

A Glossary of Commercial Printing Terms

If you're new to commercial printing or print buying is not your primary responsibility, the following terms and definitions should better help you communicate with commercial insiders.

Absorbency

The ability of paper to absorb liquids like ink and aqueous coating.

Aqueous

A water based coating laid down after the ink is applied. This provides more pop to the images while protecting them from scratches and smearing when being handled.

Author's Alterations

Also known as "AA's". Client-authorized change in copy or specifications after production has begun.

Back Up

Printing the second side of a sheet already printed on one side.

Bind

To fasten sheets or signatures with wire, thread, glue, or by other means.

Bindery

The finishing department of a print shop or firm specializing in finishing printed products.

Bleed

Printing that goes to the edge of the sheet after trimming. To print a piece that bleeds, the art must be prepared to extend 1/8" past the page's final trim line. Art and images can bleed off one side or all four sides of a page.

Brightness

The brilliance or reflectance of paper.

C1S (Coated 1 Side)

Paper with coating on one side only.

C2S (Coated 2 Sides)

Paper with coating on both sides.

CMYK

Acronym representing the four colors used in four color process or full color printing. Cyan (Blue) Magenta (Red) Yellow and Black.

Coated Paper

Paper with a surface coating ranging from extremely shiny to dull or matte. Coated papers have higher opacity (less see through) and better ink holdout resulting in brighter color and greater detail than uncoated paper. See C1S & C2S above.

Collate

A finishing term for gathering paper in a precise order.

Crop

The cutting out or elimination of an unwanted portion of an image. This can be done to accommodate the size of your piece or to remove unwanted objects from the image.

Crop Marks

Small tick marks outside the printed or "live" area that indicate where the product will be trimmed.

Crossover

Artwork that continues across a book's gutter and connects two facing pages.

Density

The solidity of a patch of color or type or darkness of an image or photograph.

Die Cutting

Cutting shapes or images out of a printed sheet of paper with the use of a steel die.

Direct-to-Plate

The process of making plates directly from an electronic file without the need for film.

Dot

The make-up of halftones and process color printing. Using a loupe you will see a series of dots sized and positioned to yield the desired results.

DPI (Dots Per Inch)

The measure of how many dots fit into one inch of an image. The higher the number of dots, the sharper the image.

Dummy

A rough layout of a printed piece showing position and finished size.

Duotone

A picture made up of two printed colors.

EPS (Encapsulated Post Script)

A file containing a combination of text, graphics and images.

Flood

To cover an entire page with ink, varnish, or plastic coating.

Four Color Process

The process of combining the four primary colors to create pictures and or images in full color. See CMYK

FTP (File Transfer Protocol)

A method used to transfer or copy files between computers over the internet.

Gang

Using the maximum sheet size to print multiple jobs on the same sheet or multiples of the same job to reduce the run length.

Gatefold

Two or more parallel folds on a sheet of paper with the end panels folding inward.

Generation

Stages of reproduction from original copy. A first generation reproduction yields the best quality.

Gloss

A shiny look reflecting light.

Halftone

A series of small single-color dots used to reproduce a photographic image. See Duotone

Hard Copy

The output of a job generally printed from an office printer and sent to a commercial printer with the files.

Hickey

Unplanned spots or voids that appear in the printed image from dust, lint or dried ink that gets between the plate and the sheet of paper. If the source of a hickey is not removed quickly by the press operator, it may come off by itself after a few sheets or it may remain for the balance of the press run.

High Resolution

A high number of dots per inch in an image. High resolution is 300 dpi (dots per inch) and above. See DPI.

Heavy or Light Coverage

Refers to the amount of ink laid down on the press sheet. If most of the sheet will have ink on it, and there are large areas of "solid" color, it is considered to have heavy coverage. Light coverage generally does not include extensive areas of solid color.

Image Area

The portion of a sheet of paper on which ink appears.

