

Fujitsu ScanSnap s500

Fujitsu's compact, easy-to-use ScanSnap s500 delivers sharp, colorful scans quickly.

The Fujitsu ScanSnap s500, a lightweight, 5.9-pound model, is one of the most compact document scanners available, measuring 6.2 by 11.2 by 6.2 inches (width by depth by height); it's about the size of a breadbox. The \$495 (as of 2/6/07), 600-dpi, sheet-fed USB scanner is primarily designed to convert single- or double-sided pages into searchable PDF files, and provides quick-start buttons for convenience. You also can customize a button to scan and print, scan and e-mail, or perform other scanning tasks.

The s500's automatic document feeder (ADF) holds up to 50 sheets at a time, and it performed flawlessly during our tests, with no misfeeds or paper jams. In our speed tests, the s500 took less than 17 seconds to turn a double-sided color page into a 300-dpi PDF--faster than any other scanner tested, and significantly faster than the average of 35 seconds. The s500 didn't outpace all of the competition at scanning text documents, however, taking 109 seconds to scan a double-sided 15-sheet document at 300dpi, compared with the average of 101 seconds.

The s500 earned a Superior rating for its color document scans, which displayed sharp text, accurate color shades, and subtle detail in color graphics. In comparison with other models, the s500's marked ability to reproduce blues matching those of the original image on a magazine cover was particularly noticeable. This model's black-and-white scans earned a score of Very Good for solid, readable text and fine details in line art in documents with graphics.

The s500 is one of the easiest scanners to set up and use (no assembly required). The power switch and quick-start buttons are both conveniently placed on the front panel, and the ADF and output tray fold up neatly when the scanner is not in use.

The scanner driver, ScanSnap Manager 4.0, is simple enough to use but it isn't TWAIN- or WIA-compliant, so you can't access the scanner when using other applications, such as a word processor or image editor. Another distinction is that the s500 saves images only in PDF and JPEG file formats, whereas most document scanners also support TIFF and other graphics formats.

The s500's driver includes an integrated optical character recognition function (Abbyy FineReader for ScanSnap 2.0), which converts documents into editable files in Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint formats. Although this function lacks a proofreading mode (a handy feature that scanners with separate instead of integrated OCR applications provide), the s500 still did a reasonably fine job of converting several test documents into editable text, with a high degree of accuracy.

Other bundled software includes Adobe Acrobat 7.0 Standard, two proficient document management applications (ScanSnap Organizer 3.0 and Rack2-Filer 3.0), and a business card OCR application, CardMinder 3.0, which did a fair (though not flawless) job of recognizing business card information and saving it in a database. A notable extra is a clear plastic "carrier sheet" that proves quite useful for scanning irregularly shaped documents, such as newspaper clippings.

The ScanSnap s500's compact design, easy operation, and impressive image quality make it an excellent choice for any small-office or home user--especially if your main goal is to create searchable PDFs.