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PRINTtips

Using a Prepress Checklist



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We're proud to say that our prepress department is great – experienced professionals who knows all the tricks to make a file print correctly. And one of the tools that makes this possible is not a whiz-bang piece of new software, but a simple form – our prepress check list.

The form is used to collect information about your file and how it will be used, so our prepress department can accurately preflight and prepare the file for output. If you've never seen the form before or aren't aware that we have one, then likely our customer service representatives have been completing the form for you prior to submitting your file to prepress.

It occurred to us that whether or not you actually complete the form, you should understand why we use it and what you can do to help. The more you know about prepress, the more likely your files will pass preflight with flying colors, and complete raster image processing (RIP) without incident. This will speed your files through prepress and produce a better result on press or our digital equipment.

In the beginning: file preparation

The prepress checklist is based on the assumption that you have constructed your file using graphic arts industry standard practices. For example:

- the software application is appropriate for the product to be printed and has been used correctly;



- the file was created in the appropriate color space;
- the document's page size was built to final trim size;
- fonts are all of one kind (and preferably Postscript) and have not been stylized;
- all photo scans are 300 dpi resolution at 100% of the final image size;
- graphic images are linked, not embedded, in the file;
- standards for indicating trapping, bleeds, and rule widths have been followed;
- trim, score, and fold marks are indicated and are outside the live print area;
- and so on.

If you have questions about any of these steps in file preparation, please contact us. We have much information, including past issues of *Printtips*, we can share with you. Please remember that any deviation from the standards creates the risk that the final printed product will be compromised in some combination of quality, production time, or cost.

Would you like more tips?

Try our weekly email newsletter – Tuesday Tips. To be added to the mailing list, send any email message to tuesdaytips-on@macgra.com

Using a Prepress Checklist (continued)

Checking it once, checking it twice: file submission

Our quotation for your printing project is based on the file being *print ready* – the digital equivalent of *camera ready*. This means that the file is ready to go through raster image processing without any additional work on our part except for imposition.

Of course we check the file prior to RIP in a process called *preflight*. But our preflight checks only the technical aspects of the file to be sure it is ready for raster image processing. Importantly for you, our preflight does not check content or any element of design.

For you to check (because we don't)

- **Accuracy**

Spelling – run spell check for spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors.

Proof reading – check names, numbers, and other things that can't be caught by spell check.

Correct version – send us the most recent version of the file.

- **Typography**

Punctuation marks – convert quotation marks, apostrophes, inch and foot marks, dashes, and similar punctuation marks to their proper typographic symbol.

Hyphenation – check automatic hyphenation for errors, “rivers” of white space, or hyphenation that creates a widow or orphan.

Widows and orphans – eliminate single words on a line or at the top of a column or a page.

- **Color**

Unused colors – delete any colors from the color palette that haven't been used in the document.

Color definitions – for spot color printing, define colors by using PMS numbers; for four color process, define all colors (including PMS match colors) as CMYK percentages.

Color names – name each spot color, whether in the document or in linked graphics, with the same PMS number; similarly, define all CMYK colors, whether in the document or in linked

graphics, with the same CMYK percentages.

Color separations – test for proper color definitions by printing color separations. You should have one sheet for each PMS color (for spot color printing) or four sheets (for process color printing). And remember – if you can't print color separations, neither can we.

For you to check (even though we do, too)

- **Images (photographs)**

Resolution – 300 dpi when the image is at 100% of the size it is used in the document. Lower resolution compromises image quality and may result in pixelation.

Fonts – convert fonts contained in images to paths or outlines. Layout programs do not collect any fonts from imported images.

FPO – if you have placed low resolution images *for position only* during file construction, replace them with their high resolution counterparts.

Color – match color definitions (*i.e.*, spot or CMYK) and color names in linked images to what you have used in the main document.

File format – use TIFF (tagged image file format) or EPS (encapsulated Postscript).

- **Traps, bleeds, rules**

Traps – set chokes or spreads as appropriate.

Bleeds – extend image to 1/8 inch beyond trim mark.

