

Oki Printing Solutions' MC561 [color laser multifunction printer](#) is well equipped for a busy workgroup, with full print/copy/scan/fax features, outstanding speed, and superior text quality. Graphics quality fell short of my expectations, however, and Oki still has a lot to learn about ease of use. Among MFPs at roughly the same price as the MC561 (\$750 as of June 29, 2011), the slightly less expensive [Brother MFC-9970CDW](#) is a bit slower but offers comparable or better features--and better graphics quality.

If it weren't for minor differences in coloring and the nameplate, you wouldn't be able to tell the MC561 from its marginally slower cousin, the [Oki MC361](#). Their feature sets are virtually identical, with five-line, 3.5-inch, tilting monochrome LCDs and well-labeled controls. What you pay extra for is the MC561's superior speed. In our tests, plain-text pages printed at a record-setting 17.6 pages per minute on the PC and an impressive 15.4 ppm on the Mac. Photos arrived quickly, too: Snapshots on plain or glossy paper emerged in 20 to 27 seconds, and a high-resolution, full-page photo on the Mac took just over a minute to print.

All printed output from the MC561 bears a slight sheen. You might be a fan of this effect, or you might not; it's a matter of taste. Patina or no, text pages from this unit looked clear and sharp. Photos, on the other hand were merely adequate, with a distinct (though not unacceptably obvious) graininess. Copies of anything other than text looked grainy, too. Scans were acceptable: Line-art samples showed some moiré, while color images tended to be overly dark.

The MC561's paper-handling features are complete. Duplexing (the ability to handle two-sided documents) is standard for printing, as well as for scanning and copying via the 50-sheet automatic document feeder (ADF). The front fold-down multipurpose tray holds 100 sheets, the main paper cassette accommodates 250 sheets, and the output tray can handle 150 sheets.

One area where the MC561 (and most other Oki multifunction printers we've tested, alas) badly needs to improve is in ease of setup and use. In the PC installation (via USB or ethernet), you have to install the PaperPort 11 SE and the OmniPage 16 scanning/document management applications separately. Network scanning is unduly complex, requiring the use of an inadequately documented configuration tool. Mac users don't get the same OCR/document software listed above, and they have to download a separate driver to get the scanner to appear in System Preference\Printers and Faxes or to use the scanner with OS X's scanning app.

Oki's estimated retail toner prices would yield middling costs per page. The standard-size supplies include a 3500-page black toner cartridge for \$97.60, which works out to a slightly lower-than-average 2.8 cents per page. Unfortunately, toner cartridges for each of the three colors (cyan, magenta, and yellow) cost \$146.30 and last for 3000 pages;

that works out to 4.9 cents per page, which is a little higher than average. If you combine all four colors, the price per page jumps to 17.4 cents, higher than it should be for a busy workgroup printer. The high-yield supplies follow the same trend: The 5000-page black cartridge (\$105) delivers a good cost per page of 2.1 cents, but the 5000-page color cartridges (\$212 each) are a little pricey at 4.2 cents per page each, leading to a higher-than-average cost per page of 14.8 cents for four-color pages. If you shop around (as we did), you can find toner for the MC561 at discounts of up to 40 percent.

Oki charges a lot for its DIMM memory upgrades, too: \$168 for 256MB, and \$233 for 512MB. Standard memory DIMMs sell for a fraction of that cost. If you ever replace the image drum, which lasts for 20,000 pages, the \$166 replacement part will add about three-quarters of a cent to the cost per page of future pages.

The Oki MC561 has much to recommend it--starting with speed, but with price and paper handling following close behind. Graphics quality is undistinguished but probably acceptable for mainstream business use. We'd like it better if it were easier to set up, but it's still an option worth considering among midpriced MFPs.