

Title:

Why do HP and Lexmark compatible ink cartridges cost more than Epson and Canon?

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Summary:

The reasons why HP and Lexmark compatible ink cartridges cost more than Epson and Canon compatible ink cartridges.

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Article Body:

We get asked this question a lot by customers who own an HP or Lexmark printer, especially ones who have previously owned an Epson or Canon printer. So why do the majority of HP and Lexmark compatibles ink cartridges cost more? Well, it's basically down to the design of the ink cartridges these brands of printer use. Most HP and Lexmark printers use a cartridge where the print head (the device that puts ink on the paper) is incorporated into the cartridge and cannot be removed. This means each time a new cartridge is installed in the printer the print head is also replaced.

Replacing the print head at each time the ink runs out has a number of advantages in terms of the quality and reliability of the print produced. The downside however, is that a print head is expensive to manufacture, it is a highly engineered electrical device which requires high levels of expertise and technically advanced machinery to produce. You will not find third party companies offering print head cartridges cheaper than the branded products, because they are unable to manufacture them at a low enough price that would draw the consumer away from the branded OEM product. Another downside to having a throwaway print head on every cartridge is that it's not very environmentally friendly in terms of the energy it takes to produce it. Although HP and Lexmark do recycle the materials used in their ink cartridges.

So what are compatible HP & Lexmark cartridges? Compatible HP & Lexmark cartridges are remanufactured. This means the cartridges have been recycled in an environmentally friendly way ready to be used again. So they just refill them with ink? No, remanufacturing and refilling are entirely different things. Remanufacturing is a much lengthier and thorough process; as a result it produces a much more reliable recycled ink cartridge.

The remanufacturing process consists of sourcing empty cartridges that are suitable for remanufacturing. The majority of these are bought from brokers and the cost of which varies tremendously, depending on the availability of the particular cartridge (new cartridges to the market are generally more expensive because there are less in circulation). Once the cartridges are received each one is carefully inspected for any signs of damage. Cartridges that pass visual inspection are then thoroughly cleaned using state-of-the art equipment and then electronically tested to ensure the electronic circuitry on the cartridge is functioning. The next stage of the process is refilling, this is done using premium quality ink and highly accurate manufacturing equipment. On completion of the filling process the cartridge is again inspected visually, electronically and under pressure controlled conditions to ensure the unit is suitably sealed (so that it doesn't leak). The final stage is packaging, this involves placing the product in a uniquely designed box which is clearly labelled with all relevant product codes. The box will also contain a freepost bag to return the cartridge to the recycler when it has been used in order for it to be recycled again.

As you can see this is not a process that can be done "while you wait". Due to the amount of time and equipment needed to recycle ink cartridges the end product can be a little bit more expensive compared to third party compatibles for Epson and Canon printers.

So why are Epson and Canon compatible cartridges cheaper? The reason for this is that the majority do not contain a print head and are therefore, simply ink tanks. These can be manufactured (in China mostly) in a very cost effective way and the end product can be retailed at a much cheaper price compared to the equivalent OEM branded product.