

# Finally: Crossing the Color Divide

**Y**ou don't use a black-and-white monitor. You don't watch a black-and-white TV. You don't take black-and-white snapshots. You don't see many black-and-white movies. You live in a world splashed with color, from the natural habitat around you to

the ads, magazines, movies, and other stimuli that surround you. So why do you print out your documents in black and white?

I know: because color is so *e-x-p-e-n-s-i-v-e*. You have that nice, sharp black-and-white laser printer on the network, or sitting by your desk. It's fast; it costs just a few cents a page; it's the obvious choice. Yep, you also have that nice color printer on the network, and you use it once in a while—for printing handouts, perhaps, or a poster for the office bulletin board, or a cover sheet for a proposal, or overhead transparencies, or maybe a color, hard-copy version of a presentation. And every time you do that, you and those who see the color pages are wowed. 'You did that on your PC?' they ask. You bask in their praise. And then you go right back to printing everything else in black-and-white.

Because color is so *e-x-p-e-n-s-i-v-e*.

Me, too. Till recently, I've had one or more color printers on the networks in my office for a decade. They've ranged from bad and slow to fairly fast and exceptionally good. But I fell victim, as have you, to the notion that printing in color is so damned expensive, you have to save it for special projects. Often I'd have loved to drop a little color graph or drawing into a letter or report to explain something better, but I usually didn't. That would have meant printing the whole document—even the black-and-white pages—on the color printer so that the different paper required by the color printer and the lower-quality text reproduction didn't jump out at you—a solution that was slow, but mainly just... too *e-x-p-e-n-s-i-v-e*.

Then late last summer I was at a technology trade show in the Northwest. Tektronix was showing its new Tek 350 solid-ink color printer. I swear by Tek's earlier, similar 340, so I stopped at the Tek booth to tell the representatives there how much I liked their company's products. I fell into conversation with one of the Tek people, who asked me if I knew how much printing costs had dropped for users of the 340 and the new 350. Tek was trying to confront that "ooh,

but color's so expensive" reaction in a creative way: From now on, for those two printers, black printing would be free. Huh? Free? "Sure," said the rep. His company was giving Tek 340/350 users all the black-ink sticks they needed, free, to get people to start using their Tek's as their universal printer.

That meant color would always be available—and now even color was cheaper with those printers. Tek cut the price of a set of color-ink sticks in half so that it costs about 3 cents a page to print an ordinary business letter with a little color on it, about a nickel a page to print one of our PC Magazine pages with color graphics, maybe 15 cents to print a color newsletter page full of bright color graphics—all the way up to a whopping 30 cents or so for a full-page, four-color graphic. And a black-only page? Free, of course: Remember the free black-ink sticks.

I couldn't stop thinking about that premise on the way home. Black-and-white was free, and color, cheap, so I could start using the existing color printer on my network to print ordinary black-and-white pages for free, and I could start printing color, at a nickel or a dime for one of my typical letter or report pages, without worrying about costs.

I was hooked. Back in the office a day later, I switched my default printer to the Tek 340, and I haven't looked back since. Sure, I change to other printers for some jobs, but in general I've been won over: Color is the norm here now.

Which, of course, was exactly what Tek wanted.

The new Tek 350 is a gem—a 6-page-per-minute, \$3,500 box that prints beautifully on plain paper (try some of the "distressed" recycled sheets, such as Simpson's Evergreen line in the Aspen color, for gorgeous results), networks easily, and switches among Fast Color (economy), Standard, and Enhanced (600-by-300 dots-per-inch) modes. The Enhanced setting produces extremely good-looking black type, even in fairly small sizes. It won't match the best lasers at true 600-by-600 or 1,200-by-1,200 printing, but for business use, it's perfectly acceptable. Like the



## OVER THE RAINBOW

Sure, I change to other printers for some jobs, but I've been won over: Color is the norm here now.

other Tektronix solid ink machines, the 340/350 are ink jet designs that accept ink in solid bricks—a bit like colored bars of soap—rather than the liquid used by the majority of other ink jet machines.

But you don't need a Tek printer to discover the quality, convenience, and economy of using color today. An explosion in high-quality, low-cost, color ink jet printers, the result of frantic competition among Canon, Epson, and Hewlett-Packard, means you can buy great color—including very, very good black-only printing—at lower prices than ever before.

Canon, for example, recently introduced several new high-quality, low-cost models, including the diminutive 4200 and the tabloid-size-paper 4550, both of which give great results with their ordinary inks but can also use Canon's special photo inks for extremely good photographic reproduction (more on this in a forthcoming column on digital photography). The Canon tabloid-size printer costs less than \$500 and will knock you out. It's even compact—a charge no one would use about any of its tab-size competitors. These aren't intended as departmental printers, but one of those 4550s hanging off your network would be a popular addition, Mr. Network Manager.

It's widely forecast that ink jet printers are going to start squeezing lasers out as we near the turn of the century. Ink jet designs have huge manufacturing economies and have begun to move out of their earlier home printer role as the print quality has improved. I think the availability of high-quality color on ink jets is going to accelerate that move. Color quality on expensive color laser printers from Apple, Canon, Hewlett-Packard, QMS, and others has only been so-so, and while these printers have the ruggedness needed for departmental network use, ho-hum print quality along with relatively high operating costs have kept them from wide adoption. The advent of rugged, fairly high-speed printers for business use, such as the Tek 340 and 350, combined with high image quality and low consumer costs, promises to push ink jets into much wider use in business. Eventually, we'll probably see a division in office printing between relatively expensive, high-speed, high-quality, black-only laser printers for long-run/high-quantity jobs—today's excellent HP LaserJet 5Si is a precursor of those machines—and less expensive, somewhat slower color ink jet printers for everything else.

It's a color world out there, and we can't hide from that any longer. □



*Phaser 350 — “Near-photo-quality printing on a budget”*

PC Computing November 1996



*“The Phaser 350 delivers what most users are looking for in a color laser printer—but at a much better price.”*

MacWorld November 1996



*“If you're looking for laser-class quality on a tight budget, the Phaser 350 is a laser printer killer that should turn your head.”*

PC Magazine October 22, 1996



*“The low cost, fast, easy-to-use Phaser 340 color printer that Tektronix, Inc. introduced a year ago is a tough act to follow, but the company's Phaser 350 costs less to use, includes better network management features and squeezes a bit more speed from its solid wax engine.”*

PC Week September 30, 1996