

20 Insider Print Buying Tips Revealed

How to get the best prices and service every time, automatically and without asking

By Steve Robison



Quick hit tips inside this report: Establish a trust relationship with a professional printer. They can save you money. Find a printer that understands lifetime value, has a bold guarantee and gives you “client” status. Discuss your print project with your professional printer before you start it.. Ask for suggestions when you know of no other question to ask.

Forward

If you are reading this, it means you have purchased printing for your business from various sources and never settled in with at least one professional. Many companies do business with more than one printing company. So, that is OK. Each printer has a niche and can do some things better than other printers do. Once you discover one or more printers who fit your business, you'll find your print buying to be a profitable venture.

If you have limited capability to design your own forms, stationery or marketing collateral then you may find this report especially useful.

Hello, my name is Steve Robison. I am both an expert print buyer and a print professional. For many years, I had the sole responsibility for buying printing at various companies before I became a print professional. I have walked both sides of the street.

Now I am going to give you "*20 Insider Tips*" that are flat guaranteed to make your print buying task easier with a lot less stress.

Theses tips are not all inclusive. It is just the beginning. There is much, much more that can be written. This report will give you the best foundation to making the street-smart decisions you need to get the most value out of every dollar you spend on printing, and maybe even how to make more money doing it. More about that later. Let's get started.

On the following page is a list of some of the topics. There are far more than 20 tips included within (sneaky bonus). If you know of something you think should be added to this report, please feel free to email me steve@toledoprinter.com or call the office (419) 246-0857. I appreciate all comments, compliments and gripes ☺

20 Insider Print Buying Tips Revealed

How Print Professionals can save your business \$, \$\$\$

---by an expert print buyer

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Smiley graphic= Bonus “tip”



1. Looking for Value? It takes one to know one.

Don't you just love it when you get a bonus you weren't expecting? Maybe it is a baker's dozen when buying doughnuts or your lawn service spends extra time manicuring the hedge row or the gas station attendant offers to check the air in your tires. (Fat Chance, eh) However, that is value-added, wouldn't you agree? The price is the same even if they didn't do that.

If value is really what you are looking for when you buy printing, and it should be, then you absolutely must look for something other than price. We print professionals love to compete for your business. However, bouncing around is not going to do you justice. You should find one or two print professionals and work with them. The right one can make money for you once you get to know and trust them.

At West Printing we earned the trust from some of our clients so much so that they just wouldn't think of making changes in their marketing scenarios without consulting with us. If you haven't considered this in working with your print provider, then you simply haven't found a true print professional who is more than a commodity supplier. **In which case, you are leaving money on the table.**

Consider for a moment your business's competitors. You know who is doing it right and who does quality work. Printers are the same. Your job is to find one or two that will actually become an asset for your business.

Secondly, you have favorite vendors don't you? Why, because it is always easier when you are on a trusted and first name basis with any of your vendors. It causes each to remember and act responsibly; always in the best interest of the other.



2. How to find a professional printer you can work with

A great way to locate someone who can print for you is to ask your business colleagues. Get a referral. Every printer has a different capability and personality, just like your business does. That's important because a professional printer will bend over backwards to help you if they feel they are part of your team.

You can also find a printer by networking at Chamber events or sifting the yellow pages of your local telephone book, and you may get lucky. The best printer for you may not have an advertisement though. Many printers rely on referrals to do their marketing. And, those that do advertise may not be a printer best suited to your needs.

If you can't get a referral from a colleague, and you don't have time to network, the road will not be so smooth. Go to Google, Yahoo, MSN or whatever your favorite internet search engines. In the search box type "Printer+Toledo" or "brochures+Toledo", or some other print product and observe the results.

In Google, if you want to shop locally, ignore the advertisements on the right side of the page. Those ads aren't usually local even if the word "Toledo" does appear in them. Naturally, you can put in any subject or location but this is just an example of how to find a printer in your locality via the internet. The plus (+) sign tells the search engine to show results with both words.

If you call or email a selection of printers gleaned from non referral sources and ask them "How much does it cost to print business cards", that is just about the worst way in the world to establish a relationship. You are going about it all wrong. Listen up, there is a way to do it right.

The internet is a great time saver if you know what you are doing. Just as it will give you totally useless and misleading information leading to expensive results.

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We get tire-kicker requests all the time. We know what they are; people looking for the lowest price or gauging their current print provider's prices. Now, there is nothing at all wrong with seeking a very fair price. Who wants to pay more than fair market value? Nobody does.

However, understand this; telephone shoppers tend to assume all printing companies are alike. **Big mistake!** The caller may get a price but they'll never, ever get the best price. Why is that? It is because that is not how professionals buy printing from professionals. So, don't do it or you will stick out like a zit on your Grandpa.

Let me explain briefly. First, it is a rare occasion that prospective buyers will have all the information needed to justify a proper quote. (See the section later on how to ask for a quote.) Often, seekers do not know or respect all the variables of quantity, paper stocks, artwork preparation, production times and proofing. You wouldn't call a tailor and ask how much a black suit costs would you?



Now, this is not to say we aren't happy to talk with a prospect. In point of fact, we are happy to talk with prospects—but only those who respect our time and expertise. A prospective print buyer who will say up front they need “X” product and say “I don't know how to proceed” will get a lot better service. And, most likely get the warm hand-holding they need.

Experienced print buyers will usually have at least minimal specifications or digital artwork ready, and maybe a hard copy we can review. Many times professional print buyers know what paper stocks and quantities they want quotes on. Not always though because smart buyers call their trusted printer early in the process. Sometimes they just ask for ranges and suggestions. Never be afraid to ask for suggestions. If you know of no other question to ask, always ask for suggestions.



It is an unwritten rule among printers that the best prices and services are reserved for trusted clients. As a first time buyer, you might get a quote on a job that you feel is a fair price but it won't be the best price. Best prices include many intangible values that have to be earned from your side of the equation. It is a two-way street. What you should seek is to become a trusted client. A whole new world will open for you.

3. Leaving it to Someone Else to Choose Does Not Develop value for You

If you are responsible for print buying, do not rely solely on an outside third party to choose a print professional or parse a quote for you.

We see this happen mostly when companies, such as yours, hire advertising agencies or graphic designers (who are not also printing companies) to do the work. Sure, it seems like a one-stop shop but it is not uncommon for problems to arise.

