suspects for each specific crime. But to determine whether your printer is pilfering from you, check its specs and our reviews for these warning signs.

## 1. If the Printer Is Cheap, the Ink or the Toner Isn't

Think you got a great deal on your printer? Think again. It's a common ploy for printer vendors to sell machines at or below their production cost--and then make their money later on with extremely high ink or toner costs. How can you tell? Do the math: Take the cost of the cartridge and divide it by the page yield—the number of pages the manufacturer says the cartridge can print. (Note that most vendors base their page-yield numbers on industry-standard testing that is designed to represent real-world usage. However, the page yields you obtain may vary, depending on what you actually print.) Some vendors make their page yield information easy to find online (thank you, HP!), while others bury it (we're looking at you, Canon). The cost per page for the printer's ink or toner does not reflect other printer costs, of course, such as those for an inkjet's special paper or for a laser's belts, drums, and other longer-life consumables.

We collected cartridges prices and vendor page yield information for a number of printers. From them, we determined that the following costs per page for black-and-white and four-color pages for inkjet and laser printers are about average.

### **Inkjet printers:**

Plain black text: 4 cents to 5 cents per page

Simple four-color page: 12 cents to 14 cents per page

### **Monochrome laser/LED printers:**

Plain black text: 1 cent to 2.5 cents per page

### **Color laser/LED printers:**

Plain black text: 2 cents to 3 cents per page

Simple four-color page: 12 cents to 15 cents per page

If your printer's costs fall at or below these averages, that's good. But if its costs exceed these averages, you should consider looking for a different printer. A person who prints two dozen or fewer pages per week, mostly text with a little color, might tolerate a higher cost per page; but with so many good printers out there, why go with one that's going to soak you?

Here are some printers and multifunction printers (MFPs) we've tested recently that aren't as inexpensive as they look:



## 2. Lower-Capacity Inks = Higher Cost Per Page

PC World's research has shown time and again that lower-capacity ink and toner cartridges cost you more in the long run. If you print relatively little, it may not matter much, since the high cost is spread over a longer period of time. But if you print a lot, look for ink cartridges with yields above 250 pages, or toner cartridges with yields above 2000 pages. Some printers offer high-yield consumables that can save you a lot more. Here are the worst and best models for cartridge capacity that we've reviewed recently.

**Worst:** Printers with standard-size cartridges that are low-capacity and pricey:



**Best:** Printers that give you lots of ink or toner for a low price:



[Evildave](#) says:

Wed Jul 29 20:46:07 PDT 2009

[Re: Is Your Printer Stealing From You? Here's How to Tell](#)

The MAIN way inkjets 'steal' from you is consuming ink all the time, whether you print or not. If you print ten pages in a year, the ink will end up 'empty' anyway, so you'll go through \$50 worth of color ink cartridges (all of which will empty out at about the same time).

That's \$5 a page, in case you keep track. Of course, when you do the math and make this discovery, throw in the \$200 the MFC cost to start with (\$25/page), because you will chuck the whole damned thing in the trash.

And inkjet MFC printers won't scan or send a fax when they're out of ink. Let alone print black & white when they run out of any particular kind of ink.

A massive rip-off any way you slice it.

A laser won't consume 'ink' all the time keeping the heads from drying out. The toner is already dry. If you're hard up for color, get a color laser. Few people print enough photos to make owning a color inkjet worthwhile.

[backpack](#) says:

Thu Jul 30 00:33:41 PDT 2009

[Re: Is Your Printer Stealing From You? Here's How to Tell](#)

I have a HP LaserJet 1020 and fairly happy with it. Reason why I purchased this is because I hardly print anything that requires color. Secondly I hardly print unless it is a report for class.

Prior to purchasing this LaserJet printer, I had an inkjet printer and the problem with inkjet is that the ink will dry up thus making you having to purchase not one but two cartridges. One black and one color.

[CEMIII](#) says:

Thu Jul 30 07:14:50 PDT 2009

[Re: Is Your Printer Stealing From You? Here's How to Tell](#)

The 'standard' is probably the same as for copiers = 20% page coverage. -- Get a copy of the 'test' document from a copier service tech.

I gave away two Canon inkjets about 6y/a. Bought a 'monochrome' (black only) laser printer = Samsung (think inexpensive).

