

Digital Imaging - Consumer Buying Guide

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Digital Cameras-Printing Images

What You Need To Know To Get The Prints You Want

Should you print your photos at home or use a professional printing service? Consider this – home printing is fast and convenient. But professional photo finishing typically yields higher quality prints for less. Here's what you need to know to get the quality/cost mix that's right for you.

What You Need & Can Do	Details And Tips			
1. Types of Printers What are the most popular printing technologies for consumers?	Ink is a crucial part of printing and makes a big impact on print quality and cost.			
	Printer Type	How Ink Is Applied	Cost/Quality	Best Use
	Inkjet	Squirt tiny droplets of ink onto page.	Vary in speed, the number of ink colors (2-8), size and the maximum dots per inch (dpi) they print. Higher dpi, more color inks and faster speed = better prints, higher cost. Lower cost models may use ink less efficiently.	Many are excellent document printers or good combo document / photo. Some are excellent dedicated photo printers.
	Thermal dye	Use heat-activated dyes sold in ribbons or rolls.	Produce high quality, longer lasting images, but at higher cost.	Highest quality photo images, but only available for 4X6 inches or smaller (larger if a commercial printer). Not well suited for text
Color Laser	Use same technology as photocopiers to melt toner to the surface of paper.	More limited in their image quality and resolution, more expensive printer, may not be able to use high-quality thicker photo paper.	Preferred for printing text documents. Good for test prints or informal prints where quality is not essential.	
2. Inks – Just Add Color Do ink costs affect printing costs? How much?	Ink is the most overlooked cost factor in printing at home. Over time the cost of ink can cost more than the printer itself. Compare ink refill prices when shopping for a printer.			
	Ink Package	Cost	Source	
	Inkjet cartridge	Expensive - filled with very fine ink ground to fit through tiny pores of nozzle without clogging.	Either manufacturer or 3rd party, which is less expensive but carries increased risk of clogging or inconsistent printing results.	
	Thermal dye ribbon	Expensive, limited choices.	Few choices, usually only from the printer manufacturer.	
Color laser cartridge	Expensive, but less costly than other types of ink, lower quality for photos.	Either manufacturer or 3rd party.		

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<p>3. Printing Paper</p> <p>What difference does the paper make? What are the choices?</p>	<p>Your print is only as good as the paper it is printed on. There are hundreds of paper products available that will work with your at-home printers. Everyday inkjet paper does not produce good photo prints.</p>		
	Paper Type	Description	Best Use
	Inkjet paper	Thin, smooth paper used for everyday print use is too thin to absorb much ink.	Good to make low-quality test prints.
	Photo-quality inkjet paper	Thicker than plain paper, absorbs more ink without wrinkling, with a special chemical coat that helps prevent color bleeding.	Few choices, usually only from the printer manufacturer.
	Photo paper	Thicker paper with a thin coating on top that holds ink and produces clarity and brilliance and is more resistant to damage.	Best quality photo paper, but expensive. For a large volume of prints, it's more economical to use commercial print services.
<p>4. Professional Print Services</p> <p>Where can I go? What do they offer? Are they better than home printing?</p>	<p>Professional photo print services provide the highest quality printing available. But they are different in a number of other ways – convenience, speed and service options.</p>		
	Service Type	Pros	Cons
	Online print service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convenient. • Offer many options (just upload and print an image on mugs, key chains, more), arrange into online galleries, and make edits and corrections. • Cost less per picture than most home printers when printing standard sizes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charge a premium for large prints such as 8x10. • Possible to save money by buying bulk printing, rather than per-print pricing.
	Traditional photo labs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same quality as for other professional services. • Don't need an Internet connection or a computer – just hand them the flash memory card, a CD or DVD with images. • Prices and services vary by location. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to go to the store.
	Self-service kiosks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional quality printing. • Low cost. • Prints ready immediately • Can edit, correct, and add captions, effects and more. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not accept credit cards, so must stand in line to pay. • Cost varies by location. • Images can usually be read from a CD, but not from all types of memory.