

Ink Cartridges:

What you need to know:

The vast majority of us are now very familiar with our own personal computer or laptop and of course the internet. However, alongside most computers there sits a printer. Here we hope to explain some of the fundamentals (and explode a few myths) about the different types of printer - and in particular the type of ink cartridge they use.

Domestic and small office environments usually operate at least one inkjet printer. This market is dominated by a handful of key players – namely [HP](#), [Epson](#), [Lexmark](#), [Canon](#), [Brother](#) and [Dell](#). Other manufacturers like [Olivetti](#) and [Philips](#) also sell inkjet printers, but on a smaller scale.

ink cartridge (also known as inkjet cartridges) come in many different shapes and sizes and vary enormously. It is essential to have exactly the correct cartridges for your own printer model - many look pretty much identical but have different micro-electronics. Some printers only take one or two ink cartridges, whereas some take up to ten individual ones. Choosing can be tricky, although there are many good websites that allow you to navigate easily to your printer model so you can only order correctly matched cartridges. Make sure you click on the right printer model though!

Different types of ink cartridges;

INK TANKS As the name suggests these are simply plastic tanks filled with ink. There is often a sponge inside to stop the ink slopping around as the carriage moves left to right at great speed. The print head (the bit that marks the paper) is an integral part of the printer. The ink drops into the print head, which regulates flow, mixes and sprays it on to the paper in the very tiniest droplets imaginable. Older printers may take one black ink cartridge alongside one tri-colour (or 5-colour) cartridge. More recent models have the black ink cartridge (sometimes more than one) alongside a number of individual colour cartridges - the obvious advantage being when one colour runs out, you don't have to throw away a cartridge containing residual ink of the other two or 4 colours. This system is preferred by Epson and Brother. Also many Canon, a few HP and some more recent Lexmark inkjet printers use the ink tank method of delivery. The main advantage of a printer using ink tanks is that they can be fairly cheap to run. Very reliable compatible ink cartridges are widely available for most Epson, Canon and Brother models for a fraction of the cost of manufacturers original branded (OEM) goods. Provided the generic ones are built to at least ISO9001 quality assurance standards you can expect good print quality, and page-life at least as long. Horror stories of them ruining printers are largely unfounded. If a printer is used regularly it will usually give reliable performance whether running original branded or compatible cartridges. If left switched off for weeks at a time it is sometimes necessary to run the "print head cleaning cycle" built in for that very reason. Manufacturers are very keen to sell you their own branded (and very profitable) products, and will jump at any chance to scare people away from using lower cost alternatives. Cheap ink cartridges are not necessarily cheap and nasty!

PRINTHEAD CARTRIDGES Unlike ink tanks, when you change a print head cartridge you are installing a completely new print-head every time you replenish the ink supply. As you can imagine, there are complex micro-electronics involved in the accurate delivery of heated ink to paper, and as a result printhead cartridges are generally more expensive to buy than simple ink tanks. The argument for printhead cartridges is that the highest level of print quality is maintained, irrespective of the age of the printer. There is certainly logic in that argument, but it's fair to say modern ink-tank printers (as described in the paragraph above) do maintain a high level of print quality for a long time at a lower cost. Manufacturers insist that printhead cartridges are designed for single use only (typically delivering between 150 and 450 pages) and should then be replaced by a new one. In fact many once-used cartridges are either simply refilled or professionally recycled. Remanufactured cartridges (as the professionally recycled ones are known) are thoroughly cleaned, emptied, refilled in a vacuum chamber with system-matched inks, and then print tested to ensure fine quality. Many contain more ink than new ones from the factory - up to three times as much, so they cost less and produce more pages. Reliability is good as long as you buy from an established reputable cartridge dealer with a track record of good customer service. In the event of any problem arising you need to know it can be sorted out without fuss or expense.