I also use Sprang eco Sans font to save ink! (with Word).

[ClaudeD](#) says:

Thu Jul 30 09:19:15 PDT 2009

[Re: Is Your Printer Stealing From You? Here's How to Tell](#)

Quality laser\led printers are low operating cost and low maintenance. My adult clients print very little in color but the kids are experts at printing trash and wasting ink. If you are printing a few pictures from your digital camera, download the software from Wa? Or Sa? Or Wg and send the photo's via the internet to them to print at a location close to you. The costs for printing listed in the article above are dubious at best and a flat out deception. Clients owning HP, Canon, Epson and Lexmark printers(expensive models) have asked my why they only got 10-12 pages of 8X10 color photo's then an "out of ink" message. In Hp that translates to \$3-4 per page. Inkjets dry out. Cleaning an inkjet using the factory supplied program can empty a full set of cartridges in a few minutes. Color laser\LED while the upfront cost is higher, the cost per page in either color or black is far cheaper than their counterparts. And they don't dry out when not being used. Easy smart decision as the most economical.

[free2speak](#) says:

Thu Jul 30 10:37:07 PDT 2009

[Re: Is Your Printer Stealing From You? Here's How to Tell](#)

Color lasers can't compare to the print quality of inkjets for color photos. Lasers are hardly cheap either. Go with a laser as long as printing pictures is not your priority. I have used HP inkjets since 1987, and I have never had an ink cartridge dry out or have a cleaning use up all my ink in minutes. In the early days I printed a lot and went through a lot of ink. Today I print what I need to and I only purchase ink once a year. I will put my HP Deskjet 952c color output up against any laser printer. Text is good too, and it is fast.

[gundark](#) says:

Thu Jul 30 12:00:03 PDT 2009

[Re: Is Your Printer Stealing From You? Here's How to Tell](#)

@free2speak

Your 952c was sold before inkjets became loss leaders. Back then, the printers were priced to actually make money. Today, they are just vehicles for pushing ink. I too had a 952c. Lost it to a lightning strike :(

IIRC, didn't the 952c also have the print head integrated in the ink cart? Every time the cart was replaced, you got a new print head. Are they still like that today? I know my latest Epson inkjet did not. If the head got clogged or broke, you had to buy a new printer.

Today, 95 percent of my printing is b/w on a three-year-old laser printer. Just a bit over 2k pages so far and I still haven't replaced the factory toner. Color document printing is handled by a color laser.

All my photos are printed at local stores. Nineteen cents for a 4x6 photo is pretty good. Plus, if the store runs out of ink half way through a photo, they eat the cost, not me.

It looks like I'm off the inkjet wagon, never to climb back on.

[free2speak](#) says:

Thu Jul 30 12:42:07 PDT 2009

[Re: Is Your Printer Stealing From You? Here's How to Tell](#)



The 952c is as you remember it the cartridges are the same. Too bad yours died because of the lightning strike. I realized today that I only had 2 printers in 22 years, and I think that says a lot about the value of a good inkjet. When I purchased my HP Paint jet the dot-matrix printer ruled the land, and now almost everyone uses inkjets. I only replaced my Paint jet when HP stopped making the cartridges, and it looks like the same for my DeskJet 952c. Laser printers are fine for pie charts and great for text, but mediocre for photos. I always did computer graphics so color photo printing is mandatory. Until there is a better printer for graphics I will stick with inkjets, but I will take a long look at the available options when it is time to replace the HP DeskJet 952c.

[ClaudeD](#) says:

Thu Jul 30 12:57:49 PDT 2009

[Re: Is Your Printer Stealing From You? Here's How to Tell](#)

What the heck. 2 printers in how many years? Now there's a qualification for today's technology. How's your 286 doing with Windows Vista? Client was using an HP printer for her Chiro Office, yearly ink costs was \$600+ dollars. Switched her to an Oki page 12, yearly cost for toner \$38.00. Not to mention her printing the year the laser was installed increased 30%. Buy ink cartridges for 18X the money, be one of the few who have minimal problems with your inkjet, but your inkjet is in the minority for reliability. Oh, and when was the last time you looked at a photo printed from a color laser? Today's color lasers are far superior to inkjets, first if they get a drop of water on them, they run or if handled by numerous people they smear. Seems like kind of a waste.

