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PRINTtips

Selecting Paper for Business Stationery



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Your company's business stationery package – business cards, letterheads, and envelopes – has a very important effect on the impression people form about the company. And whether it is a first impression or a repeat encounter, you definitely want to present a consistent look that conveys positive attributes.

Although the design you select for your business stationery is the strongest element in creating an appealing image, paper also has a role to play, since it forms a background for the printing and interacts with the ink. By understanding the basics about papers used for business stationery, you can help us guide you to an outstanding choice.

Paper basics

To help you establish a context for evaluating the characteristics of different paper types, we will review some basics about paper.

Paper is sold by weight. The price of any paper is determined by the weight of one ream (*i.e.* 500 sheets) when the paper is cut to the standard size for its type.

The basis weight gives the paper its name. A ream of bond that weighs 20 pounds in its basis size is classified as a 20# bond. Similarly, a ream of bond that weighs 24 pounds in its basis size is classified as a 24# bond.

The basis weight is not an indicator of the paper's thickness. The correct term for indicating the thickness of paper is *bulk* and the thickness itself is called the paper's *caliper*. Thickness is measured in thousandths of an

Paper Type	Basis Size
Bond & Writing	17" x 22"
Book/text	25" x 38"
Cover	20" x 26"
Vellum Bristol	22½" x 28½"
Index	25½" x 30½"
Tag	24" x 36"

inch using a tool called a *micrometer* and may be expressed as *points*.

The thickness of paper is a function of the manufacturing process, though basically, paper is made to weight, not thickness. In addition, there may be slight variations of thickness in different *mill runs*.

Paper merchants (the companies we printers buy paper from at wholesale prices) publish *tables of equivalent weights* that provide, for each category of paper, the equivalent weight of a ream of paper in the paper's basis size. We use equivalent weight tables when we wish to use a specific grade of paper for its printing characteristics – such as substituting a 50# offset for a 20# bond.

Paper merchants also provide *comparative bulking charts* that give the range of caliper measurements for various paper grades. Since its finish determines a paper's bulk, these charts help us determine what papers we can use that will meet a target thickness.

To illustrate how finish affects bulk, we have prepared a comparative bulking chart for business stationery paper grades (see next page).

Paper consistency

It is customary to use matching paper (also called *stock*) for all elements of the business stationery package. This means the basis weight for the letterheads and envelopes are identical, and that

Selecting Paper for Business Stationery (continued)

“Paper mills do not offer envelopes to match every type of bond...”

“Offline finishes are created with steel rollers that press the pattern into the paper and are known as embossed finishes. ”

the finish for letterheads, envelopes, and business cards is identical.

- *Letterheads* are usually printed on one of two types of paper: bond or text. For bonds, the most popular basis weights are 20# and 24#, while for text paper, the most popular basis weight is 70#.
- *Envelopes* are manufactured from the same basis weight paper as the letterheads in a process called *converting*. Large sheets or rolls of stationery grade paper are loaded into a machine that cuts an envelope pattern out of the sheet, then folds and glues the pattern to create an envelope.
- *Business cards* are commonly printed on a cover stock having a basis weight of 65# or 80#. The thickness of the stock depends on the finish, not its basis weight.

Paper mills do not offer envelopes to match every type of bond, writing, or text paper that could be used for letterheads. This is particularly true for darker shades of paper. Therefore, before you make your final decision on grade, finish, and color of paper, be sure to have us check to make sure the stock you are considering is available as cut sheets, envelopes, and cover weight. In addition, if you plan on using your letterheads in a laser printer, it is wise to consider a paper that is laser-compatible.

Paper finishes

Within the bond and text categories, papers are made with differing characteristics that make them desirable for use as letterheads. Some of these include:

- *Rag content*: most paper is manufactured from wood pulp, but some is made from cotton

fibers. Cotton pulp is made from rags or clippings from textile mills, raw cotton, and cotton linters. If the pulp is less than 100% cotton, then wood fiber is used for the balance. A popular paper for letterheads is paper that is *25% rag content*.

- *Finish*: finishes can be applied to paper inline during the manufacturing process or offline. Inline finishes are created with rollers that form a pattern in the paper while it is still wet. Offline finishes are created with steel rollers that press the pattern into the paper and are known as *embossed finishes*.

Popular finishes for letterhead papers include *cockle* (simulates hand made paper); *laid* (has the appearance of translucent lines running horizontally and vertically in the paper); *linen* (resembles linen cloth); *smooth* (smooth, polished appearance); *vellum* (an eggshell appearance that is consistent and even); and *wove* (a slight texture with an even finish).

- *Watermark*: a watermark is a design that has been embossed into the letterhead during manufacturing. The design often identifies the paper and the manufacturer. A watermark is visible when the sheet is held up to light and is considered a hallmark of an expensive grade of paper.

Paper sizes: parent sheets, cut sheets, and envelopes

At the conclusion of the manufacturing process, paper is wound into large rolls. Some presses (web presses that print newspaper and magazines, for example) use the rolls. Other presses, called *sheet fed*, use sheets that have been cut to either *parent* or *cut sheet* size. The paper mill cuts the sheets to size and wraps them in reams (500 sheets).

