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Subject: Re: color printers for transparencies  
Posted by [Struan Gray](#) on Mon, 28 Jun 1999 07:00:00 GMT  
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Martin Schultz, [mgs@io.harvard.edu](mailto:mgs@io.harvard.edu) writes:

- > Thanks for your feedback (you may also tell me which
- > printers we should definitively not consider), please don't
- > mention printers with a pricetag above \$3000.

The newest inkjet and colour laser printers are surprisingly good, but suffer from the weak colour you mentioned, as well as colour-banding in areas that should contain smoothly-varying tones. Also, if you want to print on paper to submit figures to journals who don't take them electronically, the pre-print scanning process usually introduces moire artifacts from the dither pattern. That said, the high basic dot-pitch makes such printers sharper for vector-graphics.

For true continuous tone printers your price limit indicates a 'cheap' dye-transfer printer or the Tektronix wax-transfer machines. According to my most recent (Swedish) MacWarehouse catalogue, the current Tek printer is the Phaser 840N, but that has full-duplex capability so there may be simpler versions available too.

The Kodak dye-sub printers have slightly better tonality and colour gamut, but they represent a big jump in price when bought new. They have been around long enough that used versions are available, and current ribbons and paper are compatible with the older machines.

We have a Kodak. Overheads are excellent, but can be easily-damaged by scratches or fingerprints if you don't put them in slip-in sheets or use the 4-way ribbon that adds a protective layer over the colours. Text can be spindly and fuzzy at sizes below about 12 point, but anything large enough to be comprehensible on a viewgraph is fine. Images have a lovely long tonal range, and paper prints scan beautifully. The printer accepts postscript across the network so everyone can print to it, and Kodak provides custom drivers and/or colour management profiles so you can calibrate your screen properly (operating system allowing).

I would recommend looking for a used Kodak, or doing what I did and twisting arms until several departments clubbed together for a new one. Otherwise, the only trial output I saw that came close in continuous tone quality was the Tektronix. Everything else was in a poor second place. In this price class and above you can usually send the manufacturer/distributor one of your own files to print out and see the differences for yourself.

Struan

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