

How to prepare your files

Correct file preparation is an important part of the process that will result in you

- getting a top quality job,
- having your job run smoothly
- having your job delivered on time.

If you don't want to worry about any of this technical printing "stuff" don't worry – we can arrange for someone to take care of all of this for you for a small additional fee.

If you are going to take care of the technical printing "stuff" yourself we suggest you print this page out and use it as a checklist as you proceed through your printing project.

Use the right software

Use the right software for the job. This advice sounds obvious, but it is frequently ignored. The most appropriate software for design work is page layout software. The popular page layout software packages currently available are Adobe InDesign, Adobe PageMaker (now discontinued), QuarkXPress and CorelDraw (all available for the Mac and the PC), and Microsoft Publisher (only available for the PC). Drawing and photo manipulation packages such as Adobe Illustrator, Adobe PhotoShop and Macromedia Freehand can be used, but work created in those packages should be placed into page layout software.

Try to avoid using word processing software such as Microsoft Word, or presentation software such as Microsoft PowerPoint. We can handle work created in these packages, but there is a greater risk of text reflowing, and images not reproducing as expected.

Supply PDF files

After your page layout software, the single most important piece of additional software you need is Adobe Acrobat, the PDF software. Our first preference is to receive PDF files. After you have created your work in the software of choice (hopefully page layout software), our preference is for you to distil it into a PDF file.

Don't use coloured text if the font's point size is small

Coloured text (a percentage of black or four colour text) will look razor sharp in a

PDF file, but, because in the printed piece the text consists of dots, it may not appear as sharp. It is best to avoid small point sizes using coloured text or grey text — it will print slightly ‘fuzzy’.

Don't place too much faith in the colour fidelity of inkjet printers

We have found that it is unwise to rely too heavily on the colour fidelity, or accuracy of inkjet printers. Many inkjet printers use black and up to five other colours, and they can produce highly saturated intense colours that cannot be matched in the digital or offset printing process, which print using four colours.

Provide crop marks

Strictly speaking, it is not essential for you to save a PDF file with crop marks, but it helps us understand exactly how you want your job trimmed. You set your job up as if you were going to print it to a quality colour printer, with bleeds and crop marks, and instead print to disk or file (PC), or save a PostScript file (Mac). You use Acrobat Distiller, using High Quality or Press Quality settings to distill the .prn or .ps file you have created into a PDF file. Often customers fail to do the obvious and actually check the PDF file. You should open the PDF file you created in Acrobat to check you actually got what you expected.

Embed your fonts

One of the most difficult issues we face, and have faced for nearly two decades, concerns fonts — wrong fonts, incomplete fonts, no fonts, fonts produced by Dodgy Brothers Inc., Type 1 fonts, Type 3 fonts, TrueType fonts, Multiple Master fonts, font management software and so on. You would think the industry would have got it right in twenty years, but no, fonts can still be a major headache. This is where Acrobat is such a boon. You can embed all your fonts and remove font worries completely. To make sure all your fonts are embedded, in Distiller, go to Settings > Edit Adobe PDF settings > Fonts, and make sure the ‘Embed All Fonts’ tick box is ticked. Occasionally you will come across a font that can't be embedded for copyright reasons. If you encounter this problem, you have little option but to change the font.

Supply high resolution images

One of the most common causes of disappointment in the finished, printed product is the poor quality of images. This in turn is usually because the image resolution was inadequate. Printed matter requires images with far higher resolution than is necessary for viewing on the screen of your computer. Computer screens, and therefore the Internet, need images of approximately 72 dpi (dots per inch). 72 dots per inch (dpi) means 72 rows of 72 dots, or a total of 5184 dots in a square inch (yes, metric equivalents are available, but no-one in the industry uses them). The ideal resolution for printing however is 300dpi, 300

rows each of 300 dots, or 90,000 dots in a square inch. Put another way, images destined for printing should contain 17.36 times more information than images destined for the computer screen. A 72 dpi image which is printed will have quite clearly visible small 'steps'. We call this 'having a bitmapped appearance'. Such an image will be indistinct, not sharp, and look very unprofessional. So one rule to follow is don't use images taken from web sites unless you can obtain a high resolution copy of the image.

Please make sure all the images you use are 300dpi or as close thereto as you can get. By the way, there is absolutely no point in using images that have a higher dpi than 300dpi. You will never see the the difference in the printed job. And when we use the expression '300dpi', we mean 300dpi at the final output size. If you have a 300dpi image that is, say 100x150mm, and blow it up to A4, you have reduced the effective resolution back to 75dpi, and achieved nothing.

Make your page size the actual page size of the job

We regularly receive files where the page size is larger than the size of the job. For example, a customer might make up a business card on an A4 page, or an A4 poster on an A3 page or worst of all, a whole A5 book on A4 pages. Such scenarios inevitably mean more work for us, a slower turnaround time for you, and may mean we need to return the file to you for adjustment. Please make sure the page size you choose in you page layout software is same size your job is to be printed at. If your document is to be printed right to the edge of the page you need to understand about bleeds. To provide a document with bleeds, you do still make your page size the actual page size of the job. All you do is drag the elements that will bleed a few mm outside the page border and make sure that if you are sending us a PDF file, the job is set up correctly in your page layout software before you save the job to disk or before you save a PostScript file.

Check your spelling and punctuation

Don't forget to check your spelling, punctuation and grammar. Run your spell checker! It is also a good idea to have someone else look at your work. Another set of eyes often sees something you've been looking at and missing. Often the longer you have been working on a project, the less likely you are to spot the obvious. Pay particular attention to headlines when checking (this advice from one who has made some fearful bloopers!).

Make good use of the Output Preview facility in InDesign and Acrobat

A little known but extremely useful facility built into InDesign and Acrobat is a facility designed to enable you to see exactly how your job will print out. In InDesign, go to the Window menu, then Output, and choose Separations Preview. In Acrobat, go to Tools, Print Production, Output Preview. In both cases you can turn see what colours your job consists of (and maybe discover you have not converted a Pantone colour to CMYK), you can see if your black text is really black or consists of all colours (in which case it won't be very sharp). Just occasionally

you will find that something on your page won't print at all.

Print out your job and check, check and check again

It's easy to miss mistakes in your document when you have only ever seen it displayed on the screen. It is an important part of proofing your job to print the document out and look at it. Check for spelling errors, spacing problems, inconsistencies, and design problems.

Supply files either stuffed or zipped

If you are sending us your job electronically, copy all files into the one folder / directory and use Stuffit (Mac) or WinZip (PC) to compress the files. The files will be smaller, and the chances of corruption occurring in file transmission are almost eliminated.