

HP LaserJet Cartridge Reliability Comparison Study – 2026

HP LaserJet Toner Cartridges vs. North American Remanufactured Brands

The *spencerLAB* DIGITAL COLOR LABORATORY has conducted a cartridge reliability comparison testing of original HP Inc. (HP) LaserJet monochrome toner cartridges and two remanufactured brands of toner cartridges sold in North America. The test included CF258A (58A) cartridge models for the HP LASERJET PRO M404dn printer. Ten cartridges of each of brand were tested to get significant overall results.

The analysis compared the Reliability and the overall Print Quality throughout the life of the toner cartridge models tested for each brand. Cartridge Reliability factors, such as Dead-on-Arrival (DOA), Low Quality (LQ) and Premature Failure (PF) cartridges [see definitions in Appendix 4], were evaluated to determine the total number of Problem Cartridges for each brand. Print samples from each cartridge brand were collected at equal intervals over the life of the cartridges, and sorted using a Print Quality Acceptance scale generated from a psychometric research study. The four PQ acceptance levels were – External Use (all uses including distribution outside the company), Internal Use (distribution inside company), Individual Use, and Unusable.

KEY FINDINGS

- Testing of the Original HP toner cartridges yielded no Problem Cartridges, whereas all of the Remanufactured cartridges exhibited some type of reliability problem, such as DOA, Premature Failures, and Low Quality.
- Original HP toner cartridges had no Low Quality Cartridges, whereas 55% of the Remanufactured cartridges were categorized as Low Quality.
- Original HP toner cartridges had no DOAs or Premature Failures, whereas 10% of the Remanufactured cartridges were DOA and 35% experienced Premature Failures.
- HP cartridges had the larger percentage of External Use Print Quality samples at 96%, whereas the tested Remanufactured brands exhibited no External Use Print Quality samples and 100% Limited Use pages.

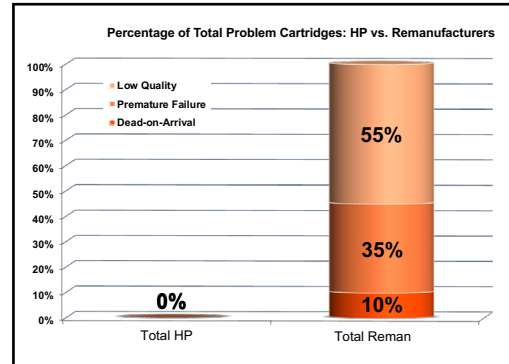
The *spencerLAB* DIGITAL COLOR LABORATORY, a division of Spencer & Associates Publishing, Ltd., is an independent test laboratory with a broad base of industry clients. Although this independent comparative study was commissioned by HP Inc., *spencerLAB* believes these results maintain its reputation for the integrity of its procedures and analyses. Results stated herein are based upon direct testing by *spencerLAB* of actual products believed to be representative.

TEST RESULTS

CARTRIDGE RELIABILITY: DEAD-ON-ARRIVAL, PREMATURE FAILURE, AND LOW QUALITY

HP cartridges were more reliable than the tested Remanufactured brands; none of the tested HP cartridges were deemed Problem Cartridges or Low Quality (LQ).

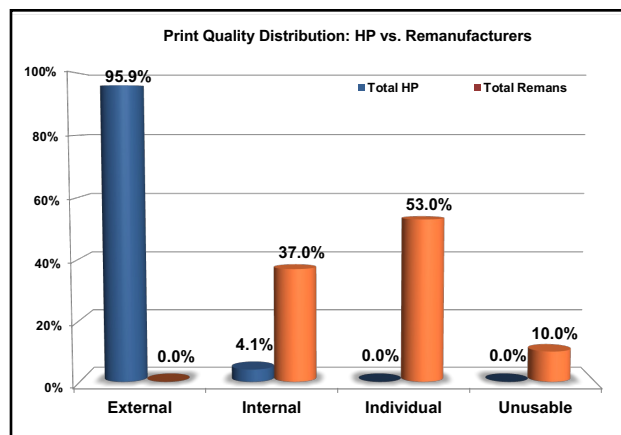
The Remanufactured brand toner cartridges suffered from Reliability issues such as DOA, PF, and LQ, yielding a total of 100% Problem Cartridges of the 20 cartridges tested. LQ cartridges (those with 50% or more pages categorized as Limited Use, but not DOA or PF) accounted for 55% and PF cartridges (those with page counts of less than 80% of the average count for all HP toner cartridges of that model, but not DOA) accounted for 35% of the Remanufactured cartridges. 10% of the Remanufactured cartridges were deemed DOA.



