

Art Submission Requirements and Answers to Commonly Asked Questions for Flexographic Printing

Whether you're a flexographic wiz or have some lingering questions, this art submission document has been created to help break the flexographic printing pre-press procedure down to the basics. Although, we have broken up the following into logical segments, we encourage you to read the submission requirements in their entirety. Later, you can easily spot check each category as you go along. These guidelines are not meant to hinder the creative process. Instead, we hope that they help you to proceed with greater confidence, knowing that the printed product will be produced as you had intended.

Labels are often the last component of a product to be conceived, but they play a crucial role in whether or not a product sells once it reaches the market. Remember, great designs only look great when they are set-up to print great. When a label is poorly designed (designed in way which is not suitable for printing) it can turn into a struggle on press and in the pre-press department, equating to increased costs and often an inferior end-product. Save yourself the hassle of going back and forth with your client and our pre-press department by following these guidelines. Plus, you'll get your labels in hand even faster!

Supplying Artwork

Our pre-press department is Macintosh based. Artwork should be supplied in its native format (Illustrator, Quark, Photoshop and/or InDesign), along with all supporting graphics and fonts. RGB images must be converted to CMYK to avoid unexpected color shifts.

Files should not be compressed. Color separation is essential for our printing process. Provide raster files in layers so that we can apply necessary color and/or trap adjustments. Any adjustments we make are solely from a printing standpoint. Files should be presented in one of the noted formats so that it can be easily read and manipulated by our prepress department. We do not make changes to your design, only to color and trap so that your design will print at it's best.

Supplying Images

Images should be provided in their correct size and orientation to the label. To do this, import the image after resizing and rotating them in the application in which they were created.

Photographs and other highly detailed images should be printed at a minimum of 175 lpi (lines per inch). The image should be provided at 1-1/2 to 2 times the resolution of the appropriate line screen. Stick to TIFF or EPS files with a minimum resolution of 300 dpi when submitting artwork. We prefer not to accept PDF files.

Be aware that images supplied in CMYK are not isolated from one another. This means that color adjustment to one item (re: bringing up color in an image) will affect the other supplied graphics as well.

Halftones, Vignettes and Fade-away Edges

Flexographic plates cannot hold less than a 1% dot. If a dot of less than 1% is used in the supplied artwork it will simply drop out when it goes to press. This is one of the pitfalls of flexographic printing, but since it is unavoidable we have to work with it in order to create a smooth, natural looking fade. It doesn't matter how light or dark a color you're working with...if you fade to 0% you will have a hard-edge. Rather than fading a gradient to 0%, fade it to 1%. If a fade is made up of more than one color, all colors being utilized must stop at exactly the same spot. This will prevent the chances of visible rain-bowing or other irregular (dirty) looking printing.

Type Size and Font Requirements

Our font size specifications are based on experience and knowing what prints well and what does not. These recommendations are strictly from a printing standpoint. Changing a font from regular to bold, italic, etc. in a layout program can cause font substitutions. Instead of changing the font as you might in a word document, please use the actual font and save yourself the headache of having to re-supply it later on.

The minimum size type is 4-point type for a block font such as Helvetica Bold (or 6 point type for reverse printing) and 6 point type for serif fonts like Times New Roman (use a minimum of 8 point type for reverse printing in this case). When possible, fine serifs and thin lines should be avoided.

When choosing font size, also keep in mind that metallic inks are more likely to close up (fill in) than non-metallics. You may want to increase the font slightly in this case. In addition, we recommend that a key line be added to reverse, or knock-out, type. This single color outline will enhance production capabilities and provide superior print quality.

Any type that will be overprinting must all be in one single color. Attention should be paid to make sure that overprint type is readable (re: what screens are behind the print, etc. should be taken into consideration).

Exceptions to these minimum font size requirements are trademarks, copyrights, and the like.

Any legal requirements surrounding point size is the sole responsibility of the client.

Text *must* be supplied in Illustrator or Quark. Text supplied in Photoshop is unacceptable since it essentially becomes an image in that program, which means we can't make modifications if needed. Additionally, text set in Photoshop will appear "blurry" (or have uneven edges) when printed. If type is being created with multiple colors, the dominant color should be used to hold the shape of the type.

Converting Copy to Outlines

There are advantages and disadvantages to converting copy to outlines. From a pre-press standpoint, files received in outlines have the advantage of "what you see is what you get" (there is no chance for reragging or font substitution). The disadvantage is that type changes cannot be made by our prepress department if needed. Copy set in outlines becomes un-editable. In other words, if changes need to be made, whatever is set in outlines must be reset from square one. Additionally, outlined components cannot be resized.

Dielines and Copy Placement

We ask that all copy be provided at least 1/16" inside of the dieline due to the nature of our flexographic printing process. Even though we utilize tools that give you print and color precision, there is some movement on press during the printing process. Think of the 1/16" as a safety net that keeps your copy from coming too close to dieline when it goes to press.

Many of our standard RCR (round corner rectangle) dies have a corner radius of 1/8". However, because we are a custom printer, die sizes and corner radii may vary. Be sure to check with your representative to confirm the corner radius of your given die if applicable.