Impression

Putting an image on paper. One impression is one side of one sheet of paper.

Imprint

Adding copy to a previously printed page.

Indicia

Postal permit information place on a printed product in lieu of a stamp.

JPEG (Joint Photographic Experts Group)

A standardized image compression mechanism which compresses an image and makes it smaller for easier storing and transmitting.

Loupe

A small magnifying glass used to review a printed image, plate or film.

Low Resolution

A low number of dots per inch in an image. Low resolution defines anything from 72 dpi to 250 dpi. Low Res images will not reproduce as well as high res and will lower the quality of your finished piece. A good example is when 72 dpi are images taken from a website and inserted into a document.

Makeready

Steps required to prepare a job for final printing at the press.

Matte

Dull paper or ink finish.

Mockup

A handmade replica that sometimes accompanies the file to the printer. See Dummy.

Offset Printing

A printing technique in which ink is spread on a metal plate with etched images, then transferred to an intermediary surface such as a rubber blanket, and finally applied to paper by pressing the paper against the intermediary surface.

Offsetting

An undesirable result, in which the images of freshly printed sheets transfer to each other in the stack because the ink is not dry or the sheet is not powdered sufficiently.

Opacity

The amount of show-through on a printed sheet. The more opacity or the thicker the paper the less show-through.

Over-run (Overs)

Copies printed in excess of the specified quantity. Overs are generally required to allow for waste in the finishing process. (Trade terms generally allow for a small percentage of overs to be billed to the job in the event that the final count exceeds the order quantity.)

PDF – (Portable Document Format)

Invented by Adobe Systems and perfected over 20 years, Portable Document Format (PDF) is an open standard for electronic document exchange.

Page Count

Total number of pages in a book including blanks.

Perfect Bind

A type of binding that glues the edge of sheets to a cover like a paperback book.

PMS

The abbreviated name of the Pantone Color Matching System – an industry-wide system of formulated ink colors.

PostScript

The computer language most recognized by printing devices.

Process Colors

Cyan (blue), magenta (process red), yellow (process yellow), and black (process black). See CMYK

Ream

Five hundred sheets of paper of identical size and quality.

Register

The alignment of all four process colors on a sheet of paper to achieve the desired outcome.

Register Marks

Cross-hair marks that print outside the image area to guide press and bindery operators.

RGB (Red, Green, Blue)

The primary colors of light as seen on a computer monitor. They must be converted to CMYK when printing images on paper.

Saddle Stitch

Binding a booklet or magazine with staples in the seam where it folds. Also called saddle wire.

Score

A crease put on paper to help it fold better.

Self-Cover

Using the same paper for the cover as for the text.

Show-Through

Printing on one side of a sheet that can be seen on the other side of the sheet. See Opacity.

Side Stitch

Binding by stapling along one side of a sheet.

Signature

A sheet of printed pages which when folded becomes a part of a book or publication.

Specifications

A precise description of a print order.

Spine

The binding edge of a book or publication.

Spoilage

Planned paper waste that is part of all printing operations. See Makeready

Stock

Synonym for paper – the material to be printed.

Text Paper

Grades of uncoated paper with textured surfaces typically used on the inside of a publication.

TIFF (Tagged Image File Format)

Very commonly used to transport colors or gray-scale images into page layout applications. Tiff files are very large and of very high quality. The images are bitmapped which can cause resolution problems if images need to be scaled.

Tint

A shade of a single color or combined colors.

Trapping

The slight overlapping of two colors printing side by side to prevent a white gap between them.

Trim Marks

Similar to crop or register marks. These marks show where to trim the printed sheet.

Trim Size

The final size of one printed document after the last trim is made.

Under-Run

When a finished job yields fewer copies than ordered due to not enough copies being printed or excess waste in the finishing process. Like an over-run, trade terms generally allow for a small shortage to constitute a complete job unless 'No-Unders' is specified by the client when the job is first quoted.