



Stump the PC Club is a free tech-advice column written by members of the **North Orange County Computer Club**, which has been in existence since 1976. Visit the club's site at noccc.org.

QUESTION: Our printer is starting to show signs of age and we'd like to replace it. We use it at home for printing letters and pictures. This time we'd like it to scan also. Do you have any recommendations and what should we look for?

PC CLUB: Wow, what a wide open question. Fortunately there is a lot of competition which equates to a lot of choices. If you're going to add scanning to the printer's repertoire then you'll be looking for an All-in-One or AIO printer. There are AIO printers that print, copy and scan while others include a Fax option. I just went through a similar experience where my 3 year old printer died so this time I changed from one popular manufacturer to a Canon MX870.

If you plan to print a lot of color documents including pictures then you should weigh the cost of ink very heavily. The articles at the Web sites below will give you some insight into this and a lot more information as well.

<http://bit.ly/pcworldprinters>

<http://bit.ly/computershopperprinters>

Although I can't tell you which specific printer to buy I'll discuss some of the features that influenced me. I wanted to be able to print general purpose black and white documents such as letters or spreadsheets, print pictures with fairly high quality and to scan, copy and fax. My first decision to make was whether or not to use a dedicated printer for printing pictures. I decided not to do this and to go with an AIO if I could find one that printed pictures well enough. For large, high quality prints I could always use an on line service such as Mpix.com. Another feature that I wanted was wireless printing. This would let me print from my laptop regardless of where in the house I was at the time.

Having two paper trays was important for me since it would allow me to load plain paper in one and photo paper in the other. The fact that the printer decided which paper tray to use automatically was a bonus.

An Automatic Document Feeder or ADF is important if you want to scan or copy multiple page documents. It's difficult to tell ahead of time how well the bundled software performs but I can tell you that the Canon software makes printing pictures with various layouts a breeze.

Another feature that I like on the Canon is being able to receive a fax more easily than with my old printer. Since I have only one phone line, I had to ask people to call and warn me when they were going to send me a fax. With the Canon MX870, you just answer the phone and if you hear a fax tone, push the Start button on the printer and it will receive the fax. Once the process starts, hang up the phone.

After reading printer reviews and test results I'm sure of one fact – buying the cheapest printer will result in the highest upkeep. This is OK for those who print very infrequently. Remember, as mentioned in one of the sites referenced above, Gillette made his money from blades, not razors.

Whatever you do, go on line and read the reviews and pricing before going to the store. You can start out by going to Google and searching for “inkjet printer reviews”. CNET usually has some good reviews but you should get multiple opinions. See the PC World printer survey report at <http://bit.ly/pcworldreview>. Not all printers are available in retail stores so you may have to buy the one you want on line. Just check the return policy prior to buying on line or in a retail store.

Before deciding on a manufacturer I always call their technical support line first. Some of the major manufacturers have a poor track record in this area. This was an important factor for me even though I usually do not require a lot of help.

Be sure to go to my Web site and click the Contac Me menu to send me a question you'd like answered. You'll also find the archives of my articles there as well - **Ed Schwartz, NOCCC member. View my Web site at www.edwardns.com.**