

LEXMARK

Lexmark E240
Lexmark E240t
Lexmark E240n
27ppm



Sum-up: Deluxe yet entry-level desktop laser printers.

Lexmark's E240 machines are its entry-level models, but they go far beyond the entry-level machines of a few years ago. The most notable feature is 27ppm printing, speedy indeed for such a low-cost (\$199 for the base version) printer. But they also have distinctive styling (a handsome, sculpted black box) and some other good features as well.

The E240 is powered by a 366MHz processor — impressive power for this price range. And it has a duty cycle of 10,000 pages a month (15,000 pages a month for the E240n), which should be no problem for a typical user.

But these printers have some features that you might not expect for its low price. They support PCL 6 and PostScript 3 printing, where you might expect only native printing protocols such as GDI. This may allow you to print more complex jobs. The base machine, the E240, comes with 250 sheets of input capacity plus a single-sheet bypass. The E240n (\$249) has Ethernet connectivity out of the box, while the E240t (\$299) adds a standard 550-sheet tray. The E240 and E240t's memory starts at 16MB; you can upgrade them to 80MB, something not always possible in low-cost printers. The E240n comes with an even more

substantial 32MB of memory that's upgradeable to 160MB. These printers are Mac-compatible.

Connectivity is pretty good. You start with standard USB and parallel ports, but you can also connect an external Ethernet server to the E240 and E240t if you want to put them on the network. You also can get a Wi-Fi server.

Like other Lexmark machines, this series has a solid design. The machines are compact and quiet, too — a comfortable inhabitant of your desktop.

The one disadvantage of the models is the cost of consumables. The combined cost of the toner cartridge and photoconductor comes out to about 3.2 cents a page. That's significantly higher than most of the competition. That's the price Lexmark makes you pay for your low initial investment. For those who don't print large volumes and just need the convenience of a laser printer on their desktop, that may not be an obstacle. But if you print anywhere close to 3,000 pages a month, you may soon wish you had spent a little more up front to buy a printer with a lower cost of operation.

The speed and features of this model are reshaping the market. Now even the lowest-end user can get 27ppm and PostScript for a few dollars more than the bottom-of-the-line choice.

Lexmark

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Vendor Profile

In the black-and-white laser printer segment, only Lexmark offers a line of printers as wide as HP's. In fact, its models are so competitive that IBM and Toshiba have shelved their own printer development plans to adopt and resell the Lexmark models. Duplicator manufacturer RISO and system consolidator Unisys sell them as well. More than ever, Lexmark has become a viable alternative to HP.

Together, HP and Lexmark have totally redefined the market for departmental and workgroup printers over the last few years, with a series of dramatic price reductions and feature enhancements. And it's certain that both companies will keep coming out with better and cheaper models.

Lexmark is the only American printer vendor



Lexmark E240 — This family's 27ppm printing speed is impressive for entry-level units.

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that makes its own laser engines. These engines, which run at speeds up to 50ppm, power Lexmark's main family of 8.5" x 14" printers, the T series. At the low end are the affordable E series printers. (It's unclear whether the W812 engine was developed entirely by Lexmark.)

Lexmark's upper-level T-series printers (all save the 32ppm model) share the same basic engine throughout. This means that all of the models share many of the same accessories and options, something that will appeal to buyers of multiple machines who want to keep printer-fleet management as simple as possible. They do, however, use two different sets of consumables. (The 11" x 17" W-series families use different consumables and accessories.)

The T-series printers share a contemporary space-efficient design. It's a vertical design — paper output devices are added to the top and/or bottom of the printers rather than on the side, as is the case with many other vendors' machines. This is even the case with some models that offer a finisher, a feature with the top two printer models in the series. It is also the case that you add an optional multifunctional unit on top of the printer, though by then you have a very tall piece of machinery. (Get out the step stool!)

Multifunctionality: Lexmark has had a strategy of producing printers with multifunctionality for some time. With the T- and W-series machines, Lexmark has continued to enhance its copy/fax/scan module. The multifunctional module is sold either as a post-purchase option or bundled as a standard feature on selected models (the X models). These models are covered in our *Printer Multifunctional Guide*.