Rules – define rules numerically (*i.e.*, .25 pt)

- **Fonts**

Unused fonts – delete any fonts not used in the document from the font listing.

Stylized fonts – replace stylized fonts with the actual font.

Pulling it all together: print & submit

Now that everything has checked out, it is time for the real test – will it print? Prior to submitting the file to us, print it out. If you can't print it, chances are we can't, either. We also need a hard copy of the file so we can compare your output to ours.

In addition, if your document requires bindery services after printing such as trimming, folding,

“...the file is ready to go through raster image processing...”

“...replace them with their high resolution counterparts.”

Using a Prepress Checklist (continued)

or making a booklet, it is a good idea for you to prepare a mockup – a completed version of the document – to give us. Making the mockup will also let you see whether the folding and trim marks are set correctly and if pages will back up accurately.

The final step is to gather everything associated with the file – the document, all screen and printer fonts, all linked images – in folders and name the file. We suggest you use a descriptive name that will distinguish your file when it arrives to our shop and be meaningful to us – such as the name of your company and our quotation number.

We also ask that you make notes of any unusual treatments in the file. For example, if you have purposely included a low resolution, pixelated image for artistic effect, please tell us. Remember that we work against standards and will automatically question anything that does not meet them.

Lastly, let us know the program and platform you used to create the file and the file name. If we have not previously quoted the job, please also include the printing specifications and whether you prefer a hard copy or PDF soft proof. We'll contact you right away to let you know when your file is scheduled for preflight and when your job can be scheduled for press.

“Making the mockup will also let you see whether the folding and trim marks are set correctly...”

What To Do When Colors Touch

Trapping is a process that compensates for minor misalignments of touching ink colors during printing. These minor misalignments are the result of technical limitations of the offset printing process; trapping compensates by intentionally causing one ink color to overlap another.

Determining which ink should overlap is influenced by the fact that to the human eye, changes in darker objects are more noticeable than changes to lighter ones. Thus there is a rule of thumb for trapping that *lighter colors expand*

into darker ones. For simple trapping (involving only two colors), the lighter color is spread into the darker color. The darker (or dominant) color defines the size and shape of the image.

The terms for creating the overlap are *choke* and *spread*. In a choke, the background color is lighter than the foreground color; the foreground color is darker. The lighter background color is extended into the foreground color, *choking* the foreground color. For a spread, the foreground color is lighter than the background color. The lighter color is expanded or *spread* into the background color.



“Determining which ink should overlap is influenced by...”

Q. *What options do I have for submitting my files to MacMillan Graphics?*

A. We offer several options for file submission:

1. Electronic media (diskette or CD)
2. Attachment to e-mail

3. File transfer function (FTP) available on our web site

We prefer either FTP through our web site or electronic media. Attachments to e-mail may be blocked by our security system, may be refused by the Internet service provider because of file size limitations, or may be delayed in arriving.

When you use FTP, you browse in your computer for the file which is then uploaded directly to our web site. We receive it minutes after you have sent it.



“Attachments to e-mail may be blocked by...”



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Using a Prepress Checklist



Please Route to the Printing Buyer

Printing Tips Regarding Envelopes



“...some parts of the envelope have more than one thickness of paper...”

Before you finalize the design of an envelope to print with an image containing a screen or a large area of solid ink, test to see how well the image will reproduce. Why is this important? Because some parts of the envelope have more than one thickness of paper, and this affects ink receptivity.

Try this experiment. Using the side of a pencil lead, rub the front of an envelope until it is completely marked. As you rub, you will see the image of the envelope's seams and flap revealed by the pencil lead marking. This same effect takes place when a screen or solid block of ink is laid on the envelope's surface.

To avoid this effect, position the image to print where the layers of paper are consistent. In this case, it is very important that you provide a mockup showing us exactly where you want the image to print.

For clearest instructions, we recommend that you tape the output from your laser print directly onto an envelope.

Alternately, the image can be printed on flat press sheets and the envelope manufactured (die cut, folded, and glued) after printing. This option is generally not cost effective for any amount less than 20,000 envelopes.