

August 3, 2009

FINAL FILES PREPARATION CHECKLIST

Well thought-out specs help printers organize the job, order the right supplies, point out potential cost-saving options, and head off prepress issues that may cause unexpected print results as well as delays on press. If in doubt, it is always best to consult the printer with any questions before preparing final files. The following checklist serves to help designers and production artists to prepare clean and professional final files.

COLORS

Check to ensure that all layout and support files specify the correct colors. Most color mistakes result from linked art files that have the incorrect color specs.

- When PMS spot colors are used, be sure that they match the paper that the job is outputting on: C for coated, M for matte, U for uncoated, etc.
- When printing 4-color process, be sure to convert all spot colors to process both in the layout and support files.
- Remove all unused colors from files to avoid any confusion by print vendors.

LAYOUT AND LINKED ART

The following are general checks to the layout and linked art files that should be done for final files. More specific checks and settings may be requested by the printer depending on the format and software used.

- All elements that bleed should have a minimum of 1/8" in bleed and sometimes more depending on the printer's requirements.
- Unless printer specifies otherwise, build the layout to actual size.
- Removed unused style sheets from layout.
- If a die line is used, place the die on its own layer, above the artwork and layout elements, and lock the layer so it cannot be accidentally moved.
- Remove any elements not being used in the layout, particularly unused objects in the pasteboard, and clean up layout as much as possible.
- Notify your printer if any effects have been used in your layout file, such as paths, transparencies, drop shadows, and layering effects.
- Any images or artwork that are outlined by a path should be outlined in the source program and then imported into the layout file. Layered photoshop files linked to layout should be replaced with a flattened .eps and renamed as "...final.eps". Rename the layered file also as "...final.psd".
- Check to ensure that all linked art is updated. Update modified or missing art links.
- Check to ensure that all linked art is scaled proportionately in the layout.
- All linked art should be placed at 100% or at final output size and at a resolution suitable for print. 300dpi is the recommended resolution for best print reproduction by most printers.
- Linked art should not be rotated in any way unless acceptable to printer. Rotation and any other image manipulation should be done in the source program and then imported into layout.

FONTS

It is important that no True Type fonts be used in a final layout. Use only Adobe Postscript or OpenType fonts.

- Check to ensure that all fonts are in the correct formats, either postscript or opentype.
- Remove or replace fonts that are not in use or are TrueType format. Be sure to view layout to ensure that text does not reflow as a result of these changes.

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PROOFING

The biggest mistake that digital designers make is assuming that what they see on screen is what they will get in print. Colors in print are always darker than on screen. Sometimes visual effects produced in software applications look great on screen and are then lost in the translation to print. And a myriad of other unexpected results can occur. Therefore it is vitally important to follow a series of proofing steps to ensure desired printing results.

- Spell check layout for typos and errors in copy.
- Create a printed proof of the layout for your own reference as well as the printer's.
- Review the proofs and/or mock-ups from printer. If printing is on a digital press, the proof is the actual press sheet. However, if printing is offset or another process, it is likely that the proofing paper is different than the actual paper used to run the job, so it will not match the printed piece. Ask the printer how accurate the proof is.
- The only way to be absolutely sure that the press run will go smoothly is to conduct a press check. Many times, everything looks fine on the printer proof, but glitches can occur on press that did not show up on the proof!

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Aside from preparing final files, confirm with printer the following job specs:

- paper selection: grade name, finish, weight, color, etc.
- quantity to print
- folding configuration, embossing, die cutting or any other special features, spot or overall varnish or aqueous coatings
- final output size, both flat and folded
- file formats and versions
- total number of pages
- font names

After all the checks have been made, use preflight software to double check the prepress work you've done and collect all files. Zip files together and transfer to printer with the above job specs.