Both high-level T-series printers (the T640 and T642) can be upgraded with one of two multifunctional options. The X3100 option (with 16ppm scanning and a 25-sheet document feeder) costs \$1,429. The speedier, more feature-rich X3200 option (with 22ppm scanning and a 50-sheet document feeder) costs \$1,959.

Note that these are not standalone devices but upgrades to the printers. Basically, these are add-on scanner/fax units that are closely integrated with the printers, so you can copy, scan, and fax. You can mix and match any of the multifunctional options with any of the three high-level T-series printers.

Multifunctional features: For all three multifunctional units, the copier function is pretty good. They can do simplex or duplex copies (provided you have the duplex option on your printer); scan once/print many (good for collating copy jobs); and 2-up and 4-up copies. They also support reduction and enlargement from 50% to 200% and allow you to enter up to 999 copies on the control panel.

The fax feature for both units operates at 33.6kbps, which is state-of-the-art. Like most scanners on multifunctionals, they have a control panel with programmable keys. Naturally, the multifunctional unit, in combination with the T-series printer, can handle and print incoming faxes as well.

Networking: You can upgrade members of the T and W series in three ways, all of them offering the same basic functionality. All accept IPP print protocols, which allow you to print over the Web from anywhere, subject to permissions.

Here are the three ways:

- You can have a network card on the printer simply by getting one of the network-capable models or by adding on an internal network card.
- A more versatile, and possibly less expensive, route might be to get one of Lexmark's external MarkNet servers.

- Other users might prefer one of Lexmark's series of MarkNet internal servers. These N2100 servers are boards that fit in a special slot on the Lexmark printer (not the same slots as the normal network card).

Internal cards, internal boards, and external servers all pretty much work alike. All run the same software. Note that some of these cards and servers offer options other than 100BaseT Fast Ethernet connectivity. These include Token Ring and ThinNet connectivity, as well as wireless Wi-Fi (IEEE 802.11g) connectivity.

Like most companies, Lexmark has tools for remote administration of printers, either on the local network or across the Internet. To facilitate this, all Lexmark networked printers have an IP address and an internal Web page.

Administrators have remote access to the control panels via a utility called MarkVision, whereby you can view printer status including error status, troubleshoot problems, and download fonts to the hard disk.

Lexmark can also supply an add-on card called ImageQuick, which allows you to store and archive Internet-accessible documents ready for printing and also allows direct printing of many file formats without the need for a specific driver. This includes support for PDF, TIFF, JPEG, and HTML. You can also preprogram the printer so that it can print out certain bookmarked documents (such as daily price lists or schedules) over the Internet from the control panel.

Additional features: Lexmark offers optional cards for all its printers, cards that handle the creation of barcodes in a variety of industry-specific formats. For example, you can add identifier barcodes to invoices as you print them. It also offers an elaborate optional tool called Optra Forms for custom forms creation, so you can design custom-printed forms and maintain and distribute them across a network or the Internet.

The company offers solutions that allow all its printers in this guide to handle AFP/IPDS and SCS workflows across the network from IBM mainframes and AS400 minicomputers. This capability is normally found on higher-speed, far more expensive back-office printers.

On the security front, Lexmark sells an encryption tool for file security that should appeal to those with confidential printing requirements. It has developed print job encryption cards for both the sending computer and the receiving printer so that hackers can't intercept print jobs en route.

Distribution: Lexmark sells its laser printers through resellers and retailers and uses a direct-sales organization to support its larger clients. Much of the company's strength has traditionally been in specific markets — such as the banking and pharmacy industries — but its recent strategy has been to broaden both its distribution and customer bases. Lexmark also sells directly at its Web site, www.lexmark.com. Prices from the Web site are the ones we quote in this guide.

Summary: Lexmark has found a way to accelerate development cycles by sharing technology along its product line. It is announcing new models, black-and-white and color, at an impressive rate. Also, across the product line, it keeps adding options such as wireless adapters and data encryption, features that get better with each iteration. Lexmark can deservedly adopt the number two slogan, "We try harder."

Excerpted from The Office Laser Printer Guide, volume 180, January, 2006. © 2006 Progressive Business Publications, Inc.

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