



Prepress Tips in Desktop Publishing

1. Panel Sizes that are all the same width.

Design multi-panel brochures with different sized panels. (Each highlighted brochure type is linked to a graphic with dimensions.)

The most common brochure is the tri-fold, which has three panels and folds letter style. The inside panel that is folded in first should be a 1/16" to 1/8" smaller than the other two. This allows the smaller panel to fold in and lie flat. If it were not shorter, the brochure would buckle.

A roll fold brochure has four or more panels on each side with each panel folding into the next. The cover panel and the panel right next to the cover are usually the same size. These will be the biggest panels. Each panel after that should get incrementally smaller by 1/16".

Some other types of folds that require different panel sizes are gate folds, double parallel folds, double gate fold, and Z-folds. For other types of brochures, call for the correct specifications. Building your brochure to the proper size is easier than going in to adjust the size after the job is completed.

2. Stylized type - bold, italic, shadows, outlines

Graphics programs make it easy to change the look of a font by using the style attributes such as italic and bold. These styles may revert to plain when sending the file through a high-end RIP (raster image processor) used by printers and service providers. This happens if the stylized font does not have a printer font in that family to support the style.

Check inside the font suitcase or font navigator for the style types available. When making a word bold, select the bold font instead of clicking on the bold attribute.

The other style problems are shadows and outlines. Text with these attributes will not trap, ultimately causing problems on press.

The best way to apply shadows is by layering the same text box with a slight offset to produce a shadow or by creating the shadows in a drawing program. Outlined type should also be created in a drawing program or select a font that is already outlined.

3. Misnamed or extra colors in files

Inconsistently named Spot colors differently named from one program to another. For example, the spelling for the color Pantone 185 is different from Illustrator to Quark to Photoshop so you end up with three different names for one color. When separations are printed, each of these names produces a different plate.

To avoid this, edit the color names in each application so the spellings are the same in supporting graphics and in the page layout program. Always print separations of your project so you can double check the color break and number of plates. Preflight software such as Flight Check will flag these problems for you.

4. RGB Images

Scanners use the RGB color mode (red, blue and green.) It is necessary to convert scans to CMYK (cyan, magenta, yellow and black) before the separating the files. CMYK is the color gamut used in commercial printing.

RGB is a broader color spectrum so the colors you see in the original scan will look different once converted. Usually scans get darker when converted from RGB to CMYK. Have your designer do the conversion so they can witness the color shift and necessary adjustments made. Leaving images in RGB mode when sent to the printer means the file will take longer to prep and possible dissatisfaction with the outcome. Please do not supply images as RGB.



5. Missing Bleed

Apply bleed. When objects extend the edge of the paper by 1/8" to ?? it is called a bleed. For example, if a page has a background color of black, the black area should hang over the trim marks instead of stopping at the edge. Without bleed, slight shifts in the cutting equipment result in paper showing at the edges where ink is supposed to be. To have a neat appearance with color going to the edge of the trimmed paper, a bleed is necessary

Adding bleed is usually not difficult. The problem occurs when the object that needs to bleed off the edge of the page is a graphic such as a Photoshop file. If the file doesn't contain enough image to extend another 1/8" to ?? Once it's reached the printer, it is difficult and costly for them to create it. Design images that require a bleed with this in mind. Adding 1/8" to ?? to a complicated Photoshop file before it reaches the printer's prepress department will save you time and money.

6. No folding sample provided to printer

Making a folding dummy serves two purposes.

- a) It allows you to check your design and panel sizes in a folded down piece. This is an opportunity to focus on mailing specs and placement of design elements.
- b) It is a safeguard. There is no confusion for the printer as to the type of fold you want. Even though the fold may be obvious to you based on the design, it might not be apparent to the printer. Printers see a variety of folding pieces from many different designers. Always document any information when communicating with the printer.

