ALPHAGRAPHICS
S E A T T L E

ARTWORK PREPARATION GUIDELINES

Use this guide to optimize your artwork files for print production.

01

Supplying print-ready files will aid in reducing the costs and turnaround times associated with your project.

Please review these guidelines BEFORE designing your artwork.

Feel free to reach out to your account manager if you have any questions.

FILE SUBMISSION

Use the **SEND-A-FILE** form on our website to send us your artwork files. Select your account manager from the drop-down menu.

Go **HERE** to send us your files:

https://www.alphagraphicsseattle.com/send-a-file/

REQUIRED ARTWORK FILES

We require you to supply a print-ready PDF file of your project. Refer to the **BEST PRACTICES** section to learn how to prepare your artwork file for print-production.

Export the PDF from your design / layout application using the following setting:

High Quality Print with trim marks and bleed

The bleed area must be correctly defined in your artwork native file. *(refer to the **BEST PRACTICES** section)*

SUPPORTED NATIVE FILES

In addition to the PDF, it is also beneficial to **send us your native artwork files**. Native artwork files allow us to address minor issues that may come up during our pre-flight inspection.

Native files should be fully packaged with fonts and linked images. Layers should be organized and labeled appropriately — meaning that someone who has never worked with your file before could quickly discern its contents.

We accept the following native artwork file types:

Adobe Illustrator | .ai
PACKAGE FILE: under the **FILE MENU** select **PACKAGE** and follow the prompts

Adobe InDesign | .indd
PACKAGE FILE: under the **FILE MENU** select **PACKAGE** and follow the prompts

Adobe Photoshop | .psd
Photoshop does not currently have a package feature.

Microsoft Publisher | .pub
PACKAGE FILE: under the **FILE MENU** select **PACK AND GO** then **TAKE TO A COMMERCIAL PRINTER**

NOTE: While we can work with artwork created outside of the applications listed above, it is FAR from ideal. It will often yield poor results, lowering overall project quality while significantly increasing your costs and turnaround times.

BEST PRACTICES

Follow these best practices to optimize your artwork for print production.

DOCUMENT SIZE

The document size needs to exactly match the specific dimensions of your project.

BLEED

Any artwork that goes to the edge of the document must extend beyond the document trim size by 1/8" (.125") on all sides. When exporting to PDF, be sure that **INCLUDE BLEEDS** is selected in the export settings AND the bleed is defined in the document settings of the native artwork file.

Bleed size may vary for large and grand format projects. Please consult with your account manager to determine the required bleed size.

MARGINS

All critical artwork elements (text, images, graphics, etc.) should be at least 1/4" (.25") within the final trim size. For small products, such as business cards, a 1/8" (.125") margin is acceptable.

BORDERS

Avoid using thin borders on the edges of your artwork near the trim line. The small shifts that happen during production make them problematic for the final output.

FONTS

All fonts used in your project must be packaged with your native artwork files and embedded into your PDF. Fonts are automatically embedded into the PDF when using the High Quality Print export setting.

IMAGE RESOLUTION

Pixel based images should be at least:

DIGITAL AND OFFSET: 300 PPI at intended print size *(with no upsampling)*

LARGE-FORMAT: 150 PPI at intended print size *(with no upsampling)*

GRAND-FORMAT: Optimal PPI will vary based on final size of your graphic and the intended viewing distance. It can range from 25 - 100 PPI depending on the project.

NOTE: Vector graphics are resolution independent. They can be scaled to any print size without losing quality. The above PPI settings are for raster graphics only.

CONVERT RGB COLORS TO CMYK

All RGB images and colors should be converted to CMYK (the standard color space for print production).

COLOR MATCHING SPOT COLORS

For spot color work that is being printed digitally, use only the Coated PMS or Uncoated PMS swatch libraries.

TRANSPARENCY EFFECTS

When using transparency effects (such as drop shadows or transparent overlays), convert all spot colors to CMYK and flatten your file before exporting a PDF. This helps ensure that transparency effects are reproduced on the printed output as intended.

NOTE: This is for PDF files only. Do not flatten your native artwork files.

IMPOSITION

Provide your files as 1-up (on a single page). Our prepress team will handle the imposition. Spreads should be turned off.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

A glossary of common printing terminology.

CMYK

The four ink colors used in standard printing, (C) Cyan, (M) Magenta, (Y) Yellow, and (K) Black. In Digital printing, the four CMYK colors are applied to the paper all at once. In Offset printing, the four CMYK ink colors are applied to the paper in successive layers using plates.

BINDERY

The production department responsible for the cutting, folding, collating, drilling, kitting and other finishing operations used on printing projects.

BLEED

The area that extends past the trim edge of a printed page. Standard bleed is 1/8" (.125") on all sides.

COATED

Paper that contains a surface coating.