Unreliable toner cartridges significantly disrupt user workflows and diminish operational efficiency. Frequent quality issues lead to substandard output, necessitating costly reprints or premature cartridge replacements. Ultimately, these failures escalate expenditures related to time, labor, and materials, driving up the total cost of ownership.

PRINT QUALITY DISTRIBUTION

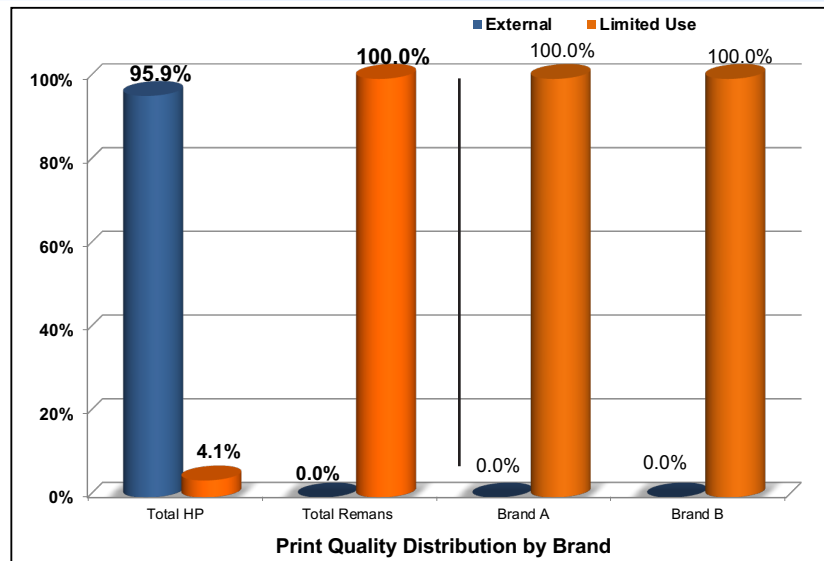
HP cartridges produced a significantly greater number of pages with higher Print Quality (PQ) than the Remanufactured cartridges tested. Tested HP



cartridges produced a total of 95.9% of print samples categorized as good for External Use and just 4.1% Internal Use pages, with no pages that were deemed as Individual. Conversely, the Remanufactured brand cartridges produced 0% pages good for External Use, 37% deemed good for Internal Use, and a 53% majority acceptable for Individual Use.

The Remanufactured brands output displayed print quality defects including dots (57%), banding (16%), ghosting (6%), light print (5%), streaks (3%), and smudge (1%), with many exhibiting multiple categories of defects.

The “bargain” of Remanufactured cartridges comes with a significant trade-off in reliability with 100% Limited Use pages (with PQ categorized as either Internal or Individual Use, or Unusable), especially if trying to print anything client-facing.



THE **spencerLAB** DIGITAL COLOR LABORATORY

With over thirty-five years of industry service, SPENCER & ASSOCIATES PUBLISHING, LTD. has earned a premier reputation for its expertise in evaluating digital color imaging and printing. Its independent test division, the **spencerLAB** DIGITAL COLOR LABORATORY, is internationally recognized as a leader in unbiased, third-party research and comparative analysis of digital imaging and printing system performance; the laboratory strictly adheres to the integrity of its methodology, even in commissioned studies. **SpencerLAB** provides leadership in quantitative and qualitative comparisons, benchmarking key performance metrics of digital printing systems in all technology classes, from desktop printers to digital color presses – providing research and evaluation services, compliance certifications, benchmark test software/hardware, and focus group management.

Leading vendors and firms for whom printing is mission-critical rely upon **spencerLAB** to provide strategic support and benchmarking of Print Quality, Ink/Toner Yield and Cost-per-Print, Throughput, Availability, Reliability and Usability for ink- and toner-based as well as other printing technologies. Corporate users rely upon **spencerLAB** for guidance in print system acquisition and usage optimization.

