The Nation's Leading Independent Buyer's Guides for Office Equipment

XEROX

Xerox Phaser 8500N
Xerox Phaser 8500DN
24ppm full color
24ppm black & white
Xerox Phaser 8550DP
Xerox Phaser 8550DT
Xerox Phaser 8550DX
30ppm full color
30ppm black & white

Sum-up: A speedy update to a unique printer series that remains a good buy.

The Phaser 8500/8550 family is the latest product offering in an evolving line of solid ink printers. That engine technology was originated by Tektronix, whose printer division was taken over by Xerox in 1999. Solid ink printers (Xerox is the only company selling office printers with this technology) have little to do with the more common, inexpensive thermal ink jet printers of the small- or home-office. Instead, solid ink is a technology in office printing competing with laser and LED machines. We consider it a laser-class technology, and it compares favorably with standard color lasers.

Solid ink printers offer what we consider to be excellent image quality. It used to be the case that these machines were almost too vivid for their own good, so that printed photos were not true to color. But Xerox color scientists have upgraded the ink technology so now photos look closer to the original. Even the default settings seem to produce pretty accurate color renderings, though this printer technology is not intended for those who need exact color matching (unlike, say, Xerox's own Phaser 7750 series).

Xerox Phaser 8400 — A versatile, quiet solid ink jet printer that is easy to set up and maintain.

It must be said that these printers run relatively slowly at the maximum resolution photo mode speed, with a standard resolution of around 300 x 400dpi more likely for normal work. As we have said, resolution is not the biggest issue when dealing with color quality, especially given the way a solid ink jet prints. On the other hand, if you demand extremely crisp black-and-white type, you'll have to run at higher than the standard resolution.

This new generation of solid ink printers offers very respectable speeds. The 8500 engines are rated for up to 24ppm, both in color and in black-and-white. The 8550 models are rated at 30ppm. Numbers don't tell the complete story here — 24ppm or 30ppm are achieved in the "fast color" mode, which is 225 x 400dpi. The default mode is "enhanced" mode, which is 1,200dpi interpolated. On the 8500 printers that runs at 12ppm, half the speed of fast mode. On the 8550 models, enhanced mode runs at 16ppm.

In addition, the Phaser 8550 models have two other modes. The "standard" mode prints at 300 x 450dpi at a speed of 24ppm. The "photo mode" has an interpolated resolution of 2,400dpi and prints at 10ppm.

You select a printing mode other than the default as an option in the print dialog box. Because solid ink technology is so different from toner, it is hard to make exact comparisons between these resolutions and those of other color printers in this guide. To our eyes, the enhanced mode is also quite acceptable for all office work and the faster speeds are totally acceptable for drafts, memos, and most other internal documents.

The standard resolution sounds low compared with the 1,200dpi claimed by some rivals, but we find that the resolution is totally acceptable, even in standard mode. This high

© 2005 Better Buys for Business allows both print and electronic reproduction of this document.

Better Buys for Business
EDITOR'S CHOICE 2006

Editor's Choice Reprint

Better Buys for Business is the leading independent buyer's guide to office equipment. Our mission is to help buyers of copiers, printers, fax machines, scanners, and duplicators make smarter purchasing decisions. To learn more about *Better Buys for Business*, including subscription information on independent guide ratings for all vendor models, contact us:

800 247 2185
www.BetterBuys.com

quality at seemingly low resolution may be due to the difference between laser and solid ink, so that direct comparisons of resolution aren't possible.

In any case, while photo-quality printing is not very fast, it runs circles around the real-life photo printing speeds on most regular (liquid) ink jet printers.

The new models come with powerful 600MHz processors, ensuring that they will handle images fast enough to keep the engine cranking out pages. Indeed, this printer series is very respectable for everyday black-and-white office printing as well.

The Phaser 8500/8550 printers are also very easy to use. For example, when you have to change consumables, you need only open the top cover of the machine and slide in blocks of ink that look and feel like disk-shaped crayons. A Phaser printer melts those "crayons" and sprays the melted extract onto the paper.

You can't even make a mistake, as each of the four colors has a unique shape that only fits in the appropriate slot. Replacing supplies on color printers can be a daunting task, but not on these models.

Per-page prices fall in the midrange, though a small difference in the capacity of the maintenance kit makes for a notable difference between the 8500 and the 8550 models. For the 8500, an average page costs 11.3¢ in color, which is above average, and 2.5¢ for black-and-white, which is a little high for similar color printers. For the 8550, prices are much more competitive: 10.8¢ for color, 1.95¢ for black-and-white.

Versions: There are two 24ppm Phaser 8500 models and three 30ppm Phaser 8550 models. All of them come with both USB and Ethernet ports. They are:

- The Phaser 8500N (street price $899), which comes with 128MB of memory, upgradeable to 512MB.
- The Phaser 8500DN (street price $1,099), which adds duplexing.
- The Phaser 8550DP (at $1,299), a faster model that has 256MB of memory upgradeable to 1GB. It also offers an optional 20GB hard disk.
- The Phaser 8550DT (at $1,599), which comes with a second 525-sheet paper tray standard.
- The Phaser 8550DX (at $2,399), with 512MB of memory upgradeable to 1GB, a standard 20GB hard disk, and a third standard 525-sheet input tray.

Each model starts with at least a 100-sheet bypass and a 525-sheet standard paper tray. A second and a third 525-sheet paper tray are available (optional on the lower-end models). The maximum input capacity for the models is 1,675 sheets. The bypass can handle up to 110lb. card stock, quite unusual in this price range. Output capacity is based on a simple 300-sheet tray.

PostScript and PCL are standard features. USB and parallel connectivity are standard as well.

When it comes to pricing, the Phaser 8500/8550 series is very competitive with its laser and LED counterparts at the low end of the midrange level of the market. But the Phaser 8500/8550 family is really in a category by itself.

In another plus, these machines are small in dimension and weight, unlike some laser machines.

A fear that some users have had in the past with solid ink jets is that printed pages can be difficult to copy or scan later via a copier's automatic document feeder because of the slightly raised texture of the image. But advances in ink manufacture have minimized that problem.

Although these limitations may cause a few buyers to look elsewhere, we feel that many color users will be swayed by the Phaser 8500/8550 family's undeniable strengths.

These are not intended for really high-volume use — they are rated for 85,000 pages per month. The meager output tray is a clear indication that this printer is better suited for a moderate flow of work. The warm-up time may be an issue as well; it's considerably longer than that for LED and laser. But this should be a once-a-day issue.

These machines are capable of producing very good color output and good black-and-white documents as well. They are easy to use and can be pretty fast when it comes to full-color output, though not at the highest resolution. Keep in mind, however, that the series does not have the paper-handling capability to be used in place of a departmental laser printer.

But all things told, we really like the Phaser 8500/8550 family. We also find its attractive pricing, small and elegant footprint, and quiet operation very nice bonuses as well. It gets our Editor's Choice Award.

Excerpted from The Color Laser Printer & Business Ink Jet Printer Guides, *volume 178, November 2005.* *© 2005 Progressive Business Publications, Inc.*

Contact Better Buys for Business at 800 247 2185, www.betterbuys.com or 370 Technology Drive, Malvern, PA 19355.

© 2005 Better Buys for Business allows both print and electronic reproduction of this document.