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## TECHNOLOGY

# Affordable All-In-One Devices: Print, Scan, Fax... Even Create PDFs

Column: Tricks & Tips

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I, along with other columnists in this magazine, have long promoted the placement of multi-purpose printers/scanners at each of the workstations in an office. The reasons are fairly straightforward: Less time spent getting up to make copies, to retrieve print jobs or to scan client documents means more time doing more productive (and higher billable) client work. For firms that already have single-function printers or scanners at each workstation, the all-in-one devices offer the benefit of real-estate — the convergence of the devices saves increasingly valuable desktop space.

For obvious economic reasons, firms are still encouraged to utilize their clerical staff for most data administration processes (especially large scanning, printing or faxing tasks), but every firm can benefit by having multi-purpose, all-in-one devices for each of the staff members who routinely needs those functions. Also, a primary production-level laser printer is still a must-have for larger firms — all-in-ones are generally inkjets and are not intended to replace these, but are rather for routine print jobs and limited client correspondence needs.

The great news is that professional-grade models of these devices are now starting to be very affordable, with most available for less than \$300, and there are even a few respected models for around \$200. When making your purchase decision, be

especially careful about print quality. For most accounting offices, these all-in-one devices won't need to print high-resolution graphics, but fine, business-quality text printing at a reasonable speed is a must. Generally, the really bargain basement models (sub \$150) are a bit sluggish and may not deliver business-quality text output. As far as other core functions, while sole practitioners will find it useful, most multi-person offices will not need fax capabilities at each desktop, so either shop around this function or realize that the function may not be used.

The **Dell All-In-One 966** ([www.dell.com](http://www.dell.com)) is available in both a wired (\$199) and a wireless version (\$279), with both providing good printing/scanning/color copying functionality, along with media card slots that allow direct photo printing and a stand-alone fax (without handset). The 966 offers pretty fast printing with business appropriate quality, including hands-free dual-sided (duplex) printing — an excellent feature for a product in this price range. It has a 50-sheet flatbed scanning/copying capacity, with OCR (optical character recognition) functionality that can read scanned text.

**Canon's** ([www.canon.com](http://www.canon.com)) sleek and attractive Pixma MP830 Office All-In-One excels at its tasks, sporting printer, scanner, copier and fax functions that more than meet the needs of a small or midsize office, with fast speeds and excellent quality. In addition to a 50-sheet autofeed for the scanner and a 300-sheet printer/copier tray, the device offers high-end capabilities rarely found in desktop combination devices, including the ability to not only print two-sided, but also to scan both sides without re-feeding the sheet. It can also copy from two-sided to two-sided, from two-sided to one-sided, or from one-sided to two-sided. At about \$290, the Pixma oddly doesn't include network support, but for the purposes this column is addressing (individual workspace usage by professionals, whether in a small or larger office), the Pixma is outstanding.

**Brother** ([www.brother.com](http://www.brother.com)) offers several multi-function printers, from home use through high-end production. One of the coolest new models that can handle frequent office use is the \$199 MFC-665CW, which offers printing, color copying, 10-sheet autofeed flatbed scanning and fax, and includes a built-in message center and wireless networking capabilities. The system includes a flip-up LCD screen that allows the user to preview faxes and photos prior to printing or sending. This system includes a fax/phone handset, along with a built-in answering machine.

The **Epson Stylus CF7000F** ([www.epson.com](http://www.epson.com)) offers combined printing, scanning, color copying and fax, along with media card slots for direct printing. With one of

the lower price tags of about \$149, this Stylus model provides reasonable speed and text printing output quality but, unfortunately, does not have an automatic document feeder.

The new Lexmark ([www.lexmark.com](http://www.lexmark.com)) X9350 offers built-in wireless support for the network-ready combined color printing/scanning/copying/fax machine. With pricing around \$279, the device includes a 50-sheet automatic document feeder and dual-side (duplex) printing capabilities, with an LCD screen control panel. The print quality and speeds are adequate, but it is a little slower than its competitors.

For offices maintaining or moving to a paperless system, the **Fujitsu ScanSnap** (<http://scansnap.fujitsu.com>) is an excellent dual purpose product with models starting around \$400. While it is not a printer, it nevertheless can be a remarkable timesaver for staff with heavy scanning requirements, since it can turn a scanned item into a PDF with the push of a button. The system can digitize both sides of two-sided documents (even legal size) in a single pass and, since it produces a PDF instead of just an image of the document, it is readable with OCR technology and can be searched. The ScanSnap supports both PC and Mac and is ideal for high-volume tax offices or professionals with clients who routinely provide source documents that must be scanned.

Unless your firm has only one or two staff, combination devices are not intended to handle the workload for everyone in your office. Rather, they are suitable for just one, so networking capabilities may not be of the highest importance. Print output quality and speed are the primary features most people look at, and while they shouldn't be compromised, slight differences can make a noticeable difference in price. Printing output should be listed by the manufacturer as greater than 20 or so, but keep in mind that the numbers each manufacturer gives for printing output speeds are about as reliable as EPA estimates for auto gas mileage (reliably wrong). You can estimate real usage at about 60 to 75 percent of these figures.

Another major consideration that will affect your wallet is the manufacturer's pricing for ink cartridges. Some companies make more at the initial purchase, while others squeeze you every time you have to get more ink.

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