

Prints Charming Printers/Moonlighter Graphics

Guidelines to Successful Offset Printing for Designers

Commercial printing is quite different from printing to the printer that's connected to your computer. Just because a file prints from your computer's system printer, doesn't mean it will print well for on offset presses. Several things need to happen for an offset printing job to work well. All fonts used in the layout need to be present, all colors need to separate correctly and be defined as either spot or process colors, and all image files need to be at the correct resolution and in the proper mode (either grayscale or CMYK).

TIPS for ALL JOBS

Set your page size to the size of the document.

Working with Type

Use Type 1 (PostScript) fonts whenever possible. TrueType fonts can be unpredictable in the high resolution imagesetters used in the offset printing process.

Do not "style" a font if the style font file doesn't exist. Some fonts do not have italic or bold styles. Using the style buttons in the layout application will make it look as if you have made an italic or bold version of the font and it may print OK on your printer, but it will most likely fail to print as expected when it goes through the imagesetter. If you're not sure if you have a full set of styles for a particular font, check the list of font files in your font manager (such as Adobe Type Manager or Font Book) to be sure. Mac users should avoid using font style buttons entirely. Actual font styles are specified by the font name and are listed directly in the font list.

If reversing type out of a background color (such as white type on a black background), be sure the type is strong enough to hold. Serif type often needs to be bold for this to work well. Consider using a sans serif typeface as these generally have an even thickness throughout and work better in a reverse-print situation.

Working with Images

Save images in "tif" format. This is the most predictable and stable format for high resolution printing across different systems and platforms. Never use "bmp," "wmf," "jpg," "gif." Use "eps" only if absolutely necessary, such as in two-color logos.

Make sure images are at high enough resolution for high quality reproduction. Images from digital cameras are often saved at 72 dpi, which looks fine on screen and when printed from a computer printer. Offset printing requires a much higher resolution for images to look sharp and clear.

Size images at 100% of the size they will appear in the layout and save at 266 dpi for printing on uncoated paper. For printing on coated (glossy) paper, 300 dpi is better.

When editing photos, check the image file size before changing dimensions or resolution and make sure that the size after you make changes is not greater than it was before you edited the image. If the file size after editing is greater than that of the original, the quality of the image will have deteriorated.

MAKING CORRECT COLOR SEPARATIONS

One-Color Print Jobs

If the job is to be printed with one color only, then all elements in the layout must be set to one color, typically black. If you intend to have the job printed in a color, say, green, and you wish to see how it will look, it's OK

to set the layout in green, but be sure you use exactly the same green for everything. Images should be set in either bitmap (for line art) or grayscale (for photographs) mode and saved as black tifs, and colored with the same green using the "Item>Modify>Picture>Color Dialog" in Quark. Once you have proofed and finished the layout, change the "proof" color (green) to black, as this is what the printer will need to output a negative for printing.

Full-Color Jobs

Full-color printing is done by reducing all colors to 4 process colors (Cyan, Magenta, Yellow, and Black, known as CMYK). These 4 inks are combined on press to create the illusion of millions of colors. In order for this to happen, the layout must contain only process colors, spot colors (which Quark can reduce to process colors), and CMYK images. Make sure your images are not in RGB mode, which is another color system, incompatible with process printing. To check your color separations, make a pdf file using the procedure described below. Make sure that "convert to process" is selected under "Print>Output>Plates." In this case you want to have 4 "plates" for each page of the layout, one for each process color.

Two-Color Jobs

Two-color jobs are more difficult to prepare, because Quark will not automatically color separate them as it does 4-color jobs. Think in terms of producing 2 printing plates, one for each color. If you have a color logo, it will need to be color-separated in Photoshop using spot channels and saved as a DCS2 eps file. If you are uncertain how to do this, or whether your logo design is appropriate for 2-color separation, please ask—we can help you with this.

As for the rest of the layout, make sure photos and single-color line art are prepared as for one-color jobs (see above), and then they can be colored in Quark with either of the 2 colors used in the job. Again, make sure that if you are using, say, blue and red, you use the exactly the same blue and the same red for every element in the layout, and that only that blue and red are used—no other colors anywhere.

If you can make a pdf file, check the separations by making a pdf with the "separations" box checked and registration marks turned on (File>Print). Make sure to select "Used Process & Spot" in the "File>Print>Output>Plates" dialog. This will let you preview the separations to make sure that you have 2 and only 2 plates (for each page of the layout) printing with any part of your design on them. If you have more than 2 plates per layout page in the pdf figure out what part of the design is printing separately and why. Don't worry if you get a page that has only cropmarks on it—that doesn't count and will be eliminated by the printer. If you have elements that aren't printing at all on any plate, that is another puzzle you must solve.

Collect for Output

When you're finished the layout and are ready to give the files to the printer, do a "collect for output." (File>Collect for Output). This will gather the layout, all the image files, and the fonts into a "package" you can put on a disk for the printer. Make sure to check all the appropriate boxes in the dialog to have Quark collect the images and the fonts. It's a good idea to save the "collect" to a separate folder so it will be easy to find when you are ready to burn your disk. Before burning the disk, confirm that the folder does contain the layout, image, and font files.

PDF Files

If you make pdf files of your project, be sure you use the "press optimized" setting, and if prompted, say that you do want to include all the fonts. Otherwise, the file will be saved at low resolution and may not contain the necessary fonts. If you are unsure or inexperienced in making pdf files for offset printing, include the native files (Quark layout, image files, and fonts) along with your pdf on your disk.

Please Ask Us

If you have questions, concerns, or problems with your design or layout, it is much better to consult with the printer earlier rather than later or to simply hope for the best. Questions asked early can save headaches and expense later.