COIL BINDING (WIRE-O BINDING, SPIRAL BINDING)

A type of binding where metal or plastic wire is fed through holes drilled along the binding side of a printed document.

COLLATION

The process of organizing pages together in a sequenced order.

COLOR CRITICAL

When a print project is color critical it is imperative that the printed colors exactly match a specification. This can apply to both digital and offset printing.

COLOR VARIANCE

Slight differences in color between and/or within print runs that is inherent to digital and offset printing.

CROP MARKS

Thin lines on the page outside the printable area that indicate where the paper will be trimmed after printing.

DEBOSSING

Uses a metal die and high pressure on paper to give a "sunken in" look, adding texture and depth to elements of a design.

DIE CUTTING

The process of using steel blades to cut unique shapes through paper.

DIGITAL PRINTING

The process of transferring electronic images directly onto paper. No printing plate is required. Digital printing is ideal for short production runs.

DIGITAL PROOF (ELECTRONIC PROOF, SOFT PROOF)

A PDF document generated by a prepress technician for the purpose of project review.

DPI

Dots per inch. The number of physical dots of ink per inch on a printed document.

EMBOSSING

Uses a metal die and high pressure to raise parts of a sheet of paper, adding texture and depth to elements of a design.

FIRST ARTICLE PROOF

A printed sample that is an exact copy of the final project. It uses the same paper, ink, press, folds, binding, kitting, lamination, etc. used for the final press run and production.

FOIL STAMPING

Impressing metallic foil onto paper with a heated die.

GRAND-FORMAT PRINTING

The printing of materials that are generally over 60" in width. It requires the use of specialty production equipment that can accommodate the bigger-than-normal size.

HARD COPY PROOF

A printed sample of a project for the purposes of review. They are useful for catching project errors such as position, pagination, missing elements, transparency effects, typos, and image resolution.

LAMINATION

A film applied to a print to protect the surface. The two most common styles are gloss and matte.

LARGE-FORMAT PRINTING

The printing of materials that are too large to be printed on most commercial printing presses. It requires the use of specialty production equipment that can accommodate the bigger-than-normal print size.

OFFSET PRINTING

Offset printing uses metal or paper plates to transfer an image onto a rubber "blanket", and then rolls that image onto the paper. Ink is not transferred directly onto the paper. Offset printing is the best choice for large run quantities.

PAGE/SHEET

A sheet of paper has two pages (front and back). Even if a side is blank it is still counted as a page. Example: a book with 50 pages has 25 sheets.

PAGINATION

The process of arranging individual pages in a multi-page document

PMS (PANTONE MATCHING SYSTEM)

A universal color matching system that is categorized by specific individual numbers assigned to specific individual color inks.

PAPER WEIGHT

The thickness of the paper stock.

PERFECT BINDING

A book binding method where the cover and pages are glued together at the spine. The spine is square and can be printed on. Example: a paperback book.

PLATES

A metal or paper sheet installed into the press that indicates where the ink will transfer onto the paper. Used in offset printing.

PPI

Pixels per inch. The number of pixels that show up in an inch of digital screen.

PREPRESS

Everything in the production of a print project that happens before the project goes to press. This includes file review, proofing, imposition, plate manufacturing and more.

PRESS CHECK

It's a scheduled time to review press sheets for offset color-critical printing jobs, for the purposes of finalizing the color.

PRINT-READY

An artwork file that meets all the specifications necessary to produce high-quality printed output.

IMPOSITION

The arrangement of individual pages onto press sheets.

RASTER GRAPHIC

A pixel based computer image. Common file types include JPG, BMP, TIF, GIF, and PNG.

RGB

The color space of red, green and blue. These are the primary colors of light, which computers use to display images on screens.

SADDLE STITCH

The binding of printed materials by stapling the pages on the folded spine. Example: a magazine. The number of total pages must be divisible by four to be saddle stitched.

SCORING

To crease paper with a metal rule for the purpose of making folding easier.

SPOT COLOR

Pre-mixed ink specified when using a PMS (Pantone Matching System) color number.

SPOT UV

A liquid varnish that can be applied to a sheet to create a high-gloss shine to specific design elements.

TRIMMING

The process of cutting the printed piece down to its intended final dimensions.

UNCOATED

Paper that does not have a matte or gloss coating. It maintains a natural look and feel.

UP-SAMPLING

Taking an image file and using editing software to change the pixels per inch to a higher PPI (ex: going from 150 PPI to 300 PPI). This will result in noticeable quality loss when the image is printed.

VDP (VARIABLE DATA PRINT)

Printing in which elements (such as text, graphics, photographs, etc) can be changed from one printed piece to the next without stopping the press. VDP prints using information from a database.

VECTOR GRAPHIC

A computer image that is stored and displayed in terms of vectors rather than pixels.