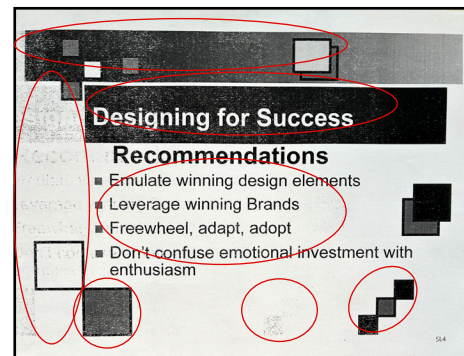
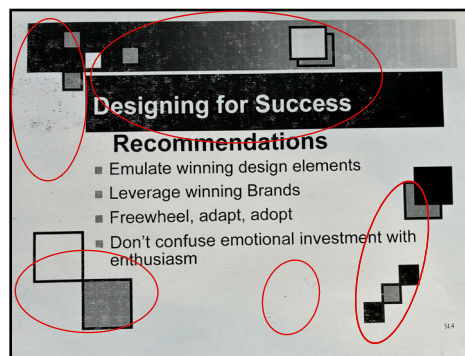
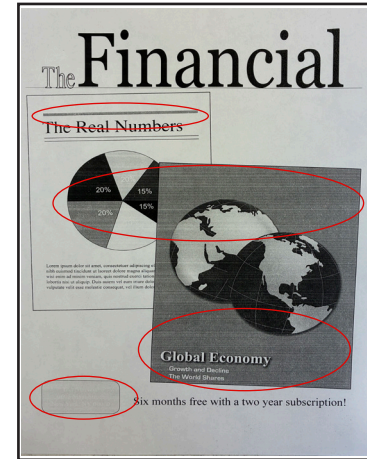
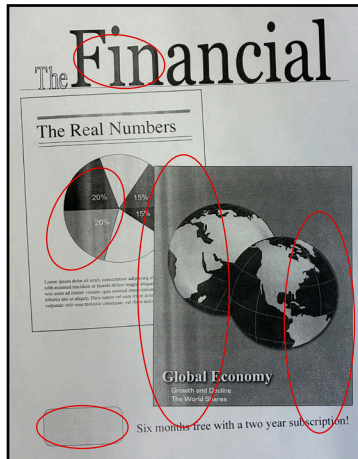
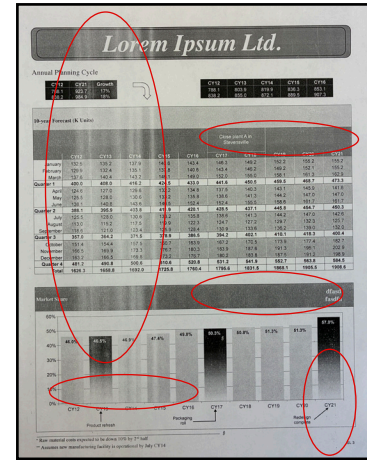
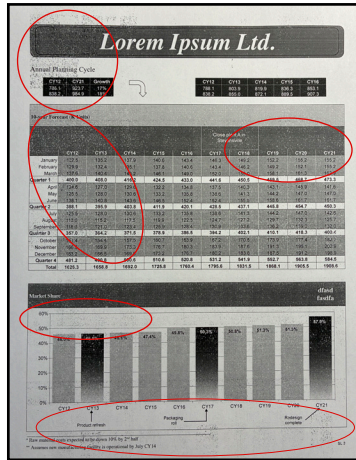
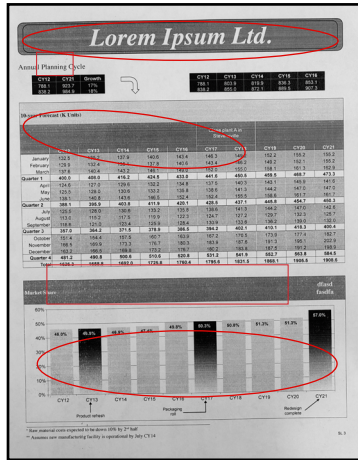
For more information, please visit www.spencerlab.com.