Don't get me wrong. We love the graphic arts folks and Ad agencies. They give us a lot of business, even if they do operate from the other side of the brain.

If you do choose to let someone else choose your printer, this is akin to having your attorney buy your insurance, do your banking, or hire accountants. You can do it that way but you'll never get full value, being out of the loop. The third party will be developing the value with the print professional, not you. You might be paying more and waiting longer to get the job done.

If you hire a company who is not, also a print professional to design your marketing pieces it is just fine to ask the agency for suggestions of printers who could do the work. It is customary for them to shop quotes from printing companies for you.



However, as a newbie buyer, YOU should not make the final decision without speaking with the print professional. There is money to be saved here because dedicated designers often make eye candy designs that cost more to print. A Print pro can tell you if there is a way to print something at a lesser cost without changing the overall design and intent.

Know also that the agency locating the printer for you is likely to markup the printing fee to account for agent's time involved, as they should. Knowing who to go to is a value added service your agent is performing. You need to know what this is in order to assess the overall cost.

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Further, in order to get the best value from the print professional, you should interview them or at least talk with them on the telephone to establish some minimal working relationship. Once the design work is done, you will still need the print professional for reprints. Better to know now who is handling your stuff.

Let me give you an example of how it went badly for one person.

A couple of weeks ago a frantic lady from out of town called and wanted to know if we had printed a job for her. Our customer service rep had no record. It seems the lady was working with a designer and planned the launch of a new product next week. The designer told her marketing collateral was going to be printed locally. Recently however the designer was not answering emails or phone calls. Disappeared so-to-speak.

So, Ms. Frantic Googled up our website in hopes that it was us who did the work. No chance. We did not know the designer so we could not help her. We made calls to other designers in the area that may know the absent one. We couldn't help but feel badly for the lady.

Letting someone else choose for you is not the way to go if you are looking for value. It doesn't matter that you don't know anything about printing. If you are relying on an outside third party to make a print provider decision, they will be looking for what is best for them, not necessarily you.

You should make the decision with an eye toward having a long term relationship in mind.



That's how you get value with a print professional or designer who also provides printing services within their facility. That is how you start down the road to getting more than you expect or pay for.

As a final comparison, think about your customers and why they buy from you. What is the value your company delivers and what are the odds they will buy from you if you fail to take care of them? You want a lifetime value relationship, not a quick-hit cheap one, don't you?

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Next, we will tell you exactly how to know when you have found the right printer. It will become clear why you need to get to know your print professional as a service partner. Lifetime value works both ways.

4. Seek and Nurture Lifetime Value Arrangements with Your Customers and Vendors

This lifetime value concept is a little difficult to understand for some business people because they don't trust anyone. Too bad for them

Let's look at it this way. "Lifetime Value" of your customers means the total sum of all sales to a customer for the period they are your customer. Think of all of the customers you have in your business. How many have been doing business with you more than five years? Did you stop to think five years ago that a customer would still be buying from you? Probably not. However, during the last five years, how much revenue has that customer brought to you? Do you remember their first order?

Let's say that the first order was \$100. Depending on your industry, maybe \$100 isn't a lot to get excited about. However, that customer continued to spend \$100 a month with you over the next five years. So now what do you have? ($\$100 \times 60 = \$6,000.00$) What would you do for to retain a customer who has done \$6,000.00 of business with you? Do you now have a better understanding of the value of a lifetime relationship?

Your goal is to find a print professional who appreciates "Lifetime Value" as much as you do no matter the size of the job you are buying or selling.

5. Work With a Printer Who Gives You "Client" Status

At West Printing Company, we do not use the word "customer" very often. Everybody who gives us money in exchange for our valuable services is at the least on the fast track to becoming a "client" Some hire us once or twice a year, some hire us weekly. They are all important and receive the absolute best effort and professionalism we can muster every day.

While your print professional seeks the lofty goal of perfection on every job, nobody is perfect. Yes, it is true. No matter how hard we try, sometimes we fall on our faces. Something is printed

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wrong and it may not even be our fault. Nevertheless, do you know what? We solve the issue as quickly as possible. The mission is to get the error corrected. Even though it means we lose a little money on the job, we move forward because we understand “Lifetime Value” Our clients appreciate and depend on us, and they tell us so.

What happens if the client makes a mistake; should not we re-print for less cost? This is the brutal truth; it costs us virtually the same the first time as the second time. It takes the same paper, ink and labor. So be kind and we’ll be kind.

The Printer may be willing to take less profit second time around on an error the “client” made just because they understand “Lifetime Value”. We want your business. We appreciate your business and the fact that you trusted us with your work.

6. Find a Print Professional that Offers a Bold Guarantee?

If you are looking to separate what’s good about print professionals, ask them about their guarantee if they don’t offer it up voluntarily. Some of us are shy. 😊

As an example, at West Printing Company, we have sought to reverse the risk of buying our services. When a new client is referred to us, we know that we have two customers to please (them and the referring party). Both must have their need met. If we do a mediocre job or don’t render a higher level of service than expected to the new client, it makes the referring client look bad and us look unappreciative. Is that any way to please your friends? Of course not.



Therefore, we provide the same big and bold guarantee to all. Whether it is your first job or your hundredth job with us, It is the same: **If you are not absolutely pleased with our services, you do not pay!**

What could be better? What is the risk to our clients? Zero, Nada, Zip, \$0. Other printers would choke offering this kind of guarantee. They don’t have the same concept of “Lifetime Value” that we do.

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Building trust is important. We want what our clients want and seek to help them by assuming all the risk. Of course our guarantee can be abused. A miniscule number succeed to fool us and what we thought was a client turned in to a monger. So we fire them. Problem solved!

7. How to Ask for References

Ok, so here's the deal. You have talked with a real live professional printer and are uncertain if they are good people and have the capability to handle your jobs.

When you are talking face to face with the prospective printer simply ask them for samples of like kind jobs they have printed for clients and further, ask the prospective printer if they would provide the contact information for you.

We do not normally parade out our portfolio first thing. Nevertheless, we can usually find a similar job in our files. Unless, however unlikely, your job is unlike anything we have seen or done before.

It's that simple. Naturally, we printers aren't going to be touting any work we did that had a sour outcome. Who would? However, this would be an opportunity to ask others how the prospective printer stands behind their work. There is value in that.

