PRINtips

Would you like more tips?

Try our weekly email newsletter – Tuesday Tips. To be added to the mailing list, send a request to:
info@techgra.com

Use Our Print Tips to Manage Your Printing Cost

If you regularly buy printing for your company or organization, you likely have a budget to meet. Whether you are ordering business stationery, functional forms and documents, or image pieces for sales and marketing, you always want to be sure you are managing the budget to get the most for your money.

We hope you won't be surprised to learn that we have the same objective – to be sure the printed materials we provide to you are produced on time, on budget, and looking exactly as you expected. Making this happen requires a partnership between us, and in this issue, we're going to explore some ways to ensure consistent and dependable pricing.

Print Tip #1: Be Clear

Printing is a manufacturing process, and the printing we do for you is *custom manufacturing* since we are not filling your order from inventory on the shelf. This is the case even if we have a partially-manufactured inventory (such as business card shells or newsletter templates) because we are always imprinting custom information.

What this means to you is that we must have clear specifications to produce the job. We don't expect you to provide the specifications – in fact, that's our job, our customer service representatives. What we do need is for you to thoughtfully and accurately answer any questions that we may ask you.

Sometimes the questions we ask may not seem to be related to printing specifications. For example, we may ask the purpose of the

functional form, or the audience for the image piece. These are *probing questions* that we use to be sure we aren't overlooking anything, or to develop an option that you may not have considered.

Print Tip #2: Allow Sufficient Time

We know that emergencies occur: someone took the last carbonless form and didn't tell anyone, or you thought there was an extra box of envelopes in the storage area, or the sales manager has a time-sensitive opportunity. We are fully prepared to meet these emergencies – we consider it a part of good customer service.

But we can't be as dependable as we like unless the emergencies are the exception rather

than the rule. There are some actual physical limitations to what is possible. For example, our high speed color digital printing equipment has a maximum output per hour for a 2-sided, 8 ½ x 11 sheet. That means our manufacturing *capacity* for all work scheduled for a single day needs to be considered Of course we can work overtime or even around-the-clock to meet your requirement, but that will have an impact on your printing budget.

> *"There are some actual physical limitations to what is possible."*

Print Tip #3: Use the Right Tools

Computers have significantly improved many tasks associated with printing, including design, copywriting, typesetting, illustrating, photography and page layout. And as computer-based tools have improved, many of the activities formerly performed exclusively by printers or graphic designers moved to the desktop of customers. As printers, we applaud these advances and certainly do not long for a return to the days of galley type and manual page layout.

When you take over some of the production functions (such as taking your own digital photographs or laying out a brochure), it is important that you work to industry-accepted standards. Microsoft Word is an industry standard for writing copy, but not for page layout. A digital photograph at 72 dpi for a web page is not an industry standard for printing.

> *"It is our job as printing professionals to stay abreast of industry standards..."*

It is our job as printing professionals to stay abreast of industry standards as they continue to evolve. We adopt industry standards as they become widespread and reliable, and we integrate them into our production processes. We also provide them to you, in the form of instructions for submitting artwork and files. One standard for images is that they must have a resolution of 300 dpi in the size being used in the document we are printing. A deviation from the standard risks the quality of the finished piece.

Today PDF has become an industry standard for submitting files. The benefit of adhering to this standard is that you can work in any software application you wish and still provide us with a print-ready file. Use this when you are submitting document files to ensure printability.

Print Tip #4: Let Us Suggest the Production Method

For many printing projects, optional production methods are possible. Which one we select depends on balancing the job factors – quality requirements, time available for production, quantity, and input file – which in turn may affect price. Normally we select the production method that gives the best all-over value giving the job factors. However, if you specify a production method, or introduce a specification that limits the production method, then we may not be able to give you the best value. We're not asking that you give up a parameter that is important to you; we're just asking that you allow us to present a production alternative that we think is a better value. The final decision, as always, is entirely yours.

Print Tip #5: Think Long Term

In previous issues of Printips we've stressed the importance of planning before beginning a printing project. Part of planning means thinking long-term: to authorize us to re-draw a pixilated logo, or create a file of a document that exists only in hard copy. The added expense is a one-time charge, but will produce a better result each time the document is printed.

Print Tip #6: Negotiate Fairly

Remember, our objective is the same as yours – to be sure you get the best overall value for your printing projects. We don't mind if you open a negotiation over promise date or price, as long as you negotiate fairly. For example, we can negotiate a lower price, but only if you change a specification. And if you give us an idea of what price you are aiming for, we will be able to advise you what single or multiple specifications should be changed to hit your price point. In our opinion,

it is not a negotiation if you make a request (a lower price or a faster delivery date) but expect all conditions of the job to remain the same.

