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PRINTtips

Seven Keys to Print Buying Success



MacMillan Graphics, Ltd.

Park 50 TechCenter
2002 Ford Circle
Milford, OH 45150
(513) 248-2121
Fax (513) 248-5141

Web site:
www.macgra.com

FTP site:
[ftp.macgra.com](ftp://macgra.com)

Email:
info@macgra.com

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Long ago we learned that our success is directly tied to what our customers think of us compared to the experience of buying from other printers. To make our company distinctive, we've invested a lot in developing the technical expertise as well as the customer service skills of our inside and outside sales staff. This enables us to analyze a printing requirement with an eye toward suggesting alternatives or options that will help our customers realize success in buying printing.

Whether you buy printing regularly or occasionally, in this issue of *Printtips* we'll offer you some keys to successful print buying.

Key #1: Be an informed printing buyer

Buying printing is like buying anything else of value – the more you know about it, the better your purchase decision will be. That's part of why we send you this newsletter. We want you to understand what goes into manufacturing the product you are buying, so you won't unintentionally make mistakes that will compromise either the printing or the budget.

Of course, we don't expect you to know as much as we do. It is our job to keep abreast of emerging communications and printing reproduction technologies. But we do suggest that you master the basics of the manufacturing process – design, printing, and finishing.

Key #2: Understand graphic design

Whether you are designing your printed materials at your desktop or having us provide design services, you should understand the



basics of good graphic design. If you are designing yourself, it will help you produce printed materials that are more successful in accomplishing their job. If we are designing, it will help you provide what graphic design professionals call *art direction* – helping us understand what you have in mind for the “look and feel” of the finished product.

According to Jacci Howard Bear, a freelance desktop publisher, writer, and instructor in desktop publishing on the Web, designs have five basic elements that convey the message of a printed piece. These elements are *lines, shapes, mass, texture, and color* or, alternatively, *form, space, and value*.

One of our favorite books for understanding graphic design is *The Non-Designer's Design Book* by Robin Williams. It contains easy-to-understand design and typographic principles for what the author calls *the visual novice*, and has won awards and is #1 on the best-seller list for its genre.

If most of your design work is forms, you have a special challenge. You must organize content, instructions, and response options into something visually compelling enough that the user will take the time to complete it. For a useful overview of the considerations for forms design, go to

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<http://www.formsthatwork.com> and select the document *Designing Usable Forms* by Caroline Jarrett.

Key #3: Understand layout

Intimately tied to graphic design is *layout* – the arrangement of graphic elements on the page. From our perspective as your printer, all the books on graphic design leave out a crucial element for the success of the printed piece: allowance for finishing functions.

The printing term for finishing is *bindery* and it consists of processes such as cutting, trimming, folding, stitching, drilling, and book binding. When your printed project requires any of these bindery functions, it necessarily affects the layout of the document. For example, if you are designing a brochure that folds in thirds, you need to size the panel that folds to the inside so it is slightly smaller than the other panels. This allows the panel to tuck neatly inside and the covering panel to be fully flush to the fold. The adjustment isn't much – less than an eighth of an inch – but without it, the fold will not be perfect.

Similarly, page margins for the *live area* of the printing may need to be adjusted to account for drilling, cutting, or trimming. For example, if you are laying out a training manual that will be put into a 3-ring binder or coil bound, you will need to have a larger left hand than right hand margin to allow for the holes. And if the manual will be printed on two sides, you will have to alternate the larger margin from the left hand side for odd-numbered pages and the right-hand side for even-numbered pages.

Key #4: Understand software programs

We have devoted entire issues of *Printtips* to preparing files that will print. What we want to remind you now is to use the right tool for the job and use the functions within the program for preparing a file to submit to us.

Most printers, including us, prefer the Macintosh platform but work equally well on PCs. If you prefer a PC, consider Adobe InDesign and MS Publisher – two programs that have been written with both the office desktop publisher and the

professional prepress technician in mind. Both have functions within the program that collect fonts and graphics as you prepare a file to submit to us. (Of course, we still need you to check color space so you don't submit an RGB file.)

Key #5: Submit files via the web, not e-mail

Did you know that we have a file transfer function? By logging on to **ftp.macgra.com** you will be able to upload your file directly to our ftp site. This is superior to attaching your file to an e-mail message for several reasons: we will have immediate access to the file without the wait that sometimes occurs for delivery of e-mail; there are no restrictions on file size imposed by the e-mail provider or ISP; and the file will not be quarantined by our spam blocker.

Key #6: Be willing to consider an alternate printing method

If you are a frequent print buyer, you may have developed a clear preference for a particular method of reproduction and specify it for all your projects. Be open to alternatives that we may suggest, particularly if you haven't tried them in a while. Years ago, when laser imaging produced relatively large pixels and toner particles were relatively coarse, digital imaging couldn't reproduce photographs and fine lines as well as offset printing.

