

This section from the book, '14 Ways to Squeeze a Print Budget' contains descriptions of specific strategies that have helped some companies get the most out of their print budgets. These ideas are examples and do not attempt to cover the full range of possibilities that may be available for your company.

If you would like to investigate a new approach for your work, contact us for a free, no pressure consultation.

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3. Good artwork file preparation

Cost to Fix Art Files

It costs about \$75 to \$150 per hour to fix files in a sheetfed or web plant. Digital printing companies often charge less, and some even figure fixing file time into their hourly digital printing rates.

Lost Sales Because of a Delayed Selling Tool

Maybe you're printing something that's part of a distribution with a definite deadline like a trade show or another event, and file-related delays make it impossible to include that selling tool at the event. The profits lost may be a high multiple of the total cost of printing.

Causes of Missed Errors

The more errors that have to be fixed in files after getting a proof, the greater the chances are that there will be unfixed errors that end up getting printed. Also, with a deadline for an event, the more things are rushed the higher the odds get.

In financial printing where large jobs are often printed within 24 hours, it's not uncommon to end up baling skids of 48 page sections even though someone is checking the sections page by page off the press. The more times the proof is marked up for changes, the greater the likelihood that something gets past those who check.

Checking Basics

In a perfect world, one person is trained and authorized to check proofs before they can go to a printer, and that person cannot be the person who prepared the artwork.

Corrections should be batched, and a new internal proof generated and checked each time you believe you've noted and fixed all the required corrections. If that cannot be done for the entire book, do it by section until it's completed.

Keep a simple log and note required corrections by section.

It's important as well not to assume that when corrections are made to one part of a section, that good sections aren't affected when handling the files. The same is true for areas that have been corrected earlier. Assume nothing – check the entire document each time a file is handled.

When you get a proof from a printer, check the entire proof and avoid the tendency to just check for earlier corrections. Errors even happen to pdf files when files are processed for proofing and plating.

When you 'sign off' on a proof, you're essentially saying that if the printed job is the same as it is represented by the proof, that you will pay the amount that's in your purchase order. You might as well take the time to be sure!

Checklist for Good File Preparation

File submission

- The disk has been properly labeled with company name, contact name, phone number and job name(s).
- A directory of the disk content has been printed and is supplied with the disk.
- Only files to be imaged are on the supplied disk.
- Each job on the disk has a unique file name.
- All elements used in the creation of the document (illustrations, images, fonts) have been grouped with the document file and placed in separate folders on the disk – Quark users should collect for output.
- A backup of all files has been used.
- A hard copy proof containing 100% of the file information has been provided.
- The proof indicates trims, bleeds, folds, etc.
- The document text has been printed and proofread.
- Original files are supplied in case editing is necessary.

Font preparation

- All fonts used have been submitted (including those used in imported graphics).
- Both screen and printer fonts have been supplied.
- Stylized fonts were not used in the document.
- Fonts look smooth, not bitmapped or chunky, on laser proof.

Color preparation

- Colors to be printed as ‘spot’ have the process separation button selected as OFF.
- Colors to be printed as ‘process’ have the process separation button selected as ON.
- Custom register or crop marks have been assigned a Registration color of 100C, 100M, 100Y, 100K.
- Items to be printed in Black are not assigned registration color.
- Unused colors have been deleted from the color palettes of both the illustration files and the page layout file.
- Each color has one specific name that is used in all applications (i.e., both Quark and Illustrator list red as ‘300 CV’ – no variation is allowed, not even 300 CVU’).
- A laser proof has been printed ‘as separations’ and the correct number of pages were produced.
- Trapping has been checked.
- Dot gain, screen ruling, and ink number and colors have been verified.

Scans & images

- Proofs (chromalin, color key, dylux, laser, etc) have been requested.
- The desired screen rulings and dot shapes have been specified (for film output jobs).
- Files have a final image resolution of 1.5 to 2 times the screen ruling.
- Scanned images have been cropped and rotated prior to placement within the page layout document.
- Scans and graphics have been converted to CMYK, grayscale – or duotone for spot color jobs only.
- Scans and graphics have been saved as either EPS or TIFF files.
- No TIFF files have a background of ‘none.’

Page layout

- Page setup/document size is correct, as specified in the estimate.
- Allowances have been made for ¼” bleeds.
- Scanned images were not enlarged beyond 110% within the page layout program.
- Extraneous page elements placed on the pasteboard have been deleted (unused anchor points, etc).