

Tips for Controlling Cost on Your Printing Communication Projects

Helping to stretch your budget dollars

Smart Spending Starts in the Planning Stage

- Challenge the conventional wisdom on each printing project: *How can we do this at a lower cost and still meet the objective of the piece?*
- Focus on every aspect of the print production workflow:
 - Job planning and design
 - Pre-press/proofing
 - Print production
 - Bindery/finishing
 - Delivery/distribution
- Use GPO's **free** project planning consultation services

Free GPO Project Planning Consultation

- Engage GPO in the **planning phase of the project** to review objectives and proposed layout and design.
- GPO works directly with authors, editors, printing personnel, program managers, and graphic designers to assist in creating the most cost-effective specifications possible to meet the needs of your project.

Job Planning and Design

- Planning: What are the purpose and audience for the piece?

Potential Money-saving considerations:

- Change the **size** to better fit standard paper stock sizes – this eliminates waste and gives you more paper options
- **How many** do we really need to print? Look at past history of usage – can we print less and supplement any additional needs using digital printing if we run out?
- What is the least expensive **paper choice** to meet the quality standards required of this piece?
- Allow **adequate production time** to avoid rush charges
- Simplify – **Eliminate complexity** that increases production steps and adds more time and money to the job

Size Considerations

- Avoid unusually small or large finished sizes as they can create finishing/binding problems that may add expense and/or handwork charges
- Avoid the cost and expense of paper waste by specifying sizes that accommodate common paper stock sizes:

Sheet-fed Sizes	Web Sizes*
8 1/2" x 11" 6" x 9"	8 3/8" x 10 7/8"
5 1/2" x 8 1/2" 9" x 12"	5 3/8" x 8 3/8"

*Use Web sizes for large quantities

These are both cost-saving and green steps!

Quantity Drives Cost

Get out of the mindset that you should print more than you need to avoid the cost of going back to press!

- Design documents in a way that files can be repurposed for digital printing – then if you run out before the document becomes obsolete or needs updating, you can use print-on-demand digital printing methods to run only what you need.
- Warehousing and fulfillment (pick, pack, and ship) can add significantly to the “cost per piece” if this is your business model. Factor these into the price when doing cost comparisons between offset and digital printing methods.

Paper – Choose Wisely

- Paper can account for 20%-40% of the cost of a print job. Do not over spend without a good reason.
- Consider smooth offset or opaque sheets instead of coated sheets to reduce cost and maintain image quality in an acceptable range.
- Ask GPO about paper alternatives to see the relative cost difference and determine what best fits your budget and your project.
- Avoid trendy “designer” sheets unless the piece (and the budget) call for it.

Scheduling

Set realistic expectations about production timeframes and work to keep on schedule

- Condensed production schedules increase costs and can lead to errors without adequate time to recover.
- Holding proofs can compromise deadlines and may increase costs.
- Consider establishing streamlined procurement options for smaller, rush projects
 - Simplified Purchase Agreement (SPA) for under \$10,000
 - GPOExpress for short-run, quick turnaround digital B&W or color production

Complexity = Cost

- Additional finishing steps (such as foil stamping, embossing, die-cutting, and numbering) add cost
 - You are paying for an additional overrun to provide ample set-up waste for each additional finishing step
 - These finishing steps are often not performed by your printer so you may be paying mark-ups and transportation costs above the cost of the actual finishing process
- Adding ink colors and varnishes add cost
 - Consider using 2 colors instead of 4-color process
- Designing with crossovers and bleeds can increase costs
- Optimize page count whenever possible
 - Think (and design) in multiples of 4

Pre-press and Proofing

- Avoid Author's Alterations (AA) and editorial changes at the proofing stage
 - Have all interested parties proof and edit the content before it goes to the printer. AA charges can be a hidden profit center for printers.

- Send print-ready PDF files with embedded fonts. Always send native files.
 - Preflight files before they go to the printer. Verify that bleeds are properly set; check resolution on photos and other imported graphic elements
 - Native files allow changes and corrections to be made by printer
- Pick the appropriate proof type and quality level for the job.
 - Understand the differences between content and hi-resolution proofs.
 - A PDF proof will often be adequate
 - Level 1 jobs are inherently more costly
- Reasons to ask for a press sheet inspection (PSI):
 - High profile job/critical color
 - Critical deadline with no time for a reprint
 - Long run lengths
 - Design has components that can't be rendered well on a proof – varnishes, etc.
 - Track record/comfort level with printer
 - It is easier to specify a PSI and then cancel if not needed than to have to add a modification for one later

Offset vs. Digital Printing

The Basics of Offset

- Upside of Offset
 - Unit pricing is lower on longer print runs (definition of “longer” varies by job type)
 - Larger sheet sizes create economy of producing more images on a printed sheet
 - More flexibility in paper stock choices – finishes, weights, and grain
 - Cost per piece continues to drop as quantity increases
 - Can easily and inexpensively use exact PMS color inks
 - Variety of format sizes to fit the specific needs – from envelopes to posters
- Downside of Offset
 - Pre-press and set-up are costly and make the “per piece rate” for short runs very expensive
 - Drying time (or coating) is required before any bindery functions can begin
 - Accurate proofing for PMS colors is still a challenge
 - Proof and finished products may vary based on substrate and other factors
 - Generally longer turnaround times for offset than digital

The Basics of Digital

- Upside of Digital
 - Virtually no pre-press or make ready – able to turn around jobs much faster
 - Proof and final product are identical and can be produced on the same substrates
 - Fulltime 4-color process plus options for additional “spot” colors and “varnishes”
 - Much lower price point than offset for short runs
 - Sheets typically come off dry and ready to handle
 - Able to print on plastics and other “non-paper” substrates for custom applications
 - Books can come off already collated
- Downside of Digital
 - Unlike offset, no appreciable change in unit pricing for longer runs
 - Often limited sheet sizes
 - PMS matches are inexact as they are built from 4-color process unless using digital devices with more than four “ink” or toner units
 - Large solids can be problematic (possible banding in some color ranges)
 - Color can vary from run to run or over the course of a longer run
 - “Digital” covers many types of devices – some much better than others

Bindery/Finishing

- Automated bindery methods are generally the least costly method for longer run jobs. Pricing involves set-up and run rates.
- Avoid multiple step finishing functions such as a die-cut and foil-stamped cover. Multiple steps require running extra pieces for set-up and waste needed for each extra process.
- Handwork is slow and costly – this includes inserting CD's in sleeves, putting books in 3-ring binders, inserting tabs, collating various odd-sized pieces, etc.
- Stick to common mechanical book binding methods (saddlestitch or perfect binding) for long runs instead of binders. For short runs, consider wire-o or coil binding.

Delivery/Distribution

- Make sure job is planned and produced to conform to USPS guidelines for automated mailing discounts when possible. **Keep mailing/distribution lists up-to-date and in a common and easy-to-use format to avoid costly returns.**
- Weight drives delivery cost – keep it in mind when making decisions on page count, paper weight, and binding.
- Digital products created using toner may not perform well if irradiated in the mail stream.
- **Stay abreast of changes in U.S. postal regulations.**



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