

Welcome to your Guide to Plastic Card Printers

Buying a plastic card printer isn't something that you do every day and choosing the right one can be tricky. Customers often get conflicting advice from different resellers. The aim of this guide is to help you identify your requirement which will, in turn, help you better understand the different machines. Most card printers can be upgraded to enable magnetic stripe encoding, chip encoding or work on the network via Ethernet port instead of the standard USB so for now let's focus on the different types of printers and the computer you'll be using to print the plastic cards.

System Compatibility

Printer Manufacturer	PC?	Mac?
IDP	Yes	Yes
Magocard	Yes	Yes
Datacard	Yes	No
Fargo	Yes	No
Zebra	Yes	No
Javelin Yes No Evolis	Yes Yes	

Single or Dual Sided Printer?

To decide if you need a single or dual sided card printer you need to answer this simple question, are you printing variable information on the reverse of the card or is the reverse of each card the same. If each reverse is the same ("If found please return to", "This card entitles the bearer to..." etc.) then despite the need for print on the reverse of the card you can save a considerable amount of money by buying a single sided printer and pre-printing the reverse of the cards using a monochrome or, if the back of your card is colour, a full colour printer ribbon. Cards can also be bought with the generic design preprinted so only the personalisation needs to be done by the card printer. This can improve the quality of the overall card and save money although it is more relevant to membership, loyalty or discount cards where the personalisation is in black.

You can get an instant quote for **printed plastic cards here**. ID cards must be printed using a full colour ribbon regardless so savings are harder to achieve using pre-printed cards. If the reverse of your cards contain variable text or barcodes then you will need a dual sided printer. All printers come in dual sided versions of the single sided so read on and decide which printer you like and go for the dual sided version of it.

Dye Sub or Re Transfer Printer?

Plastic card printers can print using dye-sublimation or re-transfer technology. Most popular is dye-sublimation; the ins and outs of these two technologies isn't very interesting but in a nutshell dye-sublimation is much more popular due to lower costs, quicker printing speed and prints directly to the card.

Re-transfer printers print to the overlay which is then transferred to the card. This re-transfer technology enables an improved print quality, edge-to-edge printing and also enables printing to cards that aren't perfectly flat such as access control cards (because of the contactless aerial in the card). Re-transfer printers are more expensive than dye-sublimation printers but if you have the budget you won't get a better print! There are three on the market at the moment, the Fargo HDP5000, the Magicard Prima 4 and the Zebra ZXP. The newest printer of the three is also our favourite the Zebra ZXP8.

With regards to thermal plastic card printers the choice is huge however it is worth mentioning all printers print to 300dpi so print quality is similar across the board. There are single feed printers such as the Magicard Pronto which, whilst offering a fairly low purchase price, can be annoying having to feed a single card each time you need to print a card. Grease from your fingers can often affect the print quality. A printer with an input hopper to hold a small stock of cards is a much more practical option for little additional cost. Special mention should go to the Magicard Rio Pro for its Ultracover three years printer replacement service.

However...our Number 1 recommended printer for ID, Membership and Loyalty card printing is the IDP Smart Card Printer. It's a low cost printer with a top-end

specification! No other printer comes to close to its reliability, low cost consumables, print quality and retrospective dual-sided printing upgrade option anywhere near this price point.

We print millions of ID & Membership cards each year in our card bureau. Reliability, print quality and consumable costs are of paramount importance. The printer utilised by our team of plastic card printers? The IDP Smart.

Special Features

If you are looking to get extra value from your card printer, then some of these may be of interest. For example if you wished to print on to clear or frosted cards to make your ID badges or membership cards stand out then the Datacard SD260 is the only printer available that will achieve this.

If you are looking to ensure your ID cards are as secure as possible you can look towards the IDP Smart with the option to print a UV feature with its unique UV ribbon. Or the Magicard Rio Pro with the facility to include a HoloKote overlay of your own design.

If you wish to preserve your ID cards for longer as well as adding an extra level of security you can of course look at printers that also laminate – here you have 2 options the IDP Smart Laminator or Datacard SP75.

Software?

You may wish to print to your card printer from existing software applications such as word or pdf. For those of you that wish to print photo ID cards a database solution will make card production easy and hassle free. We supply ImageBase Lite (normally £95.00) completely free with every printer purchased!