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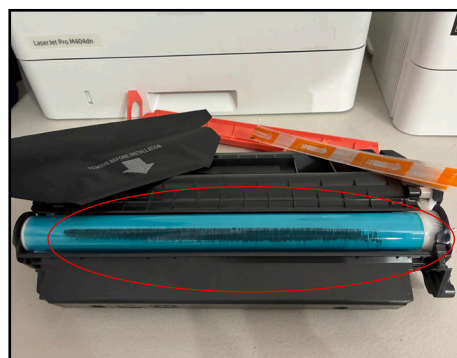
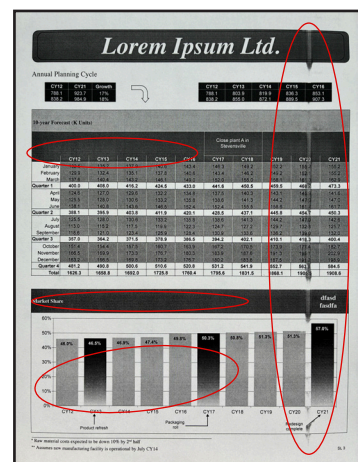
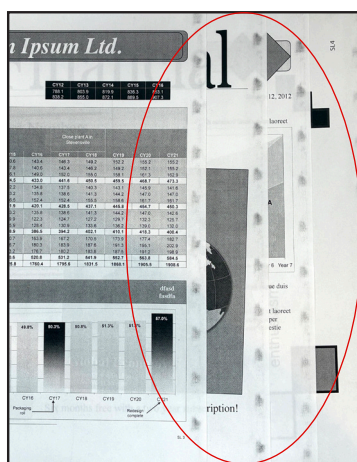
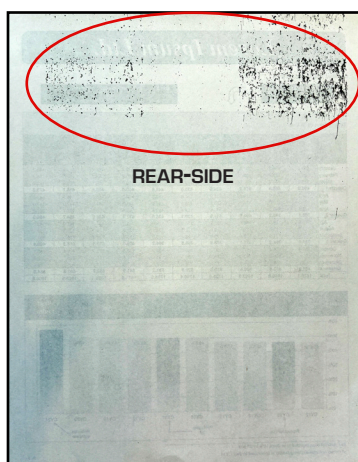
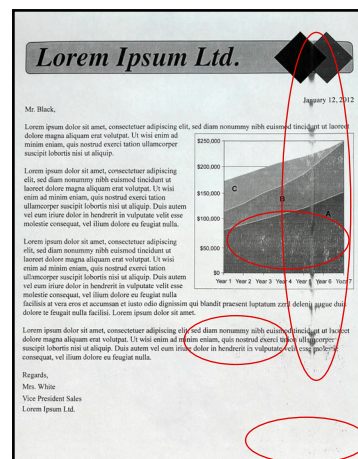
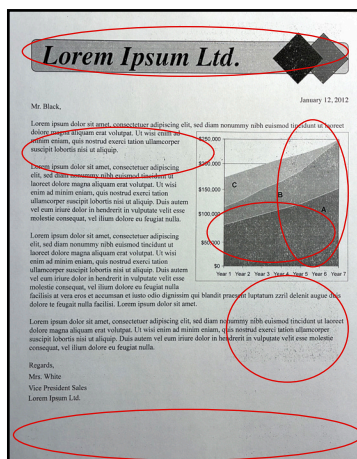
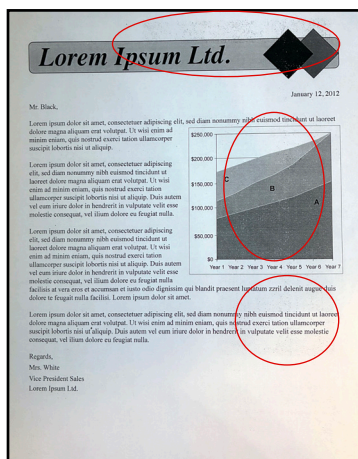
APPENDIX 1: REMANUFACTURED PROBLEM CARTRIDGES



¹Images may be magnified to show Print Quality defect.

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APPENDIX 2: METHODOLOGY

TEST PARAMETERS

The test included the 58A cartridge model tested on the HP LASERJET PRO M404n printer. The remanufactured brands were selected by HP and procured for testing from North America by spencerLAB. Ten cartridges of each of the two non-HP brands and HP branded cartridges were tested.