Its one thing to have a big bold guarantee, but what happens when things go wrong? For whatever reason. Call a few references and ask them about the jobs done by the prospective printer. Ask them what kinds of hassles they had, if any, with getting the jobs completed on time and on budget.



8. The Story of Just One Way a Company Made Money with Their Print Professional

What if all you need is a black and white office form. How is that going to make you money when a print professional works for you? That's a fair question we are eager to answer. But not easily answered without some explanation

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What we bring to the table is experience with hundreds of businesses. We ask questions.

Knowing your workflow and how you use the form may seem off-track or even prying, after all you just have a form to be printed.

Short story is in order. One of our clients called us and wanted to reproduce a couple of forms. Each form was used in various departments.



(Sidebar: We value your time. We'll always come to your office first if that is your wish. You never have to come to us. One phone call, an email or a fax gets action right now. You are the client, remember? Your time is important)

We discussed with the client how the sales forms are used for infrequent or walk-in cash customers. We then noticed that while there were some distinctions between the forms there were also similarities. A suggestion was made to combine the forms into one. --thus money savings #1.

Further, some departments were copying the forms so we recommended a multipart carbonless form, thus saving on the handling and copy cost-- money savings #2.

One of the forms to be combined was ragged from being copied over and over again and really need to be remade from scratch. The bookkeeping department was accepting discounts on sales because they could not read the terms accurately.

The client had long ago lost the original but we were able to convert the form to an editable format, updated and made as new. -- money savings #3.

Lastly, we observed that the customer contact information fields on the form were incomplete. It did not include email addresses or corporate office contact representatives. Adding these two fields resulted in additional contacts in the sales database and now the company could turn the walk-in or infrequent customers into desired customers, which they did. In the end, a simplistic print job that made money for the client.

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Do you think for a moment if our client just wanted a quote any of this would have happened? See, that's what value added service is all about. That's why our clients get the best prices. It's not what we charge; it's what we ultimately deliver.

We print professional can be a moneymaking or at least a money saving resource for your business. Most business owners understand that they need an attorney, an accountant, a banker and an insurance agent. The smart business owner knows that he needs to seek out a printer who is more than a printer.

9. "I Don't Need All This. Can't I Buy My Printing Online Cheaper?"



The short answer is maybe. As with anything you buy online, you have to know exactly what you want because the only terms are You Pay First. There are an abundance of print resources online. Each has its own niche and criteria. (read the terms or service and pay attention to upcharges, extra fees, and actual delivery/print schedules)

One of the reasons it may seem cheaper to buy printing online is that you generally must confine your purchase with what the company offers. Don't expect to get the kind of customized products and service your local printshop can provide.

Generally, internet printing companies limit the types and weights of paper they offer. Therefore, you can get a nice looking piece as long as you use their specific paper. They do this as cost efficiency. The less time changing a printing press over to print on another kind of paper and ink is decreased cost. These companies also "gang" your job with other customers. That is, several jobs are printed on the same sheet of paper and yours is cut out during finishing. That is how they can keep the costs so low. All jobs and colors are averaged. It works for them.

If you want to start the relationship on the wrong foot Tell us that you want to buy locally and then complain the cost is more expensive than the internet printer. We don't "gang run" Every job is printed one at a time to the exact specification you desire.

More importantly you need to know what to look for in the "fine print" of their Terms of Service. Make sure you understand the "up charges". Your \$149 glossy 4-color business

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brochure may end up being \$349 very quick if your order does not fit the exact scheme. That is not being negative. It just means you did not know what extras might be involved.



You might find that getting customer service to answer your questions may take a while too.

Some only communicate with email, speak in difficult to understand dialect, or will not take the time to fully understand your need. Not that this is any different than anything else you might buy outside your local area from the internet.

So if you ask us for a quote and then tell us you can get it cheaper at BigonlinePrinting.Com, then you should do it. Don't offer the lame excuse that you want to buy local and are surprised at a higher cost than Bigonlineprint.com. If you bought it online before, and got exactly the service you wanted, then the value added service a local printer can provide is of no value to you. Your needs have been met.

With a knowledgeable local printer, you can avoid most of the hassles and have someone to talk with immediately. Yes, it may still be a \$349 brochure or more. But, you can be certain that you got your money's worth with a no-hassle guarantee to boot.



10. How to Save Money with Mail Services

If you are printing marketing collateral, chances are that you want to mail it. Many print providers offer mailing services, as does West Printing. If you plan to mail in quantities over a few hundred you will want to take advantage of mail services resulting in substantially reduced postage and labor.

You can save a load of dough using presorted standard rates and you won't need to buy a postage permit when you use a mailing service provider. First class presorted rates are at least \$0.05 less than first class stamps.

For example, a new client came to us with a monthly mailing of a booklet to hundreds of members. Each booklet was costing \$2.00 for postage. When we used presorted rates for flat pieces, the postage and processing went down to about \$0.55. Think the client wasn't happy about that?

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Your print provider who offers mailing services will accept your database (e.g. Microsoft Excel spreadsheet) of names. They run it through their mailing software to first verify that each is a valid address (that cuts down on undeliverable wasted postage) and then they sort by carrier code and apply the address to the mail piece (costing a few cents), stuff envelopes, seal and finally take to the post office. Saving you a boatload of time and money.

 Here's a tip. Make sure you talk with your print provider during the design process. You'll want to make sure that your layout meets postal codes, especially if you are designing a self-mailer. **The Postal Rules are always changing.**

11. Simple Design Features Flaws Can Cause Your Postage to Be 50% Greater.



Let's say you are doing a sales letter with enclosures into a #10 standard business envelope. If you are mailing it with a first class stamp, currently \$0.44, the maximum weight is 1 ounce. If you pick too heavy a paper for the enclosures or have too many sheets in your sales letter, and the weight goes to 1.25 ounces it will cost another \$0.17. Now your postage cost is \$0.61. That might be alright for a few at a time. However, if you are mailing a couple of hundred that cost adds up quickly.

On the other hand, if you design a post card and with the intent of using the current postcard rate, you have to know that the maximum dimensions are 4.25" X 6.0" for a postcard rate.

You would be better off making the card 4.25" X 5.5" because you will not only qualify for postcard rates but also make maximum use of standard sheet sizes of paper, getting 4 out instead of only 2 out of each sheet. Saves postage and saves printing cost.