7. Photoshop files created without trap

Building Photoshop files with text and other placed images is getting easier, due to upgrade improvements. However, when creating files entirely in Photoshop or some other pixel-based program results in losing the ability to easily trap your files. A Rampage automated trap system will trap almost anything including two separate Photoshop files that are touching. Like other trap systems, it cannot trap a file that is one continuous tone. To trap effectively in Photoshop, you or your designer must manually trap while creating the file. Adding a trap afterwards is extremely difficult.

For example, if you place blue type on top of a yellow background in Photoshop, you need to slightly extend the yellow into the blue type. This is what would happen if the trap software could go in and trap that area. Without this overlap, the slight shifting that naturally occurs on press between colors will cause a white halo to appear around one side of the type. This is the paper showing through.

Apply a trap to all objects that don't have any colors in common. Dark blue type on a light blue background would be OK because these objects would have cyan in common. When in doubt, apply a trap.

Trapping is a complicated process, which is why printers invest in sophisticated equipment to take care of it. If you are unsure how to manually trap a Photoshop file, talk to one of our Production Specialists or email us at prepresshelp@valassis.com. Also, build as much of your design as possible in a page layout program or drawing program such as Quark, Adobe Illustrator, or Adobe InDesign. These files are trapped with the automated trapping equipment.

8. Low resolutions scans

Prepress output devices print at very high resolutions. Our plate setter can go as high as 4,000 dpi; the standard is 2400 dpi for a 150-line screen (300 dpi). The general rule is the pixels per inch in a scan should be 1.5 to 2 times the line screen. It is better to error on the high side; so 300 ppi (300 dpi) would be appropriate for 150-line screen.

Low-resolution scans will print grainy or pixilated when output to high-end devices. Resizing scans up will also reduce the resolution. A scan placed at 200% has half the resolution of the original.

Monitors and laser printers are generally not a good way to judge image quality. Monitors are only 72 or 96 dpi and most laser printers range from 300 to 600 dpi, well below the 2400 dpi in an image setter. Pay attention to the image size information and if possible, use a preflight program to warn of low-resolution files.

Note: Scanning at resolutions higher than 2 times the line screen doesn't improve the quality of your scan; it just makes the file size bigger and adds unnecessary processing time when the file is RIPing. Do this only if you are unsure of the size needed or if you will be re-using the scan in other projects.



9. Incorrect mail pieces

It is extremely important to check with the US Post Office Web site for correct size and data specifications for your mailer. This is a useful tool if you are unsure about mail regulations. Some common errors include indicia and bar codes in the wrong spot, post cards that are too small or mailers that have the folds on the wrong end.

Know what the rules are before designing your mailer and don't hesitate to talk directly to the Post Office. They are very willing to help you plan your project and may find ways for you to save money.

10. Using low-end proofs for color matching

Low-end color proofs do not show accurate color. The best way to judge color is to calibrate your equipment, use Pantone swatches and four color swatches and expect the high-end color proof from the printer to look different from your color lasers. Ask your printer to produce color proofs of your scans if you want to see accurate color before the assembling the scans.

When showing color lasers to customers, designers should explain the variance in colors between the different equipment. This prevents surprises when delivering the contract proof or printed piece to the client. Remember, color changes from printer to printer, from RGB to CMYK to Pantone Process Colors. Exact color matching is very difficult and you should allow for slight variances in color.

11. Transparencies

Valassis recommends the following regarding the use of the Transparency feature available in Adobe Illustrator and InDesign: The transparency feature in Adobe Illustrator and InDesign may look good on screen, but can print very unpredictably when the file is processed for print production. If your design requires the use of this feature, be extremely cautious, particularly if objects containing spot colors are layered over each other, or over placed raster art. You can preview if your file has transparency effects by using the Flatten Preview window available in both applications (be sure Transparent Objects are selected). Flatten transparencies using the preset of High Resolution. Save your file as an EPS to be placed into your ad layout prior to sending to Valassis or generating Hi-res PDF's for Valassis. And always be sure to use your flattened file when generating proofs. Valassis is not responsible for files supplied containing un-flattened transparencies being misinterpreted during processing for print production.