

LEXMARK

Lexmark T642
Lexmark T642n
Lexmark T642tn
Lexmark T642dtn
45ppm



Sum-up: Great features and a good cost per page make for an outstanding printer series.

This printer series illustrates the amazing price changes that have taken place year to year in the laser printer market. It replaces the Lexmark T634 series. With a base price under \$1,000, these printers match the performance of printers that cost twice as much just a few years ago. Because the T642 family is based on the same basic architecture as the 35ppm T640, they have a lot of features in common. The T642 does, however, have a faster processor, at 457MHz. But that is a minor difference.

The models in the family are:

- The base-level T642 (\$799)
- The network-ready T642n (\$1,149)
- The T642tn, which adds a second standard 500-sheet input drawer (\$1,399)
- The T642dtn, which adds automatic duplexing (\$1,549)

As with other Lexmark models, you can build your own configuration by adding optional features to the base machine.

The T642 family prints at 1,200dpi. The T642 starts with a generous 64MB of memory, and that can be

upgraded to a solid 576MB, while the T642n, T642tn, and T642dtn come with a substantial 128MB of memory, upgradeable to 640MB. Memory expansion may be needed if you use the printers for complex jobs involving PostScript and digital collation. You might also consider the 40GB hard disk for such jobs, though at \$535, it's not cheap. Connectivity is through the usual solid set of Lexmark options, now including a Wi-Fi external server.

The base model T642 and the T642n start with one 250-sheet paper tray; the other ones start with two. All units have a 100-sheet multipurpose tray as well. Like other Lexmark T-series printers, you have a wide choice of options, including 250-sheet paper trays, 500-sheet paper trays, and a 2,000 sheet large-capacity tray. The maximum configuration is 4,100 sheets. There is also an optional envelope feeder that holds up to 85 envelopes.

On the output side, there are four options beyond the default 500-sheet tray. You can install a 650-sheet output bin. Alternately, you can get a 1,850-sheet output stacker. A third option is a mailbox with five 120-sheet bins. You can install one of these mailboxes at a time. The final option is the StapleSmart finisher, which can single-position staple up to 25 sheets in 40 sets, or stack up to 750 sheets unstapled.

These are pretty good options, but one of the few weak points of this excellent machine is the lack of a more sophisticated finisher, one that can staple at multiple positions and perhaps deliver hole punching. Given the speed and 225,000-page duty cycle of the machines, the lack of a more sophisticated finisher makes it a little less useful for some offices.

You can, if you get the most economical option (the 21,000-sheet all-in-one cartridge), print pages for around 1.8 cents per page. This isn't the lowest supply cost in the industry, but that's a relatively minor drawback for what's otherwise a fine printer family that is worthy of our Editor's Choice Award.



Lexmark T642dtn — This printer handles a hefty 1,100-sheet standard paper supply.

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

**Editor's
Choice
Reprint**

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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 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."

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