There you have it, just a couple of examples for starters and why you should talk with your print professional about your plans for mailing what you print.

12. Printing with Ink Versus Digital Press "Copying". What's the Difference?

This is something you probably do not need to care much about. In the strictest sense of the word, ink printing is performed by first imaging a printing plate. The printing plate is mounted

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on a mechanical device called an ink printing press. The press operator is a highly skilled technician that is able to balance the chemistry solution and ink to reproduce the plated image onto the desired paper. Ink Printing presses can print wonderfully on just about any type of paper.

Copying is a term in our industry that refers to a photocopier. In the old days, we all called them Xerox's. "Xerox" a copy of this for me." No matter the machine was a Minolta or a Cannon. Nowadays, most photocopiers have digital connections, use toner instead of ink and may even be referred to as digital presses whether full color or just black. Printing companies use these machines as efficiently as ink printing presses under the right conditions.

To this end, some print buyers still refer to "printing" as "copies" and do not differentiate the two. That's OK. They just want the results and don't care how it is done.

There are however, some differences between the results you get from an ink printing press and a digital press copier. First, most digital "copiers" cannot print on as wide a variety of paper stocks as an ink printing press. Why should you care? Well here is where you need to trust your print professional to choose the right reproduction method.

For example, if you have black and white (monochrome) job that is a folded brochure with solid color crossing the fold line; it is quite possible you will see cracks along the fold line if the item is output on a digital press type photocopier. That will not be as common if printed on a printing press. Why, because digital press copiers use heat and toner to affix the image. Thus drying out the paper. Whereas, an ink printing press applies a flexible ink without heat or fusing.

13. What Are the Benefits of Printing Digitally, "Copying"?

Most professional printers have adopted a digital workflow to some degree even though they may still use non digital ink printing presses. We receive computer files and use computer assistance to image printing plates. In some cases we printers have invested in presses that automatically image the printing plate and mount it on the press without direct human contact.

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As little as 10 years ago 95% of our jobs required a manual paste-up of graphics and text. Now, less than .05% of our jobs require this skill. On the front end, when we accept a job we make a determination whether it makes sense to use a digital press or an ink printing press to produce the job that meets the clients specifications and budget.

While making a full color digital press perform the work costs a more per piece on longer runs, at some point it is generally less expensive to use an ink printing press.

The advantage of the short-run digital press is that the client can make changes instantly to marketing piece and put it into use. Perhaps 100 copies of a full color single-sided flyer may cost \$0.60 each. But if you wanted to print the same full color 100 pieces on an ink printing press the cost could be several hundred dollars. At some point though in the price vs. quantity curve it will be much less expensive to use the ink press. Likely you will need to print over 1000 pieces. At 5000 pieces it is a no brainer. Ink is the way to go.

Now if you choose the ink press to get a small per piece price but don't use the quantity or it is enough to last your 3 years, what are the chances the piece will be out of style with your business? On the other hand if the inks press prices vs. quantity give you a six-month supply, that's not bad.

(Side Bar: In this age of hi-tech printing equipment, some larger print providers have invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in equipment that removes virtually all differences between the old-fashioned ink printing press and digital presses. While they can do this, it also means they have to run 24 hours a day sometimes in order to make a return on that investment. That can be good for you because the printer may be eager to keep the press time filled. If it is not running, no money is being generated.)

Nevertheless, for very short runs, especially under 500, running it on a color digital press copier is often a better deal. You'll be able to get your job finished days ahead of the same job on an ink printing press. Prices in the print market vary with changes in technology and costs of raw materials so you should not put a lot of weight on \$\$ in the example we have given. But the cost vs. quantity and method of printing will hold true for a few more years.



14. Why Smart Print Buyers Use PDF

A pdf (portable document format) file has largely become the standard for handling print project computer files. If you have ever sent a digital file to your print professional you will have discovered that there are three components to the package. There is (1) the design native file (whatever program you used to create your job), (2) the graphic picture files you used in the project, and (3) the fonts you used.

A few short years ago before PDF became mainstream you had to hope your printer had the same fonts on his computer as you did and also had that same design program as you did and the same type of computer platform (Mac or PC). Even then there were and still are problems when taking files to a commercial printer. Shucks, simply printing you own file to different desktop printer in your office can cause text reflowing.

Some design programs such as InDesign, Corel, Quark, and MS Publisher can preflight the files for printing problems, then package all of those files up into a single folder for the print provider. Often, average business folks either do not own the high-end layout programs or do not know how to properly execute the collection process, even in the price friendly MS Publisher.

Print providers can usually help the creator, but many times we are not called upon for assistance until late in the game, if then. You'd be surprised how many times we receive client files and find they won't print properly because of missing elements. When we call the client, we hear "Well I tried to package it up but it wouldn't work or I kept getting an error, so I just sent it as is" ☺ As Homer Simpson would say, "Doh!"

Saving your artwork as a pdf embeds all of that stuff (native file, graphics and fonts) into 1 file. Neat huh! No hassles with missing graphics or fonts and text reflows...well usually (small caveat☺)

That is the good news. But it is not perfect. Issues still abound when projects saved as pdf still don't print or do not color separate properly. (See the comments about color separations)

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Fortunately, we are the experts. We can figure out what more the client's files need, often make the repairs to still get the job printed on time. Yes, it may cost more to do that but not as much if you tell us in advance that you have issues. ;-)

(Sidebar: West Printing is an Authorized Adobe and Microsoft Print Partner. This means that we support your use of just about every computer program you might use to generate artwork files. Many times we can even fix a troublesome PDF)

So, save all of your artwork files as PDFs. You'll be the smart one. You will even impress your print professional as someone who is trying to do what is right. Besides, if you decide to go with a BigonlinePrinter.Com print provider, there are growing chances that sending them a PDF may be the only kind of file they will happily accept. They don't want to deal with your problems. Cash up front and go to press as fast as they can is the mantra. If it doesn't print like you want it, it's your fault, not theirs. **Caveat:** Internet printers will usually at least give you a digital proof that you can view on-screen, however the file is normally low resolution (remember the fine print we told you to watch out for) and not an exact representation of color and contrast. You want to see a hard copy? Ok, be prepared to wait and pay more.

15. How to Save Your Document as a PDF

Saving a document or artwork file as a pdf is easy. Just select "print" from your menu and select the "pdf printer" from the print dialog dropdown box, the same way you would select any of the printers you have installed. Press the print button. Point to the folder where you want the PDF created Bam! It's done.

