

Promotion — The Basics of Ordering Four-Colour Printing

You've designed a beautiful brochure, flyer, postcard or invitation, with a photograph of some of your work. You want to have it professionally printed in glorious full colour. Before you take it to a printer, there are some technical aspects to consider. Printers usually have specific requirements for the types of computer files they can work from. It's important to find out what these are.

The technical jargon can be overwhelming. As an example, one Canadian printing company lists on their Web site that they only accept files in Quark Xpress 4.0, Photoshop 4.0 or 5.0, and Illustrator 7.0 or 8.0. They further note that "Quark 4.0 files using new effects may not print properly, so do any effects in Illustrator. Save Quark 4.0 back to Quark 3.32." Another printer can use Quark Xpress, Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Illustrator and Aldus PageMaker, but in different versions depending on whether it's for a Mac or a PC.

If you'd like to proceed and prepare your work yourself for a printer, there are four basic points to remember that can mean the difference between a great print job and a surprising disappointment. While some printers will warn you if your files have problems, others may not, printing from what you provide and expecting payment even if you're dissatisfied with the result. Here are the four basic points:

- 1. Convert colours to CMYK.** These letters stand for cyan, magenta, yellow and black. All four-colour printed work is the result of combining these four colours in different percentages. Computers, scanners and digital cameras create images using combinations of red, green and blue (known as RGB colours). For printing, you must translate your RGB file to CMYK.
- 2. Include the fonts used for text.** To make sure that your text looks the way you want, make copies of the fonts and send the copies of the fonts with your other files to the printer.
- 3. Provide high-resolution images.** Make sure that the images you provide have a resolution of 300 dpi, or dots per inch, and they are scanned at the size you want them to appear. To make colours smooth and edges sharp, don't try to enlarge an image that was scanned. Don't consider using images from Web sites; they are usually only 72 dpi and will be blurry if printed.
- 4. Provide logos in EPS files.** Unlike bitmap or dpi images, EPS files can be enlarged as much as desired, without losing sharpness.

If handling these details doesn't appeal to you, you can hire the short-term help you need. Graphic designers or desk-top publishers may be able to prepare your files for printing more easily than you can.