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# printtips

## spotlight: A Guide to Print Specifications

Consistency. This is our aim as we work on each order you place with us. The same paper, the same colors, the same fold, the same binding, each order matching all previous ones. We think you'll agree that we're pretty good at it. So how do we achieve this consistency from order to order? By following the same set of specifications each time we do the job.

Specifications are a way to describe unambiguously how the finished order should appear and can include the smallest detail (such as how the order is to be packaged and shipped). As printers, specifications are as important to us as a set of plans is to a building contractor. In fact, at Burlington Press, our production manager reviews the specifications on every order to be sure they are clear, understandable, and unambiguous. If anything is missing or in question, the order is not placed into production until the specifications are perfect.

It is the responsibility of our customer service representatives to write the



production specifications. Like all manufacturing trades, the printing industry uses its own words or jargon to accurately and precisely write specifications. If you regularly order printing, you may even have learned a few – PMS or Pantone Matching System;

CMYK or cyan, magenta, yellow and black (the colors of four-color process printing); PDF or portable document format; FPO or for position only; bleed; screen; RIP or raster image processing. You may even have learned them from reading the vocabulary section of Printtips.

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A distinct benefit of the vocabulary of printing specifications is precision and simplicity. To illustrate, think of the last time you wanted to order a multi-page document such as a 16-page booklet. When you were describing the job to have it quoted, how did you refer to the cover of the booklet? Did you include the cover as part of the page count, or think of the cover as being additional to the inside pages? To accurately quote the job, we must know which you meant. Likely the CSR you were talking to asked a few qualifying questions, and then wrote the specifications as either **16-page booklet plus cover** or **16-page booklet including cover**.

To relieve you from the burden of having to learn the complete vocabulary of printing, our customer service representatives have been trained to translate your requirements in whatever way you describe into the more precise vocabulary of print specifications. But here is an important point—the greater the difference between the way you describe the job and its precise specification, the greater the opportunity for an error to occur. That's why we ask you to learn the basics of print specification. Every issue of Printips has a list of print vocabulary and lingo to better acquaint you with the terms of the trade. Learning these terms allow you to communicate more precisely when describing a job to be printed, and help to avoid possible misinterpretation. If you're

ever unsure, one of our customer service representatives will be happy to assist!

Another way to learn how to write good specifications is to carefully read the wording on our quotations when you have requested one. It is our practice to state the specifications and also include any conditions upon which the quotation is based. So if you requested a quotation for 2500 brochures printed on glossy paper, you might receive this wording back on the quotation form:

### DESCRIPTION:

Brochure, using customer-supplied print-ready file, print in two PMS colors on both sides of 80# coated cover; trim bleed to 8.5 x 11; letter fold to finished size of 8.5 x 3.625.

### ASSUMPTIONS:

This quotation assumes you provide a print-ready file including appropriate allowance for bleed. We reserve the right to review our quotation if the order is not placed within 60 days.

By repeating the specifications back to you, we are doing our part to be sure no miscommunication has occurred. Since a quotation is binding (that is, we agree to sell the job to you at the price quoted as long as the specifications match what is written in the quotation), we want you to know that we have fully understood what you want to order.

## Elements of print specification

In order to provide a quote or enter an order, we need several job specifications. Here are a number of basic elements we'll need to verify, along with example responses:

- **Overall:** What is being printed? How many printed pieces would you like?  
[Tri-fold brochure, 2500 qty.](#)
- **Artwork:** What will you be provided as artwork? Hard copy? A file? If a file, what format and what computer platform? Will the file be ready for to print, or will it require adjustment(s)?  
[Print-ready PDF created on a PC](#)
- **Printing:** Is the printing on one side or both sides? How many ink colors on each side? What paper? If a multi-page document, is the same paper used throughout or does the cover require something different than the interior pages? What is the final size? Does the image bleed and, if so, on how many sides? Do you want a coating applied after printing?  
[Prints in two ink colors, PMS 185 red and reflex blue on 80# coated cover w/bleeds on two sides. Trim size after printing is 8 1/2 x 11](#)
- **Finishing and binding:** What post-press processes are required, such as folding, drilling, numbering? What binding is needed, such as stitching, spiral or perfect binding?  
[Letter fold to 8 1/2 x 3 5/8](#)
- **Packaging:** How should the job be packaged?  
[Shrink wrap](#)
- **Delivery:** Will you pick up, should we deliver, or should the order be shipped to one or more addresses?  
[Please deliver to us](#)

## idea corner: Providing A Mock-Up



In addition to issuing clear specifications for your print job, it is a good idea to provide a PDF file or a mock-up of the piece to be printed, even if it is not yet in final form. Having something to review in comparison to the specifications allows us to check the specifications for accuracy and perhaps to develop alternative specifications that will produce the same outcome. For example, there are several types of stock that we store in our warehouse for common, everyday usage. Because these stocks are purchased in high volumes, they can be a more economical

alternative than paper purchased specifically for one job. During our review of your order, we may suggest an equivalent stock on hand in order to reduce overall cost.

Providing us with a PDF file or mock-up is also a good idea when you are developing a budget for a printing project. Although written specifications alone do provide a basis for an accurate quotation, it is very useful to have the file so we can check for technical issues or a level of difficulty that may not be apparent from the specifications alone.

## marketing focus: The New Economy

You don't need me to tell you that we are in a very slow economy. While the experts ponder how we got into this mess and how we are going to get out of it, we still have businesses to run. Marketing and sales are still important because even in a down economy people and businesses need your products and services. This is of particular interest to charitable organizations, where demand for their service is increasing as available funding, in turn, is decreasing.