Make sure the default settings in the output in the properties box is set to "Press Quality". When that is set you'll get a pdf at the highest possible resolution.

However, that was too easy. You may not have a pdf print driver. Why? Because making a pdf in the Adobe Acrobat software requires that you own the full \$\$\$ version. The freebie Adobe Acrobat Reader installed on your computer or downloaded from Adobe.com won't get it done. That is why one reason the Acrobat Reader is free. It only reads PDF's it can't make them.

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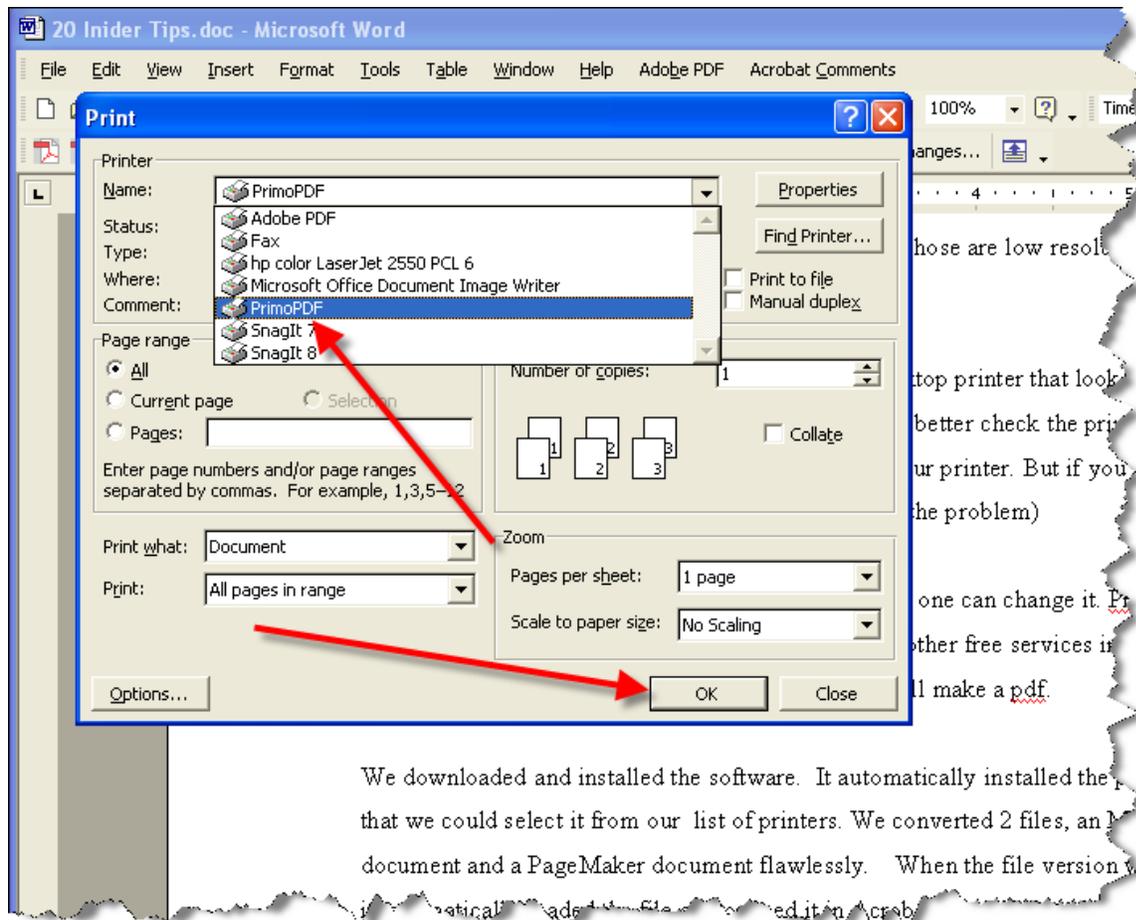
Yes, that's the catch. But all is not lost. Some computer design programs have a PDF generator built-in, such as Open Office and Microsoft Office versions 2007 and later. There are some free places online that will make a pdf for you. All you have to do is upload your file. There are also some places online where you can download a pdf maker/converter that you can put in your print dialog box. We found a few sites you might want to consider using if paying for the full Adobe Acrobat version is just not in the budget or the program you design with does not have PDF making capability.

One of the sites you can upload to is Adobe at <http://createpdf.adobe.com> and you can try it 5 times before they charge.

Our favorite freebie is <http://www.primopdf.com> for two reasons. The driver is installed automatically on your computer and you have a choice of optimizing for "prepress" which would be very important. "Prepress" in this context means the highest resolution possible. It will look best on paper as opposed to a "web" or "screen" setting which will only look good on your monitor. Those are low-resolution settings and print very grainy on paper.

(Sidebar tip: If you print anything on your desktop printer that comes out looking grainy, bitmapped or ugly but it looked okay on your screen; better adjust the desktop printer resolution settings. If that doesn't help, chances are your graphic is not suitable for printing on paper. Send an email to client-services@toledoprinter.com and we'll have some recommendations on how you can obtain or produce print optimum graphics.)

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We downloaded and installed the Primopdf software. It automatically installed the print driver so that we could select it from our list of printers.(see the screenshot above) We converted 2 files, an old MS Word document and a PageMaker document flawlessly. When the PDF file was complete it automatically loaded and opened it in Acrobat Reader. Sweet!

For the newer versions of Microsoft Office Products (2007 and thereafter), all you need do is select "save as" and then select "PDF" from the options.

One last caveat when making PDF. Check the properties/preferences or options and insure that you have selected the highest resolution. If you need help, ask us.

16. Desktop Publishing and Designing on Your Own

Chances are unless you are a pro designer you won't have invested in a pricey and feature rich page layout program such as InDesign, Quark, Corel, Illustrator or even the obsolete, but very functional Pagemaker.

Rather, you might have found the much more affordable and user friendly Microsoft Publisher to your liking. MS Publisher is certainly handy enough to meet the needs of most office environments. Because MS Publisher has at least 5 times the user base of any of aforementioned pricey programs, professional printers have to grudgingly support it. Grudgingly we say because MS Publisher can be a bit awkward and restrictive compared to the high-end feature rich professional layout programs.

