

By Scott Lowe

HP printers are generally reliable even in the most demanding of environments, but they can still be problematic from time to time. And we all know that printers fail at the most inopportune moments. For an IT support professional, it's critical to know how to fix the most common problems associated with these printers. Here are some of the problems you can expect to run into most often when dealing with an HP printer, along with suggestions on fixing them.

## 1 Paper jams

Paper jams are among the most common problems with any make of printer. A printer will jam for any number of reasons: It's dirty, the wrong paper type is being used, or the rollers that feed the paper through the pathway are worn down. Although cleaning the printer periodically and using the correct paper type are easy fixes, roller replacement can be a difficult job depending on the model of HP printer. On some models, the rollers are easily accessible, but you'll need to completely tear down other ones to remove the rollers. Regardless of the cause, when removing a paper jam, always pull the paper in the direction of the paper path, because pulling it backward can severely damage the printer.

Certain HP printers are more susceptible to paper jams than other printers. In my experience, any printer that holds the paper vertically and pulls it down through the printer invariably ends up having paper jam problems. These models aren't designed for heavy use, but many organizations make use of them on individual systems and should be aware of this flaw. In addition, some people have trouble with the newer HP 4000 series printers' paper pickup rollers—which is odd, because the older 4000 and 5000 series HP printers are considered rock solid and don't seem to have any trouble with their pickup rollers.

## 2 Faded printing on the page

A faded print image is normally the result of one of three conditions:

- The printer is getting low on toner.
- The print density is set too low.
- Economode printing is turned on.

For the last two settings, a printer self-test (typically a separate button on the printer) will show what the current settings are.

If Economode is on, and users are complaining about how light the print is, turn it off and/or set the print density higher. If the toner is low, simply removing the cartridge and shaking it to redistribute the toner more evenly can temporarily resolve the problem until you can replace the cartridge.

## 3 Ghosting

Ghosting is a condition where the image prints properly, but a much lighter copy of the image also prints elsewhere. This can be due to a problem with the power outlet that is supplying power to the printer. Check the power outlet by plugging in a different printer to see if the same results occur.

Ghosting can also be caused when consumable printer parts (such as the drum or imaging kit) are near the end of their life. All of the consumable parts in a printer are rated for a certain number of pages. Once a printer gets near that magic number, you'll need to replace those parts to eliminate ghosting.

## 4 Smearred toner

If words and images come off the paper when a hand is run across them, there are a few possible causes. First, the fuser assembly may be damaged or at the end of its life. The solution is to replace the fuser assembly. Repairing a fuser assembly is generally not recommended because the fuser is considered a consumable printer part and not worth the time or effort to fix.

Second, the toner cartridge may be defective and letting too much toner out at one time. In a black-and-white laser printer, the solution is to replace the toner cartridge. In a color laser printer, replace only the cartridge that is exhibiting the problem.

Third, some toner may have spilled in the printer. If so, you'll need to clean it out.

## 5 50.4 error message

A 50.4 error message on some of the newer HP LaserJet printers indicates a problem with the power supply. If the printer is connected to a UPS, disconnect it or disconnect it from a power strip and plug it directly into a wall outlet.

A laser printer should never be plugged into a UPS because the UPS can be damaged by the surges of power printers require to keep the fuser assembly warm. If that doesn't work, make sure that all the components in the printer are seated properly.

## 6 Missing drivers for a particular operating system

As new operating systems are released, new drivers will need to be loaded for your existing printers. Not all printers have a driver for every OS. In these cases, it's best to consult the printer manual and find out what printers the drivers will emulate.

Although not all of the functionality of the printer will be available under this emulation, at least basic printing will work. For example, most HP printers will print with the HP LaserJet II driver installed, although specific options, such as duplexing, won't work.

## 7 Printing from the wrong paper tray

Look in two places to correct this particular error. First, look on the printing PC. Second, look on the printer. If the application is set to print to the wrong paper tray, you can correct it within the application by clicking Printer Properties and finding the Tray Selection source. On the printer, make sure that the paper sizes in the control panel match what is actually in the paper trays.

## 8 Pulling all the paper from the manual feed tray

If the printer is pulling all the paper from the tray instead of a single sheet, the pad that's responsible for separating the paper has likely worn out and needs to be replaced. You can order and install a new pad without sending the printer out for repair. It's also possible that the paper is wet due to humidity. Make sure the paper is properly stored and that it is fanned before putting it into the printer.

## **9** 79 error

A 79 error can be the result of a problem with the network print server that services the printer. When troubleshooting a 79 error, first open the Printer folder from the Start menu on the Print server to make sure there are no jobs pending. A 79 error can also indicate a failure of a printer add-on component, such as an MIO card or a RAM module. All add-ons should be removed and then added back to the printer one by one to determine which module may be at fault.

## **10** Envelope problems

Envelopes can cause many problems for laser printers. Choose envelopes that are close to 20-lb paper in weight and thickness. Also, make sure that the adhesive on the envelope is capable of withstanding the heat that the fuser puts out to keep the printing on the page. If you don't, the envelopes will come out of the printer already sealed. If envelopes are coming out of the printer wrinkled, they may be too stiff for the paper path. Open the rear of the printer and let them exit at that location instead.

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## Version history

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