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How Paper Affects Printed Pieces

It's often quite a challenge to select the perfect paper for every job. Finding the right combination of finish, color, opacity, bulk, cost and availability often requires compromise. However, knowledge and creativity can make it possible to find a paper that suits your needs without lowering quality or raising costs.

Typically, printing papers fall into seven grades: bond, uncoated book, text, coated book, cover (uncoated and coated), board and specialty. Each grade has quality levels appropriate to specific applications. The features that distinguish one grade from another should be considered from the start in order to control job quality and cost.

In addition to these properties, sheet size plays a key role in the selection process. It's important to understand how paper in standard "parent" sizes can be cut to insure maximum efficiency. Of course, efficient use of paper means efficient use of your money. (You'll find a chart on the ways to use a 23" x 35" sheet on the back cover of this newsletter.)

So graphic designers must think "paper" right from the very beginning of the design process. Early decisions are particularly crucial for jobs requiring large amounts of paper, or if the desired paper has to be special-ordered. Delivery from a distant warehouse or mill could take up to several weeks or more.

Because paper represents about 30 to 40 percent of the cost of a typical print job, it should be chosen carefully. In some cases, the cost difference between a very ordinary and an outstanding paper can be insignificant...particularly if you factor in the increased effectiveness and overall impression created with the use of an outstanding paper.

One of the hot topics today is designing and printing with recycled paper. Used properly, recycled papers can create an unusual visual appeal with its flecks and rougher textures, while demonstrating a concern for the environment.

To know all the options available, graphic artists need to meet regularly with representatives of various paper mills. The enormous number of brand names, weights, finishes and colors of each type of paper is staggering. Just keeping up with all the new papers, their colors and finishes could be a full-time job.

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