The same applies to Microsoft Word, but for different reasons. The best advice we have for those who would try to design in Microsoft Word is to consult your print provider first. Maybe it will be just fine; maybe not. For example, if you are trying to design a full color newsletter to reproduce by the thousands you may need to stock up on antacids. ☺

It's not because print providers are snobby, it's because problems occur more often when nonprofessionals do the design and that means more work will likely be required to get the file ready to print. This may translate to more cost back to you.

Printing a few brochures on your desktop printer may yield satisfactory results but printing a couple of hundred or couple of thousand does not always correlate. A different setup may be required for efficiency.

Now I do not mean to discourage you when you have sweated over a project and it is still not print ready. However, we find most often that Pantone colors are not properly assigned, bleed spaces (edge-to-edge ink coverage) are not created, graphics are low resolution and fonts are missing. (See the section on PDF creation) and panels for a folded brochure are not evenly spaced. All of this means that in order to reproduce the design it is often necessary to rework the file, which translates to more \$\$.

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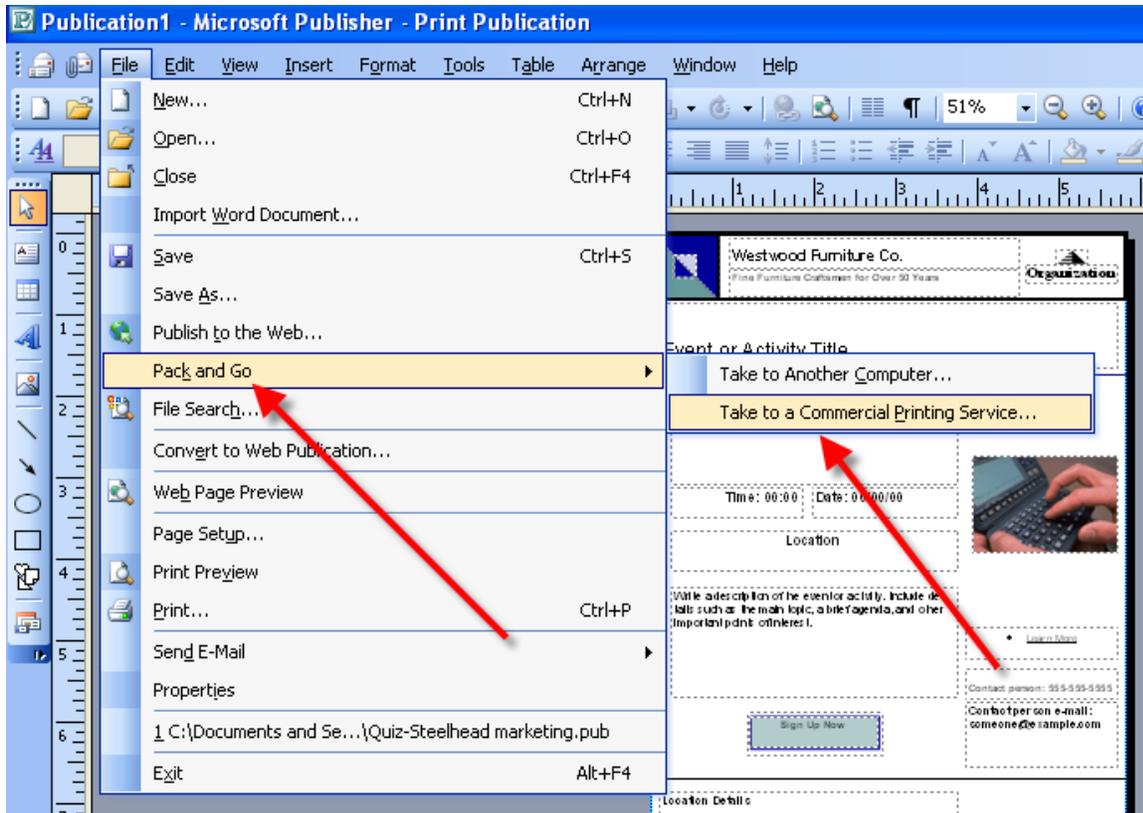
Designing on your own just takes time to develop a skill set to match the kind of artwork you want to produce efficiently. Being your own designer can be both economical and rewarding. Sometimes there are some bumps along the way.

Could this have been avoided? Yes it can. It starts with consulting with your print provider before you start. If your print professional is a Microsoft Service Partner, as West Printing is, you can expect expert consultations that often spot problems before they happen. Not always, but often.



You can help your print provider the most when using MS Publisher if you use the “Pack and Go” function found under the file menu. (See the example on the next page) Just follow the wizard instructions and this function will collect the graphics and fonts so that your file will have all the necessary ingredients for success.

The wizard will step you through the simple process and ask you where to copy the work you are saving in a separate folder. The end result is a compressed file with a “puz” extension. That’s the file that you need to give to your print provider. There is also an “unpack.exe” file that will be included so that the person receiving the file simple selects the “Unpack” and the “Puz” file will expand your Publisher document to its original size containing all of the fonts and graphics you used. Viola!



17. What Are Color Separatable Files and Why Should You Care? (For Advanced Readers)

Unless your project will be a composite (cmyk) output to a digital copier, your artwork will need to be created so that each of the colors can be separated for printing. In the current age, this is done digitally and you will need to know how to do this if you are the designer.

Professional designers should know all about this so we are usually not as concerned when we receive a file from them. However, for the novice office designer, or wannabe professional graphic designer, that is a whole other issue requiring a bit of education.

