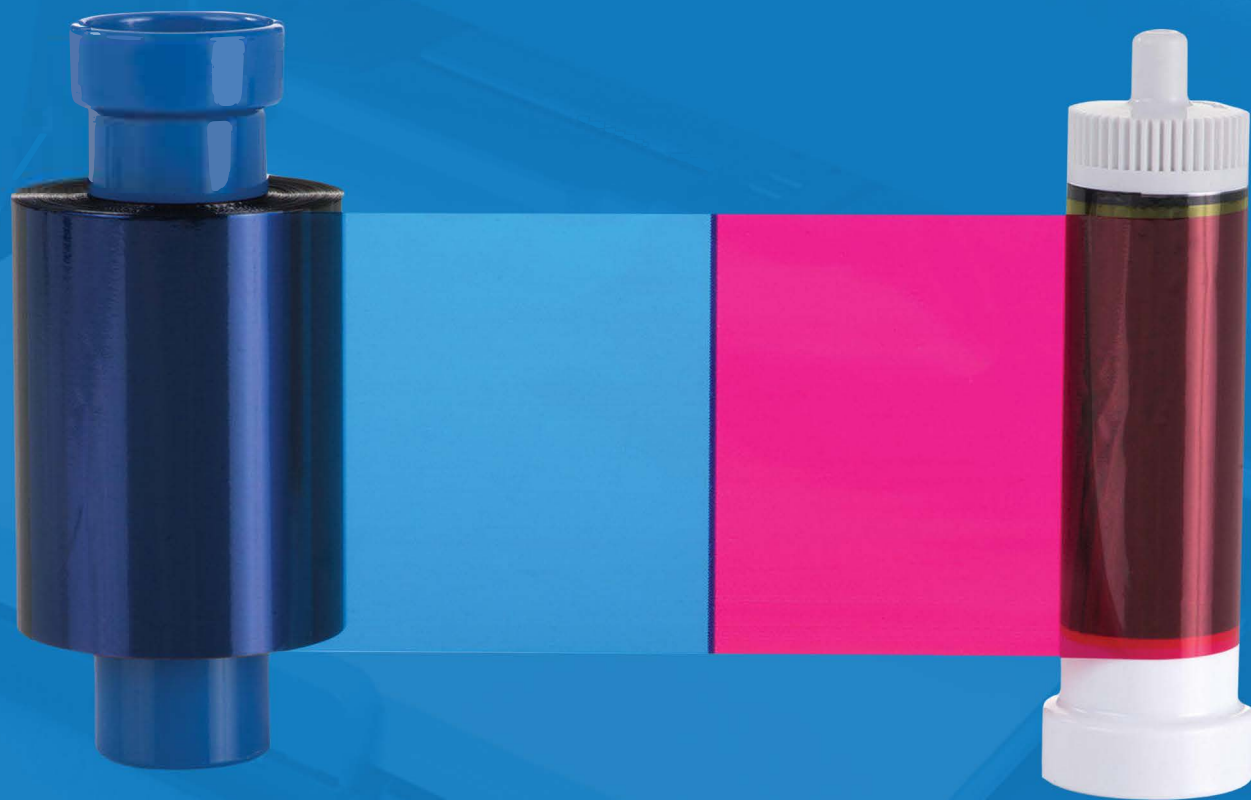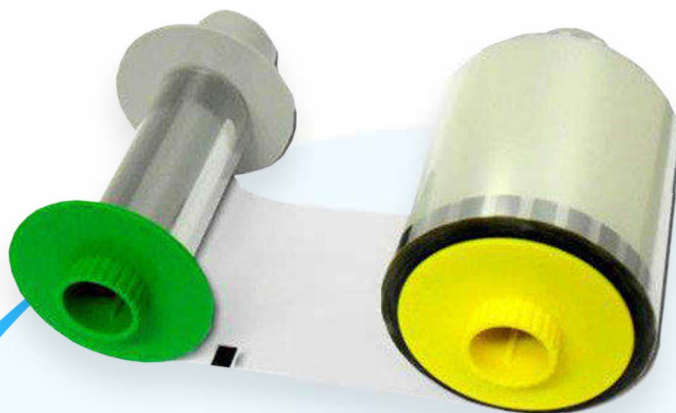# digital id

A Helpful Guide
to Buying the Right Printer Ribbon

Understanding ID card printer ribbons isn't easy, but it's imperative that you identify the right ribbon for your card printer. We have created this helpful guide to firstly show you the different types of ribbons available & secondly the abbreviations / letters that are used with card printer ribbons.

![digital id logo]

Ribbon Types

- Full-colour

- Overlay or Topcoat

- Inhibitor Panel

- Scratch Off

- Monochrome

- Laminate Film

- Holographic

- Ko Monochrome

- Fluorescent or UV overlay

- Half Panel

WHAT DO THE LETTERS MEAN?

The letters used in the ribbon descriptions describe the different panels that make up that particular ribbon, and the order the panels are printed in, from left to right.

For example one of the most common printer ribbons used is the YMCKO ribbon. This means Yellow, Magenta, Cyan, Resin Black & the Overlay Panel.

Abbreviations / Letters

To help you understand each ribbon easier here is a summary of what each letter stands for:

- ☑ Y Yellow (lower case y denotes a yellow half panel)
- ☑ M Magenta (lower case m denotes a magenta half panel)
- ☑ C Cyan (lower case c denotes a magenta half panel)
- ☑ K Black
- ☑ O Overlay sometimes called a Topcoat (T)
- ☑ F Fluorescent / UV I Inhibitor panel
- ☑ H/h Half panel

Don't worry, we don't expect you to be an expert just yet. We have broken each one down below, including a helpful image so you can see exactly what the ribbon will print.

