

Learning Print Production

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Introduction

If you open a newspaper, brochure, magazine, or advertisement, you can guarantee the printed piece you are holding was born in a print shop. For most of our lives, the only way to obtain information was to print it on paper via commercial printers available for consumer use. Now that the internet is available, people are using print shops less. However, these commercial printers are still quite relevant and include very large organizations or small shops within a neighborhood. Many would agree that printing can be fascinating and complex.

Customer Service

Customer Service is the cornerstone of all good businesses. For a print shop, discussing specifics is a crucial part of the printing process if you are looking to obtain a desirable result. When a client brings their artwork to the print shop what does the print shop offer? Hopefully great customer service to start with. The print shop should advise the client regarding their many options. These options usually include such things as paper stock and ink choices, offset press or digital press printing, quality, quantity, file preferences and what file versions they accept. Some printers will send you a job options file. The printer also informs the designer of print requirements and can dictate how things are created and laid out. The client's files may be analyzed by the printer and the printer can provide a cost estimate and date for printing. Both parties agree on a schedule for finishing. Some printers provide fulfillment services, such as offering storage or mailing services as well. As you can see, communication with a printer is very important. Printers will work with a client to make many decisions about the print job before pre-press begins.

Pre-Press

Pre-press, or preflight, is the process of looking for potential problems before the files go to press. Sometimes, the printer will fix the problem if it's a small issue. Other times, the files will go back to the client so they can fix larger issues, which would be more cost-effective. When everything looks good, the job will go to prepress production. This step can include image work such as scanning, color work, or re-touching. It will also include prep work, such as trapping to make sure there are no dissimilar colors. Then page proofs are created which the client can sign-off on. This means the pages are ready to go to a step called imposition which means placing the pages correctly for plating. When everything is finally approved, the job will go to a process called plate. This means it goes to the offset press next or if it's a digital file, a digital press. Finally, make ready and press check are completed to make sure everything matches the approved proofs.

- **Paper Selection**

Paper selection will be dependent on whether you are using an offset press or a digital press. Offset printing gives a larger selection of paper stock. For either press option, paper stock choices include textured, colored, synthetic, or heavier stock for embossing or foiling. Choosing the correct stock for a project is essential for proper ink support.

- **Ink**

Ink choices also depend on whether you are printing via offset or digital press. Most digital presses only support CMYK color or they don't have a large range of spot color choices. There are some inks that take much longer to dry than others. Florescent inks can require two pass

throughs on the press to show the expected color. Also, some inks can scuff easily, which would require a special coating on the paper to keep this from occurring. Ink considerations are important when it comes to timelines and expected turnout.

Press

When everything is ready for press, the project will usually go to an offset press or a digital press. Sheet-fed printing creates high-quality print jobs and offers a large variety of paper stock options and sizes. Sheetfed means just that—rolls of paper are fed into a press machine which then pulls the paper in for printing. The paper is continuously fed in this process. A machine operator is there to make sure everything runs properly and makes any necessary adjustments.

Digital printing offers more flexibility, shorter runs, and allow more color options than offset printing. Changes to the file can also be made easily before printing. There are limitations to stock and paper sizes with digital printing, however. Digital printing doesn't use rolls of paper, but sheets of paper that are hand-fed by a machine operator. Large format inkjet printers are used, which have a wide range of output options and have inks that go beyond CMYK—inks that are very colorful and vibrant.

Finishing and Binding

This video did not have much information about actual finishing and binding within a print shop. This video focused on how you should create your project for finishing, such as creating a bleed area and building your file for the correct trim size. In the beginning of the print process, the artwork should be made a specific size for finishing and binding. It's more cost effective to build your piece to the correct trim size rather than letting the printer deal with the issue. As an example, if you are creating a three-panel brochure, you should adjust for the panel that folds in. This panel is going to be smaller in size than the cover and back cover, therefore the artwork margins will need to be smaller on this panel.

Tips for Working with Printers

A checklist is a helpful tool to use before sending your artwork to a printer. Is your document the correct size, does it have a bleed, and are you using the correct inks? Make sure to create a good working relationship with your customer service representative at the print shop, as well. A positive relationship makes the entire process much easier when everyone is working well together. If your printer has a customer education day, as some do, take advantage of the opportunity and take a tour to see how things are handled before you submit your job.

Conclusion

Printing is a complex and detailed process. Working together and having a can-do attitude is important for any successful outcome. With printing, this is imperative because once a job goes to press, it could be very expensive to start over if things don't line up as they should. From the beginning talks with the customer service representative, through pre-press to press and binding, keeping a good working relationship is imperative for a successful outcome. Additionally, understanding what happens at a print shop before you submit a job is beneficial in many ways. You will have a better idea of how to submit your artwork and what will be expected of you by the printer.