[free2speak](#) says:

Thu Jul 30 13:17:40 PDT 2009

[Re: Is Your Printer Stealing From You? Here's How to Tell](#)

Yeah 2 printers in 22 years. What are you jealous? I never had a 286 because they sucked. I was printing color computer graphics when everyone else had dot-matrix printers. Now everyone has inkjets so I think I made the correct choice from the very start. The DeskJet 952c is my home printer. I long ago got over the novelty of printing everything I see so my print costs are low. I buy one color, and one black cartridge every year. Should I replace my printer because you are offended by its long life? My HP Paint jet was surpassed in quality by the time it was replaced. The Paint jet was replaced because the supplies were discontinued; not because it failed. The HP DeskJet that replaced it was one of the top printers available for years when I bought it. Print quality hasn't increased greatly over the years. It is more like cheap printers have caught up to the technology I already own. I have seen plenty of color lasers at work, and their graphics capability does not beat my HP DeskJet. Yeah I use my DeskJet for 10 years what a waste. Think about who is getting real value from their printer. I think that would be me.

[davidrayrob](#) says:

Thu Jul 30 22:13:23 PDT 2009

[Re: Is Your Printer Stealing From You? Here's How to Tell](#)

I can vouch for the Canon MX330 being a bad buy. It routinely shows the cartridges as empty when I get (on average) about 100 more copies before it's out. The fax stops working when it shows low so you have to replace a good cartridge in order to receive them. Additionally Canon refused to honor their 25.00 rebate because they said I didn't send the SECONDARY bar code on the box (there wasn't any). It's slow as hell and it's my first and last printer from Canon.

[upsdrv](#) says:

Fri Jul 31 06:21:26 PDT 2009

[Re: Is Your Printer Stealing From You? Here's How to Tell](#)

I have always had Canon inkjets and have been very happy with them. To my knowledge they were the first ones to go to separate tanks for each color.

Not sure I agree w/ the article regarding PPM. I have never bought a printer based on PPM, bought them based on print quality. I don't care if a photo takes 3 or 4 mins to print or a document takes a min, I work on something else while it's running.

[tagno25](#) says:

Fri Jul 31 17:26:58 PDT 2009

[Re: Is Your Printer Stealing From You? Here's How to Tell](#)

For the past couple of years I have used a HP LaserJet 5si with duplex unit that I got for free. It has printed over 514,000 pages. I have had to refill the toner twice at \$40 each time and replace the drum (which is the toner cartridge) for \$80. I have probably printed over 10000 pages of that. At \$2 per ream of paper (\$40) that would be \$200 total that I spent on my printer, that comes out to exactly \$.02 per page not including electricity.

It is one of the more common older business laser printers that are still used. I will probably get at least another 500,000 pages out of it.

[dsrtdawg](#) says:

Fri Jul 31 17:31:54 PDT 2009

[Re: Is Your Printer Stealing From You? Here's How to Tell](#)

I have an HP 952C Deskjet and have used it for many years. I don't print a lot, probably an average of three pages or less per day. I haven't noticed that my ink cartridges dry up. I am happy with the performance. I don't print in color much. 99% b&w!

[kurkosdr](#) says:

Fri Jul 31 23:00:08 PDT 2009

[Re: Is Your Printer Stealing From You? Here's How to Tell](#)

Ah, the **inkjet dry out problem**

Never, and I do mean **never** use the nozzles cleaning function of your printer's software. The "cleaning" it performs is only temporary and does not last, it only wastes your ink and time. Only alcohol can clean for good.

If your printer doesn't have removable nozzles (ex Epson), ditch the thief printer and buy one that does (ex hp). You'll not regret it (I didn't). Don't attempt to clean it by software, it's hope less (personal experience with two Epsoms, ditched them for an hp and since then I am happy, hp might not be happy about that unofficial cleaning method, but I certainly am)

- The solution: Buy an inkjet with disposable heads. **You know, the ones where cartridge and head are one thing.** Then, if it dries out, remove the cartridge and use a cloth with some drops of alcohol on it to clean the nozzles\* (just touch the nozzles with the alcohol moistured spot of the cloth). Then, print.