Bleed in Relationship to the Dieline

Butt cut labels are cut to the liner between each label. There is no space between labels and therefore no room for bleed. There may be some instances where bleed can be accommodated (re: a bumper sticker with a tab where one side bleeds), but the rule of thumb is that you cannot have bleed on any side of a butt cut label.

Other label shapes, such as RCR (round corner rectangle), circle, oval and other special shapes that have spacing between each label can accept bleed. If your label artwork includes bleed, adding a 1/8" bleed area all around will ensure that you get beautiful edges with color consistency once the waste is removed. Keep in mind that adding bleed means placing additional color beyond the dieline, not simply increasing the overall image size.

Setting Your Template

Whether or not your label art requires bleed, it's a good idea to include crop marks with your design. This will help eliminate any guesswork on our end and ensure that you get your label proof with the dieline set correctly the first time out.

Setting Barcodes

We have the tools to set a barcode for your product. Simply supply us with the first 11 digits of the code. Our equipment allows us to set the check digit and scan the barcode for readability. The most favorable barcode is one that has the most contrast. For example, a barcode with the bars and digits printed with black ink on a white background will provide more contrast and better scanability than any other color combination.

Another element to consider when you are setting your barcode is what is referred to as quiet zones. These are the areas to the left and right side of the barcode that allow scanners to know where a barcode starts and stops.

Whether we set your barcode or you supply it with the artwork, we will scan the code to ensure that it scans properly. Should you supply the barcode, please set the bar width reduction (BWR) at 0.

Adding White Back-Up and/or Spot UV to a Label

White back-up and spot UV are sometimes required on a label. White back-up is often used on clear label material to help maintain color consistency and opacity once the label is placed on the end product. This back-up can be regular, UV, or rotary silkscreen white ink. Spot UV is used in place of a full UV coating when an expiration date or other information needs to be imprinted on an unvarnished area of the label. If you require any of these items, they should be clearly marked (i.e., "no varnish this area", "spot UV", etc) and included with your artwork.

Adding Eye Marks

Eye marks are used to stop the flow of material for fulfillment purposes and are determined by the requirements of the given converting equipment. Eye marks should be included in the supplied artwork. They should be kept clear of any other printing (copy or design) to allow for proper machine reading.

Correct placement and any machine specifications are the responsibility of the client.

Trap

Please keep in mind that due to the nature of flexographic printing, trap marks can produce a third color (for example - cyan over yellow will create green, etc.). Some color combinations will produce more noticeable differences than others. It is important to understand how this will impact the final print of your design. If you feel that a color combination on your label will produce a dramatic or unwanted effect, you can place a 1-point line (in black or white) between colors. In terms of actual trapping for the balance of the label, we will set all trapping in accordance with our specifications. *Artwork should be submitted un-trapped.*

Distortion

Flexo plates are imaged flat, but they do not print flat. Flexographic printing utilizes print cylinders, which means that the flat plate is wrapped around a cylinder and therefore prints round. For this reason, distortion must be added to artwork in order to compensate for the difference in plate height that will occur when it is applied to the print cylinder. Our pre-press department will apply the necessary distortion according to our pre-established guidelines. Please supply your design without any distortion.

Running Combos and/or Common Plates

If you have a set of labels that can be run in combination with one another it can save you time and money. For example, it is normal to run common process plates and simply change out the black plate. This can even aid in better color consistency, since the process plates are pulled from one versus multiple files.

If you choose to create any items in this fashion, be sure to place each design in a separate layer within the same file. If a change is made to a color on one of the items, be sure to apply that same change to all of the other common products in the exact same position.

Digital, PDF, and Color Laser Proofs

Spot color jobs are relatively easy. Simply match specified PMS colors to a Pantone book and you're good to go. Four color process jobs are a bit more challenging. Since four color process utilizes cyan, magenta, yellow, and black inks to achieve the desired end result, a pdf or color laser copy proof is not an accurate representation of the actual artwork. For this reason, digital proofs are required for four color process jobs. We use a digital proofing system that creates proofs on actual stock, using real dots and real ink, so you can rest assured that what you see in your proof is what you will get in your final product. There is a one-time charge per original order for this service.

PDF and color laser proofs are acceptable for jobs that will not be printing with four color process and can also be used when additional proofs are needed due to type changes after a digital proof has been produced. In this case, the digital proof will be used for color and the pdf or color laser will be used for copy.

Matching a Previously Printed Job

Whether a job has been printed previously by Overnight Labels, Inc. or another vendor, we guarantee color consistency. All files that have been previously printed by another vendor will require a digital proof to determine color accuracy. This digital proof will be compared to the previously printed sample you provide us to match. There are instances where a file is printed differently from printer to printer. In many cases, color correction is required to match existing labels.

Changes to Artwork

If changes to artwork are required and cannot be made by the artist, jobs will be assessed on an individual basis. If the given artwork can be manipulated (typesetting changes, cleaning up, resizing, etc.) it will be billed accordingly.

Files smaller than 50MB can be emailed to prepress@gdinc.net. Larger files should be sent on CD with a corresponding color printout.