Many studies done during past recessions and economic downturns have revealed that those companies that continued to advertise and market not only saw results immediately, but their customers remembered them when the economy started to improve and they started to spend more.

The reality is that marketing dollars shrink with the reduced budgets we all have to live with when sales are down. We can either do the same thing we always do, just less, or we can work to find the ways our marketing dollars are going to get more bang for the buck.

Direct Mail induces consumers to touch the offer. Recipients of mail are receiving, sorting, reading, and using direct mail to make purchasing decisions. If you are not using direct mail or would like to have us review your direct mail program to help you squeeze more profit out of it, give us a call.



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In September 2008, Pitney Bowes conducted a survey of 1000 individuals 18 and older and found that targeted direct mail remains a key method of reaching consumers and influencing their purchase decisions. Here are some of the key findings:

- More than 8 out of 10 survey respondents (85%) say they review their USPS mail daily.
- Half of all respondents report greater enjoyment reviewing the mail received in their home mailbox versus e-mail. This includes people age 18 to 39, with 52% reporting greater satisfaction in reviewing mail received through the USPS compared to e-mail.
- Two-thirds of the consumers surveyed said they are examining their mail more closely for coupons and offers than they did a year ago.
- Half of all respondents say they have requested promotional materials from companies over the past six months.
- 78 % said that direct mail is the preferred way to receive offers.
- Nearly 94% of consumers surveyed say they took action on promotional offers and coupons received via direct mail over the past year. Coupons offering discounts on groceries are the most likely to be used, followed by coupons for health and wellness products, entertainment, and electronics.
- One in five consumers surveyed reports that more than 10% of the offers or coupons they receive by mail lead to a purchase.
- Close to 40% of respondents say they have tried a new business for the first time because of information received via direct mail. Nearly 70% report renewing a relationship with a business because they received a direct mailing or promotional item.
- Respondents state that information received via direct mail often lead to contributing to a non-profit organization for the first time.



## green concepts

Recently, forest preservation began gaining new visibility as an end in itself rather than an outgrowth of recycling. Paper manufacturing accounts for about 43% of wood use. About 16% of worldwide wood pulp production comes from trees raised specifically for that purpose and another 75% comes from second-, third- or subsequent generations of trees. Only about 9% of paper pulp comes from old growth forests.

If you are aware of forest preservation activities, you may have heard of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). In its own words, FSC is a non-profit organization devoted to encouraging the responsible management of the world's forests. FSC sets high standards that ensure forestry is practiced in an environmentally responsible, socially beneficial, and economically viable way.

The essence of FSC's mission is to verify that landowners and forest products companies are practicing forestry consistent with FSC standards, and to monitor the chain of custody of forest products – the movement of FSC-certified products from forest to pulp provider to paper mills to paper mills and to printers. To date over 50 U.S. manufacturers of paper or packaging materials have become FSC-certified and have begun offering FSC-certified papers.

There are some minor drawbacks to using FSC-certified papers. As with all new products, availability may be an issue. A stock normally used for your printing project may not yet have an FSC-certified grade, and if available, may not be a stocking item for our paper merchant. Because FSC-certified papers must be physically segregated from non-certified stock throughout the chain of custody – including when the paper reaches our production floor – FSC-certified papers cost more than their non-certified counterparts. Thus you can expect a printing project that uses FSC-certified paper to be more expensive.

## print lingo: Vocabulary of the Trade

**AQUEOUS COATING:** a water-based coating applied by a printing press over the printing ink. Used to protect and enhance the printing.

**BLEED:** printing that extends to the edge of a sheet or page after trimming.

**COATED STOCK:** paper that has a coating of clay and other substances applied during the manufacturing process. Coating improves ink holdout and light reflectivity.

**EQUIVALENT:** stock (paper) that is not the brand specified, but has the same characteristics and specifications as the brand specified.

**ESTIMATE:** a price stating what a job is likely to cost; not considered binding. Estimates are provided when specifications are not firm.

**FINISHING:** post-press operations required to complete the printed piece such as trimming, folding and binding.

**FLOOD:** to print the entire surface of the sheet with ink or a coating.

**HOUSE SHEET:** paper kept in stock by the printer.

**INK HOLDOUT:** a characteristic of paper that prevents it from absorbing ink and allows the ink to dry on the surface of the paper.

**PAGE:** one side of a leaf in a publication.

**PERFECT BIND:** a method of book binding that uses glue to bind the leaves of the publication to the spine.

**QUOTATION:** price offered to produce the job; considered to be binding provided specifications don't change.

**UNCOATED STOCK:** paper that has not been coated with clay.

**UV COATING:** a coating applied after a sheet has been printed, then bonded and cured with ultraviolet light.

The printing industry of North America's trade customs are a set of common business practices prevalent in the industry but adopted by each individual business owner. The industry's first trade customs were originally announced at the annual convention of the United Typothetae of America in 1922 and were updated five times through 2002. At that time, two industry organizations (NAPL and PIA) released a three-part report entitled Best Business Practices for the Printing Industry to take the place of the trade customs. The best practices report includes guidelines for digital-asset-management issues; terms and conditions of sale, including quotations, orders, delivery and production schedules; and a glossary of the industry's most common workflow terms.

Like trade customs, the purpose of the best practices is to act as a framework so that printers and their customers can discuss and develop a clear understanding of how they will do business. When printed on the back of an invoice (as ours are), they become our Terms and Conditions of Sale.

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