Preparing Files for Print

There are several simple steps you can take when creating files and preparing your project for production through computer to plate (CTP) or film output, that will help eliminate the most common potential production delays. This will address both novice and advanced users. The following information has been based on using QuarkXPress, Pagemaker for PC and or Mac.

1. In page layout programs such as QuarkXPress and Pagemaker, make document size or page size equal to the final trim size. Create multi page files with pages in consecutive numerical order. Do not place pages in printers spread.

2. Make bleeds wherever they should occur, including along the spine. Bleeds should be consistently 1/8" wide (some printers prefer ¼")
    Note: Bleeds are extra allowance for images to print outside the page boundary, so That they go right to the edge of the page after trimming.

3. QuarkXPress and Pagemaker, files should have up to date pictures – nothing modified in picture usage or links.

4. When creating page layout programs such as, QuarkXpress and Pagemaker, refrain from using text styles, that is, the little (plain, bold, italic buttons) in the measurements palette, instead, select the actual style and weight of type from the font window above the style buttons. Test your document for properly formatted type by double checking it in font usage dialogue. You should see the name of the font followed by (plain) in every case.

5. Refrain from using image styles in QuarkXPress or any other page layout programs, for example – colorizing bitmaps, instead, colorize bitmaps in programs such as Photoshop and import them into the layout.

6. Avoid excessive nesting of images. The following is an example of excessive nesting: import a tiff file into QuarkXPress: place some type on top of it: save it in QuarkXPress as an eps file, bring the eps file into Illustrator, position it as an element in a larger drawing which includes other imported images and elements created in Illustrator, make a new eps file, import the new eps file back into QuarkXPress, etc.

7. Refrain from providing eps files that contain multiple image versions, with the desired image positioned in a QuarkXPress picture box, make each eps file to contain only a single image.

8. In general, avoid using QuarkXpress (save pics as eps) as a quick generator of images, at the plate imaging stage, it is a common source of production delays.

9. Use TrueType fonts with caution. Supply fonts in postscript format whenever it is possible. Postscript fonts are still better supported on MACs than TrueType fonts.

We have seen TrueType fonts go through successfully, however we always have to test them carefully before hand, which adds time to your project.

10. Remember that image resolution should equal 1.5 to 2.0 times the output line frequency. For example: 150 line frequency output requires image resolution of at least 225 to 300 ppi (pixels per inch). Remember to take into account image scaling in page layout programs. If your original image is 300 ppi and you increase it's size to 200% in QuarkXpress, you've also reduced it's resolution by half.

11. A well organized project gets to press a lot faster. Before collecting files for sending to the printer, please take a moment to do file management. Send us all the files we need, and only the files we need. Organize separate parts or versions of complex projects in separate, clearly named folders. Name files clearly and logically.

12. Keep file names and folder names short. Avoid the use of symbols andany special characters in the file or folder names: stick to the letters of the alphabet and the numbers 0 to 9. Use the underscore characters and or dashes __ "__" separator rather than slashes and dashes. Never use periods in folder names. Never place spaces at the start or end of folder names.

13. Along with your files, send supporting documentation as follows:
    a. acrobat file (pdf file)
    b. a full and current set of black and white or color composite lasers
    c. a full and current set of color separated lasers
    d. print windows showing contents of supplied disks with key files highlighted
    e. notes that clearly explain any special expectations or requirements

For users who are new to file creation for an electronic prepress workflow, the most important guideline is to remember to use appropriate software. Be aware that the appropriate software may not necessarily be the most convenient or easiest software for you to use. For example, Microsoft Word, or Paint is a good program for fast and easy creation of multi page documents (used around the office) but it's print software cannot color separate files, which is required for any type of printing. PageMaker, QuarkXpress, Illustrator, CorelDraw and PhotoShop on the other hand, provide the ultimate control for design and have built in color separation capabilities.