HP PageWide Pro Printer

Editor rating: ★★★★☆ Excellent

By M. David Stone

Pros

Fast. Low running cost. High paper capacity. Touch-screen controls. Integrates Ethernet, Wi-Fi, Wi-Fi Direct, and NFC. Prints from a USB key, mobile devices, through the cloud.

Cons

Text on paper can smudge if it gets wet. Colors in photos printed on plain paper are a little dull.

Bottom Line

The HP PageWide Pro 552dw Printer uses inkjet technology, but competes directly with lasers designed for small to midsize offices. It delivers excellent speed, ample paper capacity, and laser-quality text.

The PageWide Pro 552dw Printer ($699) is the top-of-the-line model in HP's first-generation of PageWide printers. The new designation comes from the inkjet printer technology inside, which uses a printhead that measures the width of the page. The design delivers extraordinary speed for an inkjet, along with laser-quality text and graphics. That, plus a higher paper capacity than most inkjets, puts the 552dw squarely in competition with lasers. More important, it offers enough to make it our Editors' Choice printer for up to heavy duty use in a small office.

The 552dw is actually one of HP's second generation of single-function, desktop printers based on PageWide Technology. The first generation—which used Officejet rather than PageWide in the name—includes the HP Officejet Pro X551dw Printer, which is another top pick.

The 552dw is in the process of replacing the older model at this writing, and it's a step up in many ways. In particular, it delivered better speed on our tests, and it has double the claimed page yield for both black and color cartridges. The claimed cost per page is the same—at a low 1.3 cents for printing with black ink only or 6.8 cents for a color page—but the higher yield frees you from having to replace the cartridges as often.

The Basics

Along with speed that's well into laser territory—rated at 50 pages per minute (ppm) in the default Professional mode—the 552dw offers a level of paper handling that's more often found in lasers. It comes with a 500-sheet drawer, a 50-sheet multipurpose tray, and a duplexer standard. For offices that need more, you can also add one 500-sheet drawer or a floor stand that includes two 500-sheet drawers, for a maximum 1,550 sheets.

The 552dw's output tray holds a substantial 300 sheets. As with a laser, the paper comes out face down, so documents don't have to print in reverse order for page one to be at the front of the stack.

The printer also offers some important conveniences. If you connect it to a network, using either Ethernet or Wi-Fi, you can print through the cloud, as well as print from an iOS or Android mobile device by connecting through an access point on your network. You can also take advantage of HP's print apps and print from a USB memory key using the 4.3-inch touch screen to give commands.

If you choose to connect to a single PC via a USB cable instead of connecting to a network, you won't be able to print through the cloud or use HP's print apps, but you can still print from a mobile device by using the printer's Wi-Fi Direct to connect to it directly. If your mobile device supports NFC, you can also connect simply by tapping the phone to the NFC logo on the printer.

Setup and Speed

As is typical for any printer that offers a large paper capacity, the 552dw is too big to comfortably share a desk with. However, it's also bigger than most lasers with similar capacities, at 16.5 by 20.9 by 16 inches (HWD) without the optional paper drawers. In addition, it's hefty enough, at 37 pounds, that you might want some help moving it into place. Physical setup is similar to setting up a color laser. Network setup is standard. For my tests[1] I connected the printer to a wired network and installed the drivers on a Windows Vista system.

I timed the 552dw on our business application suite (using QualityLogic's hardware and software for timing) at 10.5ppm, making it a bit faster than the HP X551dw, which came in at 9.2ppm. It's also faster than most color lasers. The Xerox Phaser 6600/DN, for example, managed only 4.6ppm. The HP Color LaserJet Pro M452dw, which is a top pick in part for its speed, came in at 9.8ppm.

Output Quality

The 552dw's output quality isn't as impressive as its speed, but it's good enough for almost any business use. Text quality on my tests was better than what most inkjets offer. It was also within the range that includes the vast majority of color lasers, making it easily good enough for any business use. I was able to smudge it a little by dripping some water on it and then rubbing it, but even the smudged text was readable.

Graphics output is a clear step above the level most inkjets and color lasers can manage, which makes it easily good enough for most business needs, including PowerPoint handouts and the like. I saw some minor banding in large black fills in my tests, but no other obvious problems, and no banding with other fills. Colors in photos I printed on plain paper were a little dull, but that's not surprising for an inkjet. Colors in photos I printed on photo paper were far better.

Conclusion

For higher-quality text than the HP PageWide Pro 552dw Printer offers, consider the Xerox 6600/DN or, for greater speed than the Xerox model, the HP M452dw. For most offices, however, the 552dw's output quality will be easily good enough, while the speed, paper handling, and low cost per page will be hard to beat. The combination makes it our Editors' Choice color printer for up to heavy duty use in a small office.

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