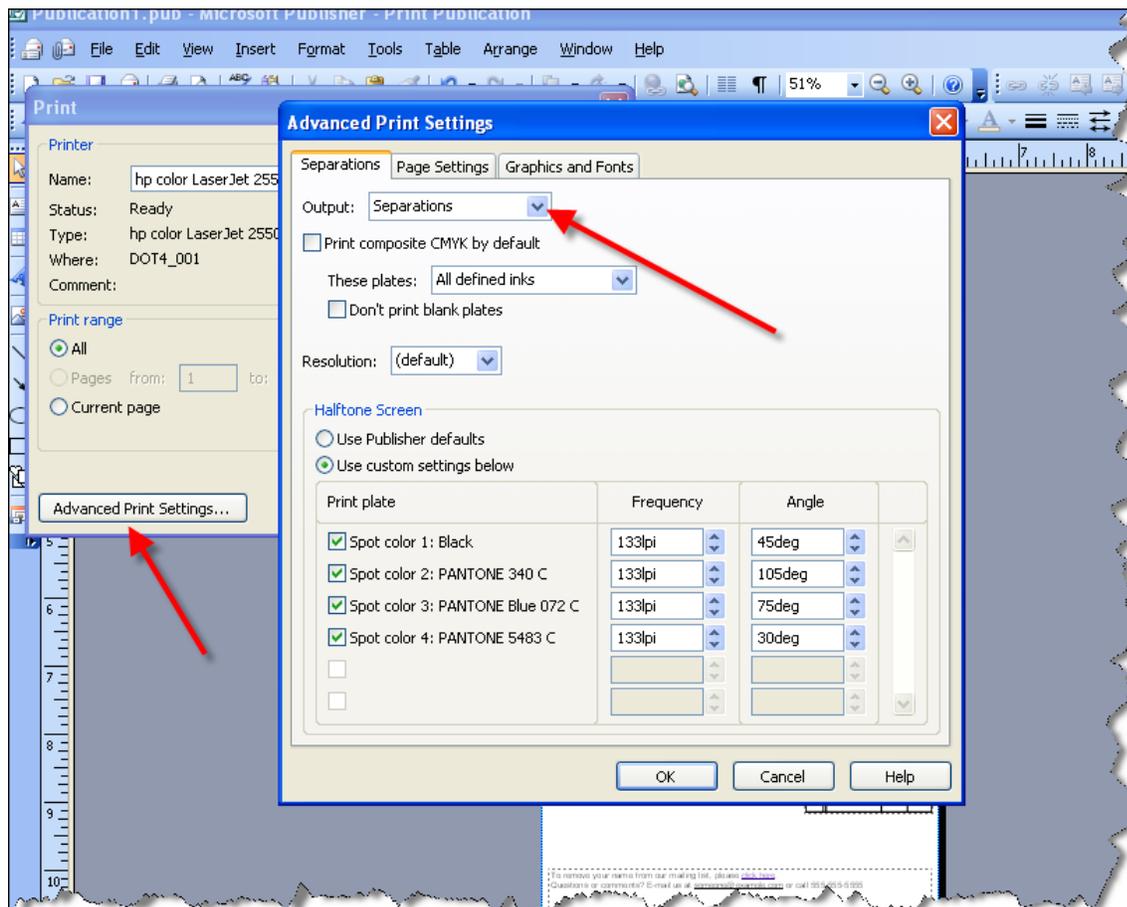
If we are going to print your job with real ink, a printing plate is created for each distinct color on each head of the printing press. Printing presses come in 1, 2, 4, 6 or more tower head variations. Your average printer has 1, 2 and 4 tower presses.

Color separation is a term we use to describe the plates we make for each color. If you have a two color job we need to make 2 plates. One for each color. If you have a 4-color job or process (cyan, magenta, yellow and black) four color job, we will need to make plates; one each

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for cyan, magenta, yellow and black. These four ink colors are combined in various proportions to produce the results you see on a colorful printed item.

When designing your artwork for printing on a press you need to create artwork that will separate each color when that color is selected for output. For anything other than 4-color cmyk printing you should assign the Pantone (spot) colors you want and then test it to see if each color will print on a separate sheet of paper from your desktop printer. But that is not all. Not just any desktop printer will do. You must have a postscript print driver in your computer for the desktop printer. Big Caveat Here. Below is an example for MS Publisher of how to print separations with a postscript driver from your desktop printer.



If you

don't have a postscript driver for your desktop printer you cannot perform the separation. We will be glad to help you. If you still want to do your own design work, just tell us ahead of time and we'll budget for converting your files so that they will color separate.

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Just ask your professional printer (West Printing would be my choice...hint hint) early on in the design phase. Ask them how they would print your project.

Often we get files that lack certain design elements that preclude printing immediately or require our intervention. Most common is computer designed artwork that was done in Microsoft Word or Microsoft Publisher.

Word and Publisher many times fail, but for different reasons. We actually like Microsoft Publisher because there are ways to fix most design problems and get the job printed. It's mostly just a matter of experience with a little skill mixed in.

MS Word, on the other hand is not a program that readily lends itself to design or layout work. Especially if you need to reproduce the document in the thousands quantity and have multiple colors. To get the proper color separated press plates made, serious intervention is required. It can be a little like knitting with a fork and a Popsicle stick. As they say in TV commercial fine print, "consult your doctor, results may vary"

To this end, designing print projects in MS Word is not recommended. However, if that is all you have, call us first to discuss what you are trying to do. Maybe for what you are trying to do, your file will be just fine. The point is, why spend 40 hours designing something that is not print ready? Sounds like aggravation to me.

Sure you may want the experience of design and pride of doing this. (Good on ya, as the Aussies say) If so, call your print professional first, they will be glad to give you some advice on how to do it. It probably won't cost you a thing. Most likely you'll save time, money and aggravation.

18. How to Transport Your Job Files to Your Print Professional

When you physically carry your files to a print professional, you should burn them to a CD as well as have a hardcopy printout.



Email attachment is acceptable for smaller job files, usually under 10 megabytes. Most email providers have some limit on the file size you can attach. Most importantly though is to archive/compress the file using WinZip or Stuffit and attach the resulting (zip or sit) file.

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Sometimes the native files get corrupted when they are attached to an email but usually arrive fine when “stuffed” or “zipped”, or are in pdf format.

If WinZip isn't on your computer you can download a trial version at <http://winzip.com> Stuffit is available for 30 day trail free download <http://stuffit.com>

Many professional printers have a direct file upload area on their web site. So, all you have to do is go to their site and click the button that usually says something like “Upload Files” or “Send Us Files”. (Look on the right side of the page <http://Toledoprinter.Com>, as example) The procedures are usually simple and there is a sign up process so that when your file is finished uploading you'll get a confirmation email and the printer will also receive an email notification that a file has been sent.

Many times these direct upload sites do not require the files to be zipped or stuffed. In any case you will also want to provide a hardcopy of your job. Once the printer has your file he can print out a proof and send it back for you to bless at your convenience before going to press.



19. How to Ask For a Quote

Printing is much akin to manufacturing. Just about everything we do is customized for you. Your print pro needs to know the following in order to give you a fair quotation of cost.