A four-page PDF test suite was printed from a Windows 11 operating system, using Acrobat Reader 2024.005.20421. Test files were printed in default mode for plain paper, using the latest printer drivers available from HP's website, on Hammermill Fore Multi-Purpose 20lb., 96 Brightness, office paper. All test printing was performed by spencerLAB.

All test supplies, such as printers, toner cartridges, and paper, were acclimated to office ambient temperature and humidity for at least 12 hours. Printing was performed in a semi-continuous manner, with stops for paper replenishment, overnight, etc., until toner cartridges reached End-of-Life (EOL). EOL is defined as degradation of Print Quality of any one page of the four-page suite to Unusable (grading scale with Unusable Print Quality benchmark established by psychometric study [see Appendix 3]). Two shake procedures were performed prior to a cartridge being deemed EOL.

CARTRIDGE RELIABILITY TESTING

Prior to printing, all cartridges were carefully unpacked and inspected for any toner leakage and/or broken parts.

PRINT QUALITY ASSESSMENT

Overall Print Quality was evaluated on a total of sixty-four print samples from each toner cartridge. The sixty-four print samples comprised of sixteen four-page suites collected at equally dispersed intervals over the life of each cartridge.

Using the psychometric Print Quality acceptance scale, spencerLAB evaluators independently assessed and graded the overall Print Quality of the samples by categorizing them into one of four Print Quality levels: External Use, Internal Use, Individual Use, and Unusable. The Print Quality level of each print sample was determined by the average of the evaluators' grades, with defects also noted.

APPENDIX 3: PSYCHOMETRIC STUDY – PRINT QUALITY SCALE

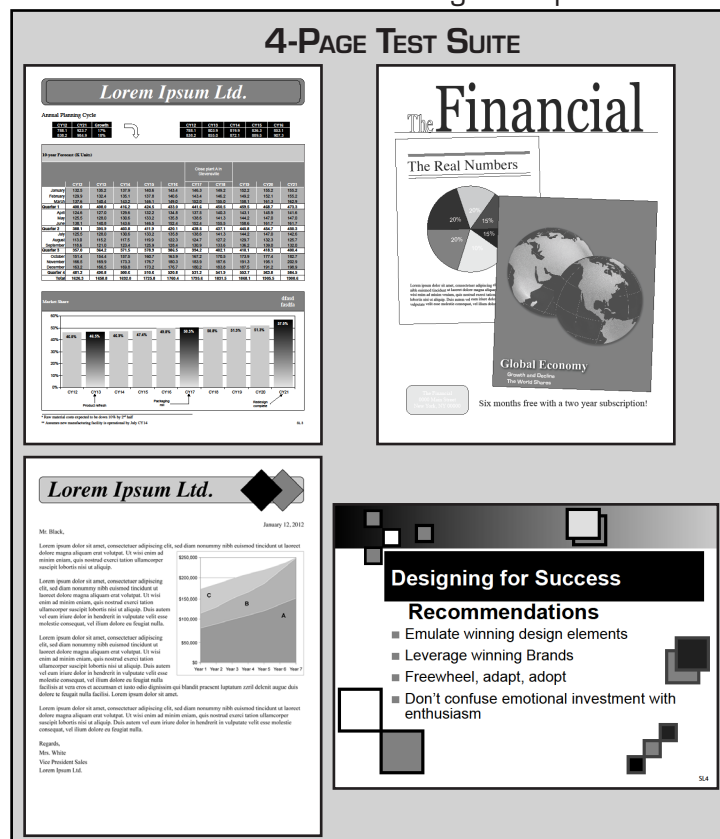
A psychometric study of monochrome office printing users was conducted by spencerLAB in the greater New York City area (Hicksville, New York) in March of 2012, to establish a Print Quality acceptance scale. Participants who printed monochrome documents for personal, internal, and external use, were recruited from a range of professions and business sizes, from micro business (1-49 employees to enterprise business (>500 employees). A total of thirty-eight business printing users participated in the exercise.

