



Creating press-ready artwork

Preferred Format

High-resolution Adobe Acrobat PDF files are our preferred file format for supplying artwork for print. When set up correctly, PDF files simplify the whole process of supplying artwork. All fonts and graphics are embedded into the one file; the size of the file is smaller and can often be sent via email; and while not completely providing a “what you see is what you get” environment, the PDF format goes along way to uncovering any problems your source files may have before travelling too far down the production path.

The best (most reliable) option to produce PDF files is to create a postscript file on your computer and then make the PDF file by processing it through Acrobat Distiller. Please note the Acrobat PDF writer doesn't yield reliable results for complex artwork as it was designed for producing PDF's for screen viewing only and does not contain enough data for high quality output. This is also the case when directly exporting to pdf from the native application and we strongly recommend against creating PDF files for print using this method.

First Things First

Before creating a postscript file on your computer it is important you check your source file to ensure it does not contain errors that will be transferred to the pdf file. While it is impossible to cover every issue regarding artwork preparation in this newsletter, please find below a list of our most commonly encountered problems.

All artwork must include a 3mm bleed. That is, if any printed element touches the edge of your page then it needs to be extended 3mm past the trim edge on your artwork.

All lines or rules should be at least 0.25 points. Hairline rules do not print well at high resolution.

All imported pictures/links are updated or “ok” in the source file.

Use correct colour format in your job. If the job is to be printed in 4 process colours (CMYK) then make sure you are not using RGB images or spot colours. If in doubt print the job to your black & white desktop printer and click on “colour separations” — “all”. This will print out each colour used in your file on a separate page. If the job is printed in spot colours (pms colour) make sure they are name consistently throughout the job. Note, pms 301CV and PMS 301CVC will result in two different printing plates. This simple check of printing colour separated laser prints cannot be recommended too highly. It also allows you to check on trapping of colours (see point below).

Generally speaking black should always be set to overprint and all other colours, especially white, should be set to knockout. White that overprints, by definition, won't come out on the plate. Furthermore, when black overprints on an image you will get different shades of black as the image varies in density. This is a very common problem when a picture box extends underneath a black solid. In this case the black needs to be set to “knockout”.



To achieve dense black solids it is best to create a “rich black”. We recommend 100% black and 60% cyan. Text black should be 100% black only and not a mix of cmyk or registration (all colours).

Avoid setting small or fine-line type, or fine-line rules in process colours or reversed out of process colours.

Choose font styles on the font menu not the style bar. In Windows the style bar may be the only place to style type but be sure the actual styles are available. Avoid outline and shadow styles.

Make sure all printer and screen fonts used in the job and in EPS files are available on your system.

Check Illustrator layers for hidden items that could print.

Images (raster files) should be 300dpi and not enlarged beyond 120%. Line art (vector files) should be set at 800dpi or more.

Knife line included in your artwork for jobs to be diecut. The knife line should be set up as a colour that is not being used in the job and set to overprint.

Blends/vignettes are best created using the gradient option in Photoshop or Illustrator.

Place a background fill of white for all tiff picture boxes in Quark XPress.

If your document ‘setup’ in Illustrator does not match your final artwork size you need to create trim/crop marks to indicate final size of printed item. Illustrator is able to create crop marks using the Index menu option.

Next Step

Once your job is ready to go, it is worthwhile to “preflight” the file using either the built in feature in InDesign or a third party product such as Flightcheck. Once you are satisfied everything is in order, you can use these programmes to “package” or “collect” the job for output. This process will gather all the fonts, graphics, and the source file itself, and place them neatly in the one folder. If you want to supply your artwork in this format and plan to email it through, please be sure to use a compression programme (Winzip or Stuffit) because fonts notoriously corrupt if emailed without the protection of a compressed folder.

The Final Steps

To supply a print-ready pdf (did we mention this is our preferred format for artwork!) you simply need to create a postscript file then process this file in Acrobat Distiller. “Printing” a postscript file to your computer varies from programme to programme and we would be happy to talk you through the steps if need be. However, there are 3 basic things to be aware of which seem to cause most of the problems.

1. When setting up your paper size in the print window, make sure you have made it sufficiently larger than your finished artwork size so that the pdf file will include bleeds and trim marks. For example, for an A4 (297mm x 210mm) document it would be advisable to set your paper size as 317mm x 230mm which gives you 10mm all round to capture your trim marks and bleeds.
2. Ensure all fonts will be included/downloaded in the post-scripting process.
3. Ensure when options are given to make things as high a resolution or quality as possible.

Once a postscript file has been created process this file in Acrobat Distiller using the “Press Optimised” option and with a little bit of luck you should have a beautiful print-ready file.