1. Do you have artwork?
2. Will you need design assistance?
3. What are your paper specifications? E.g. matte, gloss, laid, linen
4. How many colors of ink? 1, 2, 3, 4
5. What quantity? Think about usage and updates
6. When do you need the job completed?

Notice the first question “Do you have artwork”. It is an important distinction to note that printing and designing artwork to print are two VERY different things. If you are a newbie print buyer, never to confuse these two.

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It is kind of like getting a house built. When you ask a building contractor to give you an estimate, you would never do so without an architect's plans. Yes, some builders do both. Consequently, many printers also do graphic design or desktop publishing.

Just be aware that the cost of developing artwork to print is a cost separate from printing.

Also be aware that just because a print provider says they can design something, doesn't mean that they can do it well. Printing and designing is kind of a left brain right brain thing. So be sure you know that if you ask your printer to design something, that she has a staff member who is a qualified or experienced designer.

To continue the analogy, you wouldn't expect the architect to be able to drive the nails, pour the concrete and saw the miters. An architect might be able to draw a perfectly square house, but actually building one is a whole different ballgame so-to-speak.

If you are in need of designing help but the print provider you are talking to doesn't seem to have a handle on what you want and you don't want to attempt to do the work yourself, all is not lost. Use the same resources you did to locate a printer. The questions to ask when parsing the list are similar.

There are numerous resources you can look to.

1. Ask a colleague who they would recommend
2. Look up graphic designers in the local yellow pages
3. Do a search on the internet
4. Contact an advertising agency. They employ designers as a matter of practice
5. Sign up in the internet marketplace at Getafreelancer.com or Elance.com, and then post your job.

Expect to pay anywhere from \$25 to \$100 per hour or bid for completed project. All designers are not created equal. Some are better at certain kinds of design than others. Only through experience will you find out which. Ask a designer to see their portfolio. It is their badges of honor and they will always be pleased to show you.

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Now if you have all of rest of the information ready to give to your printer, then you are ready for a quote. We are pleased to help you every step of the way but do not call us up and ask for a telephone quote and expect any degree of certainty without having the at least some of information we have described above. (Do not know the paper you want. Come on in, we have thousands to select from.)

Experienced print buyers know this stuff and are ready with the answers. Newbies don't. Experienced print buyers aren't afraid to physically appear at the printer's door and ask for help when they don't know all of this stuff.

Inexperienced print buyers who are unwilling or unprepared to properly consider each of the aforementioned factors should be prepared to pay top dollar prices and waste a lot of time. Ask for help and you will save money.

So, how do you ask for a quote when you are inexperienced? It is simple, call a printer and make an appointment to see them. It is guaranteed that you will get far superior service when you physically appear because we will know you are **serious** about what you are about to do. In this day and age telephone shoppers are rarely given more than a courteous reply unless they know their print specifications or plead ignorance up front while asking for help.

20. How to Ensure You Pay the Highest Prices! Don't Pay the "PITA" Tax

What?? Who in their right mind would want to do that?

The short answer is that nobody wants to pay the highest prices for their printing. However, certain types of people do it all the time. These types have to pay the highest prices because they are dysfunctional. ☺

Well friend, I'm here to tell you that we printers being a shy lot to begin with don't take real well to people who fail to respect our skills and time.

Those kind of customers (notice, I said customers, not clients) are known as a PITA or. Pain-In-The-A** and end up paying more for their printing than anyone else pays.

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PITAS share one or more of these common traits. They micro manage and fuss over every detail, delay projects, don't respect your time, delay payment, are always in a hurry to get the job done yesterday, and then make mistakes expecting you to find and fix them.

Maybe that sounds like a boss you used to have.



The smart print professionals have a special way of dealing with this sort. We either fire them or charge them “aggravation surtax”. Those that get the “aggravation surtax” stuffed into their invoices are usually nice people but just a little screwed up. Sometimes the surtax can be 100%! Those that are fired are not worth having no matter how much business they bring.

Bottom line, follow the golden rule and you will get golden results. Be a PITA and you'll always be starting over.



21. How to Get Your Job Printed on Budget, on time, Every Time

Sometimes our client service is so good that some think we are just hanging around waiting for their beck-and-call. Well it isn't quite like that but we'd like our clients to think so.

In all frankness, we printers can usually turn any job around in three or four days if it is something we have printed for you before. It just depends on what we already have scheduled for production and their due dates. Sure, we make exceptions and can even turn jobs around in the same day under the right circumstances when a **client** makes a reasonable request. Some jobs just take longer to do if they are complex or require long hours of press runs or need to be scheduled in the production cycle for finishing; such as binding, numbering, perforation and scoring.

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But let's say you give us something totally new. What are the things you need to have done before you give it to us?

1. It is always wise to call us first. (I've said that six times, it must be important) Tell us what you are planning.
2. Tell us what your time frame is. When do you need the job in your hands?
3. If your project requires a special order of paper from the mill, the sooner we get it on order that faster we can go to press.
4. When a job file is received, it is always a good idea to give us a hardcopy so that we can compare our output to yours. Text reflowing and dropped fonts are a common problem unless you provide a properly constructed pdf. Emphasize the words "properly constructed" Not all PDFs are alike. Many desktop software programs can crate PDFs nowadays but they don't do it all the same way. Sometimes stuff happens in ways that surprise even us, your expert but humble print professional. ☺



Getting your job printed on time every time is a teamwork approach. Neither team member can take the other for granted if success is to be assured.

We hope that you have found value in this report. The most important points we want to reiterate are:

1. Establish a relationship with a professional printer. They can save you money
2. Find a printer that understands lifetime value, has a bold guarantee and gives you "client" status.
3. Discuss your print project with your professional printer before you start it.
4. Ask for suggestions when you know of no other question to ask.

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One final comment. When you go out to look for a printing company partner I hope you will consider West Printing as a candidate. There are many fine print professionals in the Toledo area you can choose. With this report, we hope that we have explained some of the fundamentals for finding print professionals that can help you achieve and not just be an expense center on your financial statement.

If you know of something that should be added to this report in order to help buyers of printing make their experience more profitable, please feel free to email me steve@toledoprinter.com or call the office (419) 246-0857. I appreciate all comments, compliments and gripes ☺

West Printing Company ☺ 327 12th Street ☺ Toledo, Ohio 43604 ☺ www.ToledoPprinter.Com