TEST SUITE

SpencerLAB collaborated with HP to design a representative business-user test suite. SpencerLAB then utilized the test suite pages to simulate common Print Quality defects such as banding, streaks, dark and light density, ghosting, etc. A total of fifteen test sets were created and each test set had a range of up to twelve variations (based on severity of defect) for a single defect type.

Test sets were printed on a HP LaserJet P3015 using Windows 7 and Acrobat Reader 10.1.2. Test samples were printed in default mode for plain paper, using the latest print driver available from HP's web site at the time of printing on Hammermill Fore MP 20lb., 96 Brightness, plain office paper. All printing

was performed by spencerLAB and test sets were reviewed to ensure that the test samples were rendered as intended.



BUSINESS USER FOCUS GROUPS

The focus group participants judged fifteen sets of print samples and sorted the samples into four Print Quality levels based on their acceptance level of Print Quality. The test samples were rated in a neutral environment, with no external lights, and uniform lighting.

Participants sorted all the test samples into four Print Quality acceptance levels:

- External Use – acceptable for all uses, including distribution outside a company to customers, vendors, etc.
- Internal Use – acceptable for distribution inside a company, but not acceptable for distribution outside a company
- Individual Use – usable as a copy to read, file, or mark-up in the office, but not acceptable for distribution, either within or outside a company
- Unusable – not acceptable for any business purpose

SpencerLAB used proprietary sorting and analysis algorithms to calculate the average Print Quality rating of each sample for each test set. The resulting score was used to determine the rank order of samples in each test set.

APPENDIX 4: TEST TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Terms		Definitions
End-of-Life, (EOL)		A condition determined by one of three mechanisms: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cartridge is Dead on Arrival. 2. Cartridge stops printing and efforts to recover are unsuccessful. 3. Degradation of Print Quality to unacceptable (Unusable) for any one of the Test Suite pages. Any printer documentation recommendations are performed no more than two times to recover PQ. After the second recovery, if PQ does not recover or degrades to Unusable, EOL is reached and marked before pages of unacceptable quality.
Dead-on-Arrival, (DOA)		A condition determined by one of four mechanisms: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A cartridge that has at least 50% of the handling surface covered in leaked toner, before or during the installation process and/or toner visibly spilled in the plastic bag containing the cartridge and/or on the exterior of the cartridge. 2. A cartridge that within the first ten pages has at least one page categorized as Unusable and does not improve during the recovery process. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recovery process requires following the printer manual instructions for correction of the noted defect, or if the defect is not addressed in the manual, the first attempt to recover shall be to remove the cartridge and perform a shake procedure. Following this recovery process, ten more pages shall be printed and evaluated. If at least one page is categorized as Unusable, a second recovery attempt of printing a cleaning page, if available, shall be performed. Following the second recovery procedure, ten more pages shall be printed and pages evaluated for categorization. If at least one page is categorized as Unusable following this recovery process, the cartridge is DOA. 3. Cartridge is broken or missing parts. 4. Cartridge fails to operate upon installation and does not recover upon removing the cartridge and re-installation.
Premature Failure, (PF)		A cartridge with a page count of less than 80% of the average page count for all HP toner cartridges of that model that were not DOA, unless remanufactured cartridge stated yield differs from HP stated yield.
Low Quality, (LQ)		A cartridge with 50% or more pages categorized as Limited Use, but was not DOA or PF.
Problem Cartridges		Cartridges categorized as either DOA, PF, or LQ.
Limited Use		Sample pages with PQ categorized as either Internal Use, Individual Use, or Unusable.
Print Quality Levels	External Use	Acceptable for all uses, including distribution outside a company to customers, vendors, suppliers, etc. Examples: marketing materials to promote the company or products, official company correspondence, invoices.
	Internal Use	Acceptable for distribution inside a company, but not acceptable distribution outside a company. Examples: documents to distribute to colleagues, immediate superiors or subordinates as business communication.
	Individual Use	Usable as a copy to read, file, or mark-up in the office, but not acceptable for distribution, either within or outside a company.
	Unusable	Not acceptable for any business purpose.
Usable Pages		Pages that were acceptable for any use, and not deemed Unusable.
Remanufactured Toner Cartridge		A cartridge that is sold as a substitute for an Original HP cartridge, but was not manufactured or authorized by HP.

*spencer***LAB**
RELIABILITY TESTED