YMCKO

This ribbon is the most common ribbon across all card printers. It prints a full-colour image, and it includes a black ("K" panel) for text and barcoding and also has the "O" overlay panel to add a protective layer to your card.

YMCKT

This ribbon is a variation on the YMCKO ribbon, the only difference is that the T refers to Topcoat which is essentially the same as the "O" overlay. Datacard refers to Overlay as Topcoat.

YMCKOK

This ribbon is primarily used when printing a double-sided card when full colour is required on the front, but only black text is required on the reverse. The extra K panel is used to personalise return to address or variable numbering or barcoding which are common elements on the back of a photo id card.

YMCK

This ribbon is also used when printing with a laminating or retransfer printer. This ribbon does not have any built-in overlay panel, so it requires a transfer film or overlaminate patch to protect the dye from regular card use.
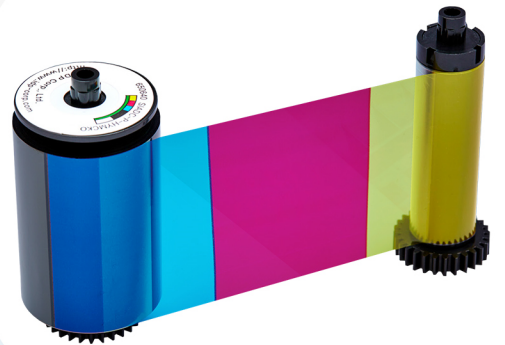
YMC

Again this ribbon is also used when printing with a laminating or retransfer printer. This ribbon does not have any built-in overlay panel, so it requires a transfer film or overlaminate patch to protect the dye from regular card use. It also does not have a "K" Black panel so is not recommended if clear black text or barcodes are required.

YMCKK

This is another variation on the YMCK mentioned above that included an extra K Black panel so the reverse of the card can be printed in monochrome.
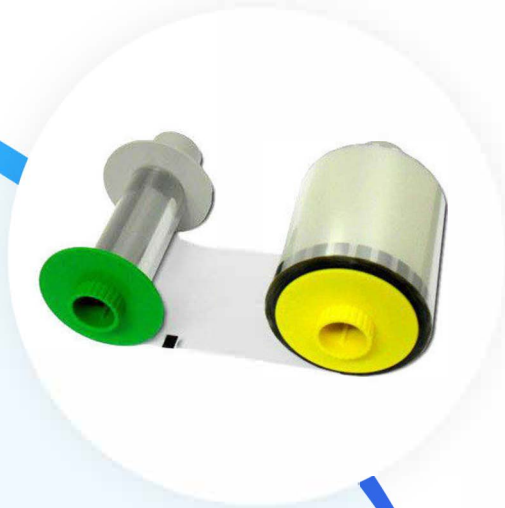
Monochrome

The monochrome ribbon is a single colour ribbon. The most common colours are Black, Red, Green, Gold, silver & White. These are most commonly used to personalise text information and simple line art onto cards.

KO

This ribbon has Resin Black and Overlay panels so that a card can be personalised with black text and barcoding and also include a protective layer on the card.

Laminate/Re-Transfer Film

These consumables are used in conjunction with a laminating printer or retransfer printer.

A Re-Transfer film is used on a Re-transfer printer in conjunction with a colour ribbon (typically a YMCK or YMCKK ribbon) where the image is printed to the film & then the printed film is bonded to the card by heat & pressure using a roller inside the printer.

The laminate film is used on a laminating printer & will usually cover the whole card. A patch will have a small border which is an unprotected area. Patches are generally much thicker & provide more protection than a laminate film.

Holographic Laminate / Re-Transfer Film

These are as above but include holographic elements that refract in the light to produce colourful images which add security features to a printed card. These fall into two categories. Generic designs or Custom designs. Generic designs are typically off the shelf and available to anyone.

Custom designs are manufactured to a specific customer requirement and are usually reserved for larger national ID card projects as there is often a minimum order of 50 rolls of custom film.

Fluorescent or UV

A colour ribbon which includes an F in it (e.g. YMCKF or YMCFKO) has a UV panel which can be personalised on to the card to print a static or variable image as well as the standard full colour and black text including protective overlay.

The UV image can only be seen when a UV torch is shone directly onto the card.

Inhibitor Panel

A ribbon which includes and inhibit panel (e.g. a YMCKI) is only found on a ribbon for a re-transfer printer. The inhibitor panel is used to stop specific areas on the card from accepting the printed re-transfer film. An element like a signature panel or holographic patch must not be covered to retain the intended effect or use.

ymcKO or Half Panel Ribbon

A ribbon referred to as "half panel" is used only when a pre-printed card is needed to be personalised with a colour photo. These ribbons typically have a higher print count and print faster but cannot be used to personalise the full card area with colour. They can be more cost effective for specific applications.

Scratch off Ribbon

This consumable is used to print an obscuration panel over a printed element on the card, eg a coupon token or code obscured at first but then removed by the card recipient by scratching away the panel.

If you require further information then one of our friendly ribbon experts will be happy to take your call and discuss your needs. Simply call **0800 988 2095** and quote "Ribbon Guide".

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