You are familiar with the cut sheet size for letterheads – 8 1/2" x 11". We use this size when the letterhead design permits. If any elements bleed off the sides of the sheet, then we must print on oversized sheets and make a final trim to 8 1/2" x 11" after printing. Another popular size for executive-style letterheads is *monarch* – measuring 7 1/4" x 10 1/2". We use standard cut sheets) and trim to monarch size after printing.

Paper Grade	Finish	Use	Caliper
24# 25% rag bond	Cockle	Letterheads	5.9
24# 25% rag bond	Laser	Letterheads	4.7
24# 100% rag bond	Cockle	Letterheads	5.3
70# text	Smooth	Letterheads	4.8
70# text	Vellum	Letterheads	6.0
70# text	Linen	Letterheads	5.5
65# cover	Smooth	Business cards	9.2
80# cover	Vellum	Business cards	11.4
80# cover	Felt	Business cards	12.3
80# cover	Linen	Business cards	11.1

Selecting Paper for Business Stationery (continued)

The standard size envelopes that are most often used for letterheads measure 9 1/2" x 4 1/8" and are referred to as #10 size. A letter folded in thirds fits neatly inside a #10 envelope.

Similarly, a monarch envelope measures 7 1/2" x 3 7/8" and accommodates a monarch-sized letter folded in thirds.

Business cards measure 3 1/2" x 2" and are always printed on cut sheets. More than one business card image is printed on the cut sheet; the

number of images varies from four to twelve, depending on the card's design and amount of ink coverage.

We hope this discussion provides you with a context in which to evaluate the various kinds of papers you could select for your business stationery. We have many paper sample books available to show you the difference between colors, finishes, and caliper. Call us, and we will have the books ready for your inspection.

"Another popular size for executive-style letterheads is monarch..."

Consider Recycled Paper

In recent years, much attention has been paid to the effect of paper manufacturing on the environment and waste paper in landfills. Of the four main categories of paper (high grade printing and writing paper, newsprint, corrugated/paperboard and packaging material, and tissue/towel products), the second-largest category is printing and writing paper, which amounts to nearly 30% of total paper production. (The largest category is corrugated/paperboard, which amounts to about half of all paper produced; the balance is split between tissue (7%), newsprint (8%), and packaging papers (5%).

Since 1993 there has been a concerted effort to encourage collection of post consumer paper waste and to recycle waste paper in the paper

manufacturing process. For each main category of paper, the overall recycled content in each category varies. Tissue and towel currently contain the highest percentage of recycled material (well over 50%), and printing and writing paper the lowest (about 10%, little of it post consumer). This is particularly significant because the vast majority of printing and writing paper is discarded within six months to a year after production.

The American Forest & Paper Association (AF&PA) reports that nearly 12 million tons of printing and writing paper were recovered in 1995, out of nearly 29 million tons consumed. This is a recovery rate of 41% – a substantial amount. However, this still means that 14 million tons of printing and writing paper went into landfills.



"The American Forest & Paper Association (AF&PA) reports that nearly 12 million tons of printing and writing paper were recovered..."

Q. *Sometimes I have trouble getting a good print when I use letterheads in my laser printer. Is there something about the paper that may account for this?*

A. Yes! You are experiencing the same effect that we do when we are printing or copying – the effect of the *conditioning* of the paper.

Paper is very sensitive to changes in temperature and humidity. High humidity, where there is more moisture than usual in the air, may cause a flat sheet of paper to curl. Likewise, low humidity may result in moisture escaping from the paper into the air, causing static electricity between sheets. In both instances, the paper becomes difficult to feed, leading to paper jams or skewing while traveling through the printer or press.

The best way to protect paper from temperature and humidity changes is to store it in a temperature- and humidity-controlled environment. This means stocking paper in the air conditioned part of your facility rather than a warehouse, and opening just one box at a time.



"...low humidity may result in moisture escaping from the paper..."



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Please Route to the Printing Buyer

The Master Run Option



“A master run is a large lot of letterheads or business cards that we print...”

If your letterhead usage is large, if you have many people in your organization that use business cards, or if your business stationery is printed in more than one color of ink, we can offer you a method of ordering that cuts production time and may save you money. We call the ordering option **master run**.

A master run is a large lot of letterheads or business cards that we print with information that remains static or constant for all individuals or office locations. An example of such information is the name of the business and the logo.

We print the static information on cut sheets, but do not take the final trim. Instead, we wrap the paper to protect it from absorbing moisture and from getting scuffed or dirty, and hold it in inventory for you. Then when you order letterheads or business cards, we imprint the information that changes, or is specific to an individual, to order on the masters.

Imprinting on masters has several advantages:

Production time is reduced, meaning we can deliver your order more quickly. This is because we have only to typeset the variable information (rather than layout the entire piece) and because often the variable data prints in a single ink color. Speed of delivery can be a very important consideration for individuals who inadvertently run out of business cards before reordering.

Costs can be reduced. By printing the more difficult parts of the job (such as the logo) ahead of time and in a long press run, we gain production efficiencies that are reflected in our pricing to you. As you know, with offset printing, the longer the press run, the lower the cost of each individual unit printed.

If you are interested in our large-lot ordering program, please call us for an appointment to discuss.