

Preparing Files for Print

As technology in printing and publishing changes, the role and responsibility of the graphic designer also changes. Prepress and production have become part of the creative process, whether we like it or not.

Recently I surveyed print providers and prepress technicians to find out how graphic designers can better prepare their files. I've summarized a few highlights from the survey.

First things first: Use design software (Adobe Creative Suite, QuarkXPress). I know, I know, you're a professional, you would NEVER design a poster in a word processing program or worse, a presentation software program!

It sounds crazy, but I've seen it! If you save a document from Word as a PDF, the black type turns into "rich black" automatically. Rich black will produce a printing plate for the four process colors (cyan, magenta, yellow and black) even though you only used black. This translates to a nightmare on press.

Fonts

Fonts are a touchy subject with prepress professionals and print providers. Use quality fonts and don't forget to include them with your packaged file. There are so many free fonts on the Web, but just because they're free doesn't mean they're intended for high-end output.

There are four different types of font architecture: OpenType, PostScript (also known as Type 1), TrueType and dfont (Mac only – beware of these for high-end output). Your print provider can provide information on how to avoid common font issues. The printer and their prepress department know what they're talking about, they can tell you horror stories. The last thing you want to see on your embossed and foil-stamped business card is the dreaded Courier. Yes, I've seen it.

Outlining Fonts

One way of avoiding font issues is to outline fonts. Once a font is outlined, it is non-editable so be sure you save a copy that is NOT outlined so you can make changes.

Tip: use the -OL in the outlined file name, this makes it easy to tell which version is outlined and which is real text:

Mozart Poster.ai

Mozart Poster-OL.ai

Keep in mind that if you outline large bodies of type, it can lead to larger file size and increased RIP time. If using InDesign or Illustrator, use the Find Font... (Type > Find Font...) feature AFTER you

have created outlines to make sure that the font is no longer associated with the document.

When submitting files to your print provider, you should include both the outlined file and the editable file, along with the fonts. Including fonts with your files is easy if you're using the packaging function in InDesign or the collect for output function in Quark. What about packaging fonts in Photoshop or Illustrator? If you use these programs you'll need to manually collect the font.

Fonts in Placed Graphics

If you place an Illustrator graphic in your InDesign layout and the graphic has fonts attached to it, you'll need to manually package the font. How do you know which font? Use the Find Font function in InDesign. It shows you the status and type of fonts used in the document. As you can see from this screen shot, I'm missing two fonts (Amphora and Sanderson) in a placed graphic.

InDesign's Find Font feature shows you the font architecture (OpenType, PostScript, TrueType) and the fonts that are in the placed graphics (which are missing by the way!).

Speaking of Placed Graphics

Just because you can see your placed graphic in InDesign or Quark or Illustrator does not mean it will be there when you send it to the printer. You'll need to include your linked graphics, and the best way to do that is to use your software. In Quark you'll use the Collect for Output feature. In InDesign, you'll use the Package feature. If you used an image (photo) in an Illustrator layout, you'll have to embed the photograph (Links panel flyout menu > Embed Image) or manually collect the image before sending your file to the printer. Photographs should be 300 ppi effective resolution, and avoid enlarging placed graphics in your page layout program more than 20 percent either way.

Name that File!

Name your files with meaningful names. It helps to keep things organized on your own computer, and it helps when a prepress technician is trying to navigate through your files. Avoid using special characters: !@#\$\$%^&*() and use file names that make sense. It will personalize your job. How many files titled business cards.ai do you have on your computer? How about iStock845316_290.jpg? Wouldn't it be better to use Donegan Business Cards 7-09.ai or Autumn Leaves-300ppi.psd?

To Bleed or Not to Bleed

If your design requires color to extend past the trimmed edge you'll need to set up your document

to bleed. Set up your document to the trim size and make sure you use the correct bleed amount. Most presses require 1/8" bleed, and the best place to set this up is the Document Setup dialog box in InDesign. Illustrator CS4 includes the ability to set your document up with a bleed. Show your guides and pull the color beyond the document trim (look for the red guides in Illustrator and InDesign).

If you want a PDF to show crop marks and bleed settings, check the box in Marks and Bleeds (the bleed measurement will automatically show up if you set up your document properly). Do you have spreads in your document that require a bleed? Ask your printer if you should create a non-facing page document to add the necessary bleed.

Delete Unused Colors

Files will fail preflight if they include unwanted spot colors and redundant separations (multiple references to the same spot color). I recommend you confirm your Pantone (spot) colors are consistent by checking your Colors or Swatches panels in your page layout software. Make sure you intend to pay (\$) for every spot color listed (or convert them to CMYK if you didn't intend to print extra colors).

To delete the unused colors in InDesign & Illustrator: Swatches panel (fly-out menu) > Select all Unused (the unused color swatches will be selected) then use the flyout menu to Delete

Swatch or click on the trash can in the Swatches panel. You can delete any unused colors, including CMYK, but you cannot delete Registration (but don't use Registration for design elements!)

To delete the unused colors in Quark: Click on the colors and click on the trash can to delete. You cannot delete CMYK or Registration in Quark.

Printing is a Process

If you develop an understanding of the printing and production process, it will help you become a better designer. Talk to the people who work in the prepress department. Ask them about color management, PDF creation, preflighting and anything else that you might do to help your jobs print to your specifications. If you spent an hour observing in the pressroom and the bindery, you would learn what to avoid. Asking questions is the best way to learn.

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