

# Lexmark C524n

By **M. David Stone**

A near twin to our Editors' Choice, the Lexmark C522n (\$499), the Lexmark C524n (\$699 direct) has a faster processor to boost speed for complex images. It's now the company's premium choice for a work-horse color laser printer for a small to medium-size office or workgroup.



Like the C522n, the C524n offers excellent text, decent graphics, and good photo quality, as well as an Ethernet connection for sharing over a network. It also offers somewhat

better paper capacity, with a default 250-sheet standard tray and 100-sheet multipurpose tray. A 500-sheet option (\$299 direct) boosts capacity to a maximum 850 sheets.

Measuring 19 by 17.3 by 16.1 inches (HWD) and weighing 57 pounds, the C524n is essentially identical to the C522n in size and weight. That makes it bigger and heavier than some color lasers in the sub-\$1,000 range but still appropriate for a small office. Setup requires more work than with other printers. There's more packing material to remove than you'll find with the HP Color Laserjet 2600n, for example, or the Konica Minolta magicolor 2400W. But network and driver installation is easy, with a fully automated, state-of-the-art routine.

Performance is impressive for the price. We timed the C524n at a total of 10 minutes 18 seconds for our business applications suite (timed with QualityLogic's hardware and software). That was a full minute faster than the C522n's time.

As you might expect, given that the C522n and C524n have the same engine, rated at 20 pages per minute for both color and monochrome, the two printers tied on Microsoft Word and Excel files that consisted primarily of text. But thanks to its faster processor, the C524n was significantly faster on Microsoft PowerPoint and Adobe Acrobat files, as well as on our Excel test file with three pages of graphs. Contrary to expectations, however, the C524n was a few seconds slower per photo when printing from Adobe Photoshop, a surprising result that Lexmark was unable to explain.

Output quality was excellent for text. Most fonts were easily readable at 4 points, with two highly stylized fonts requiring 8 points. Even if you need to print legal contracts in small type, the C524n can handle the task without problems.

The graphics quality is a touch lower than that of most color lasers—still good enough for internal business use but not for output that's meant to impress clients or customers. Output is suitably eye-catching, with fully saturated color and solid fills, but we also saw posterization, with shading changing suddenly where it should change gradually; misregistration, showing white gaps between blocks of adjacent colors; and problems with thin lines, which tend to get lost.

Though photo quality is not spectacular (a bit below the norm for color lasers), it is easily good enough for output like client newsletters. At least some photos can pass for photo quality at arm's length, but at a normal viewing distance, they show a loss of the subtle shading that gives photos printed at true photo quality a three-dimensionality look.

You can find printers at this price or less with better-looking output for graphics and photos—most notably the Konica Minolta magicolor 2450—but you'll have to give up performance. If you're looking for a color laser printer for a small office or workgroup, the C524n should be on your short list.

**EDITOR RATING**



**COMPANY**

Lexmark International Inc  
<http://www.lexmark.com>

**BOTTOM LINE**

The Lexmark C524n combines excellent text, decent graphics and photos, and the fastest performance for business applications of any color laser printer in its price class. All this, plus the built-in network connector, makes it a strong contender for a small-office color laser printer.

**PROS**

Excellent performance for business applications. Excellent text quality. Includes Ethernet connector.

**CONS**

Despite being more than acceptable for internal business use, the graphics quality is relatively low for a color laser printer.

**PRICE**

\$796.00 - \$1,219.00

**SPEC DATA**

Type: 1-pass color  
Technology: Laser  
Rated Speed (Color): 20 ppm  
Rated Speed (Mono): 20 ppm  
Maximum Paper Size: Legal  
Duty Cycle: 65,000 pages per month  
Input Capacity: 350 sheets  
Network-Ready: Yes  
Duplexing: No / Optional  
Cost Per Page (Color): 11.9 cents  
Cost Per Page (Mono): 2.2 cents