Today the quality differences are much less pronounced. In fact, of greater significance is the more limited range of substrates that can be used in digital printers versus offset presses. If we are suggesting a switch from offset to digital, ask us to produce a sample print, and judge the quality for yourself.

Key #7: Talk to us

The best way to get the most for your printing dollar is to talk to us. And if you are planning a current printing project, the earlier you bring us in, the better. We can arrange for a meeting here in our facility, or we will be glad to come to your office. Call (513) 248-2121 or e-mail **info@macgra.com** to arrange a convenient time to meet.

“...all the books on graphic design leave out a crucial element for the success of the printed piece...”

“By logging on to ftp.macgra.com you will be able to upload your file directly to our ftp site.”

“What we want to remind you...”



How to hold down the cost

If you have a tight budget for a printing project, there are several things you can do to hold down costs without sacrificing quality or compromising your design.

- **Ink:** The hierarchy of cost related to ink choices (from least to most expensive) is: black ink; one ink color; black + one color; two ink colors; three or four PMS ink colors, or four-color process (full color). The cost determinants are number of press plates (one plate is required for each ink color, including black); number of ink mixes and color washes; and number of makereadies (one for each ink color, including black).
- **Paper:** We stock certain grades and sizes of paper – the papers that we use most often and that function best in our equipment. We buy from a paper merchant and negotiate the price per thousand sheets based on our volume. We refer to these as our *house sheets*. When you use a house sheet for your printing

project, you get the benefit of our price negotiation as well as a sheet that performs well on press or in the copier.

- **Finished size:** Depending on the finished size of your project, we may be able to fit more than one image on a sheet. This increases makeready time, but decreases the amount of time needed to run the job, so may beneficially affect the price.
- **Design elements:** Popular design elements such as screens, tints, bleeds, and touching or overlapping ink colors are attractive but may add to the cost of a job. We aren't suggesting that a print job on a tight budget must give up these design elements, just that you must accommodate them. For example, alter the design to separate adjacent ink colors enough to avoid close registration. Or design the finished size of the piece so we can run on a standard size cut sheet and still trim to the bleed.



“Depending on the finished size of your project, we may be able to fit more than one image on a sheet.”

Preparing a file for Printing

Here are some reminders when preparing a file to submit to us:

1. **Check the fonts:** It is best not to mix Adobe Type 1 and TrueType fonts in a document, unless you are submitting the document as an Adobe-distilled PDF file. Our output devices are PostScript, and non-PostScript fonts may complicate or halt ripping. Make a folder for all fonts used in the document, and put both printer and screen versions in it. Be sure to include fonts for linked images.
2. **Color space:** Offset printing uses only two color spaces – CMYK (process color) and Pantone match (spot color). Images and art submitted in the RGB color space must be converted to either CMYK or spot color before output.

3. **Page setup:** set the page size at the finished size. Be sure to allow for bindery functions when setting the live area.
4. **Bleeds:** extend colors and images that bleed to 0.125” beyond the page boundaries.
5. **Scans:** verify that all scanned images are between 225 and 300 dpi in the finished size of the image.
6. **Links:** check links and if necessary, update prior to submitting the file.
7. **Print a hard copy:** print a hard copy from the file you are submitting. If you have printed a hard copy prior to making final revisions, print a new hard copy from the file you are submitting. Mark color breaks and folding instructions as necessary.



“...some reminders when preparing a file to submit...”



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Seven Keys to Print Buying Success



Please Route to the Printing Buyer



*"...programs must be
PostScript compatible..."*

Q. *What software programs do I need to be a successful desktop publisher?*

A. You will need three: a page layout program, a graphics illustration program, and an image manipulation program. All three programs must be PostScript compatible and export to formats interchangeable among them.

- *Page layout programs:* a page layout program is the fundamental building block of desktop publishing. It handles text and tables and can import graphics. Examples of page layout programs that are standard

in the graphic arts industry are: Adobe InDesign; Adobe PageMaker; Quark XPress; and MS Publisher.

- *Graphics illustration programs:* these are drawing programs used to create and edit vector-based illustrations and logos. Files generated from a graphics illustration program can be saved in native application or exported as Encapsulated PostScript (.eps) for placement in a page layout program. Adobe Illustrator, MacroMedia FreeHand, and Corel Draw are all graphics illustration programs.
- *Image manipulation programs:* these programs are used to edit scans and draw bitmapped artwork. Files from photo-editing programs can be saved in native application or exported into .eps or Tagged Image File Format (.tif) for placement in a page layout program. Adobe PhotoShop is the most widely used image manipulation program.