

Make it Easy on Yourself: Simplifying Print Ordering



Which kind of print buyer are you?

Print buyer #1: your job description includes buying printing; printing is an integral part of your company's product or service; printed materials facilitate your company's processes; printed materials are essential to sales and marketing; part of your annual performance evaluation includes how well you manage the printing.

Print buyer #2: your job description doesn't have anything to do with printing; buying printing is a nuisance, an annoyance, or both; your company always seems to be running out of things, forcing you to place rush orders or beg for fast delivery; you were designated the print buyer for no particular reason.

As different as these descriptions are, they do have something in common: when the printing doesn't show up at the right time or if there's a problem with it, the print buyer suffers.

If you've been our customer for a while, you know that we are usually sensitive to your situation and have designed our entire company around being dependable – delivering what you order on time, without error, and at the agreed-upon price. You also know that we can't do our job properly without your help. So in this issue of *Your Printing and Mailing Resource* we will cover some ways to make print buying easier for you.

Understanding the basics

Printing is a manufacturing process, and each order we produce is a custom job. Even if we have a supply of preprinted business card shells or letterhead masters, when it comes time to imprint with specific information, the job is still custom manufacturing.

Like all custom manufacturing, print projects require *specifications* – the precise instructions for how the item is to be made.

The specifications are written by our customer service representatives, Jeannette Jacobson and Mark Daley, and entered on a *job ticket*. Because the specifications are critical to the outcome of the item, we have developed standards for writing the instructions that includes both a standard vocabulary and a uniform way of presenting the instructions. We also include a sample of what is being produced (either a previous print, or a signed proof).

We also have *production standards* that govern the manufacturing process. Basically, the production standards tell us how long to allow for each manufacturing step, and when each step must be completed in order to meet the delivery date. Production standards are determined by the capability and capacity of our equipment.

Besides the amount of time to complete each step in the manufacturing process, we need additional time to enter the order and write the specifications; wait for needed materials to arrive (such as paper that we do not stock); make press plates or process files for our digital printing equipment; and package. We automatically figure the time for those activities when we commit to a delivery date.

What we need from you

There are three things we need from you:

Enough time to produce the job. Ideally we'd like the amount of time indicated by our production standards – basically, one day for each activity (order entry, prepress, printing, bindery, packaging, delivery). On those occasions where you need the job faster than production standards dictate, we may be able to shave off some time.

But we can't change the laws of physics. Even if we stop all other work in order to produce twelve bound copies of a 15-page

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PowerPoint presentation from your file, we won't be able to complete the job while you drive to our store on your way to the meeting.

Good files. If you will be preparing documents yourself, please learn the basics of file construction and how to prepare files for us. This is a different set of skills than design and may not be anything you have previously encountered. Some examples of file construction are: setting the panel dimensions of a trifold brochure to allow for folding; shifting the margins on right- and left-hand pages of a manual to allow for binding or drilling (hole punching); extending an image that bleeds by 1/8th inch beyond the trim lines and adding trim lines.

In addition, use the right software tools – a page layout program (Microsoft Publisher; Adobe PageMaker or InDesign; Quark XPress are standards) if you are submitting a native application file; or an Adobe-distilled PDF file if using something besides the standards.

Timely approval of proofs. The final proof is an insurance policy for both of us. It gives us a clear, unambiguous picture of what we are going to produce, and gives you an objective measuring tool for determining whether we've filled your order correctly. Our policy is not to proceed to press nor commit to a final delivery date until you have signed off on the final proof. Therefore, to help us keep your project on schedule, please return all interim proofs and the final proof promptly.

Simplifying the ordering

So how can you simplify the print ordering process to make it less time consuming and more reliable? We have several suggestions, depending on whether you are ordering something for the first time, reordering, or need delivery at a specific time.

First-time Order

When you are developing a new form or making major revisions to an existing form that changes the previous specifications, contact us so we can discuss what you have in mind. No matter how long you've been buying printing or how experienced you are, since it is our business to know about printing we will almost always have something to offer. There may be new papers or new technologies that you

should be aware of, or an alternate way to produce the item.

Ask us for a quotation as soon as the specifications are firm, or tell us what budget has been set so we can develop specifications to fit the budget. Neither of us wants the disappointment of discovering well into a new project that it has to be significantly altered because of cost.

If developing an item that has a lot of copy (such as a brochure or a newsletter), write the copy and have it approved before beginning design and layout. Knowing how much copy needs to fit on a panel or a newsletter page helps the designer select the organizing grid and graphic elements such as stock photography and clip art.

Reorder

Take advantage of the information we have about your printed items. We keep an order history and can tell you the interval between reorders. In fact, you may remember a time when Jeannette or Mark suggested you increase or decrease the quantity because of the reorder interval.

For items that change infrequently, let us keep the file or artwork in our prepress department. We safeguard customer files with daily backup; we also archive files on CD. We store hard copy artwork in jackets away from light and dust.

Reorder Online

For your items that don't change (or that change very infrequently) we offer an online ordering system we call a *gateway* through our web site. We can include any items you wish in the *gateway* and even install an approval level if needed.

Need delivery by a specific date

When you are working on a project such as a newsletter or direct mail piece for which there is a designated mail date, or if you need an item by a specific date for an event, ask us for a project timeline. The timeline contains all the project steps – both yours and ours – and the last day each must be completed if the schedule is to be met. Securing a project timeline as soon as you know the delivery date is a great way to help keep not just us, but also your team members on schedule.



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