Printing is a partnership

Our best customers share similar characteristics: they need the products and services that we excel at; they need them regularly and often; and they respect us as printing professionals. We think this is a sound basis for a business partnership, and one that we work hard to cultivate and nurture.

" We think this is a sound basis for a business partnership..."

The Final Approval

Proofs are a very important part of the printing process as they allow you to view and inspect a rendition of the printed piece for errors in content, correct color, and overall design. It is our duty to follow your instructions and present error-free proofs using your input (copy, photographs, logos, images, etc.). It is your duty to double-check our work.

The printing trade custom when accepting input from customers is to make no alterations without permission, including leaving unchanged spelling and punctuation errors that were inadvertently submitted. In practice we will correct obvious errors when we see them, or if unsure, may call them to your attention. But please remember that yours is the final say-so on whether something is ready for press. Take your responsibility for proofing seriously and examine everything carefully before signing your approval.

IDEA CORNER

" It is your duty to double-check our work."

Q. *What factors determine the price of printing?*

A. This is a great question, and the answer may not be what you expect. First, let's assume that all design and layout is complete and we are talking about printing from a print-ready file.

Every job must pass through three manufacturing steps: prepress, press (offset or digital) and bindery. Prepress activities include retrieving the file and subjecting it to raster image processing, then using the RIPped file to image press plates.

Press activities include cutting paper to run size, loading paper, mounting the plates, inking, running test sheets and adjusting as necessary, and running the job. Bindery activities include post-press operations such as trimming to final size, folding, binding, stitching, drilling, padding, numbering and shrink wrapping and boxing.

Depending on the specifications for the job, any of the three manufacturing steps could be the primary determinant of price. For example, for a full-color job in a small quantity, prepress may be the cost driver. Alternately, for a job consisting of small, padded sheets counted and shrink wrapped, the bindery may be the principal cost.

If you find that our quoted price for a project is outside your budget, let us know and we'll help you determine where costs can be cut.

Q&A
questions and answers

"Every job must pass through three manufacturing steps..."

Managing Your Inventory

Managing your inventory of business stationery and forms is a great way to avoid the stress of last minute ordering and to stay within your printing budget. If you haven't been ordering long enough to know how long a particular item will last, try these tricks:

- *Estimate a 3-6 months supply.* We recommend you order enough of an item to last between three and six months. More than a six-month supply could mean that you are tying up money in inventory and, in some cases, running the risk that the printed piece may become obsolete. Less than a three-month supply and you are foregoing cost savings that result from a longer print run. An easy way to estimate is to ask yourself how many of this item you use in a specific interval (per day, per week, per month).

- *When you order an item, ask to have it included in our reorder reminder system.* We'll check your order history, predict when you might be running low, and notify you when it is time to reorder.

- *When reordering, ask us to price additional quantities.* Our computerized estimating and pricing system makes it easy to recall a job from history and to produce a current quotation using multiple quantities. Then you can evaluate the tradeoff between storing an item and the cost savings of a longer print run.

If you need help developing reorder quantities, give us a call at 513-248-2121. We have a complete order history on file that we can access while we talk to you.

Words

AAs: abbreviation for author's alterations. Refers to changes made after the inputs for a job has been submitted (such as changes in design, layout, copy, graphics or photographs). Printers charge for AAs.

Allowance for bleed: an image extension (usually 1/8 inch) beyond the trim area of the sheet or page. When trimmed, the image "bleeds" off the page or sheet.

Contract proof: a color proof representing an agreement between the printer and the customer regarding the standard for color and quality of the printed product.

Finishing: a general term for post-press operations such as trimming, folding, binding, stitching, drilling, padding. Also known as *bindery.*

Folding dummy: a sample used to show the folding and binding requirements.

House sheets: selected grades and sizes of paper carried as inventory by the printer.

Layout: the composition of a page. A layout may be a rough drawing or sketch, a computer-rendered partially-completed design, or a print-ready comprehensive.

Make-ready: all processes necessary to prepare for printing. Includes loading paper, mounting the plate, inking, registering and adjusting.

Manufacturing capability: the aggregate of equipment, supplies and staffing that defines the possible range of products that can be produced by a printing company.

Manufacturing capacity: the total amount of work that can be produced in a given time.

PDF: an acronym for Portable Document Format, a universal file format that preserves the fonts, images, graphics and layout of any source document, regardless of the application and platform used to create it.

Preflight: evaluation and analysis of a digital file to ascertain whether it has all the elements necessary for accurate output and conformance to printing requirements.

Proofreading: examining copy for spelling, grammar and typographic errors.