



HOWARD PRINTING NEWSLETTER

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SHERPAS ARE CHIC

What You See

Showing clients an exact replica of what their printed piece will look like *before* it is on press continues to be a challenge for printing companies. The challenge lies in the fact that print shops are attempting to emulate final printed sheets without using plates. Since printing plates are what transfer ink to paper, creating an equivalent image without them becomes quite a feat.

Plates are the final major prepress cost before any order is printed. That's why so much attention and effort go into the proofing process. It's also the reason that print shop staff are so conscientious about getting client approvals before the printing plates are imaged and sent to the pressroom.

So what's all the fuss about plateless digital proofing systems? Well for one thing, there are too many systems to keep track of and many of them are not what they promise on paper. Also, if you are a large volume buyer who works with several print suppliers, you are probably seeing many different kinds of digital proofs. Determining which proofs are the most consistent and reliable can become a burden.

A printing company's dilemma then becomes: "Which digital color proofing system should we invest in? We need to show clients CMYK color, PMS colors and special ink mixes—before we print the job. We need to come as close as possible, run out proofs as fast as possible and keep the cost as low as possible." That's why Howard Printing spent nine months on the research and selection process for their Agfa Sherpa digital color proofing system.

What We Got

Agfa's Sherpa system is a large-format piezoelectric ink-jet proofing device that uses six printing heads. These

include the standard CMYK colors (cyan, magenta, yellow, black) plus a light cyan and a light magenta. The fifth and sixth "light" colors are important elements because they extend a proof's tonal range for photographic highlight areas and increase the capacity for matching very light shades of PMS ink colors.

Why We Got It

Piezoelectric ink-jet technology was selected because it has the most desirable features for digital color proofing. Tiny ink droplets are driven by a voltage pulse that is applied to a piezoelectric crystal. This process generates a pressure pulse in the Sherpa's imaging head and controls the meticulous positioning of each color droplet.

Sherpa proofs can be confidently reviewed for color content, image trapping and page imposition. The digital files are already RIPped before being sent to the Sherpa, so upon client approval, the same RIPped files can be immediately sent to an imsetter or platesetter. This seamless file integration preserves accuracy throughout the whole proofing process.

In addition to high quality, ink-jet proofing systems use less complex imaging devices than other digital proofers. This reduces downtime for adjustments and calibrations. Ink-jet systems are not dependent on light sensitivity, lasers or LEDs (light emitting diodes). This makes them more predictable from the start and more repeatable when multiple proofs are requested or when several rounds of changes become necessary.

With production costs on everyone's mind, the ink-jet process excels. Ink-jet consumables such as proofing paper are much less expensive than other systems (which often require expensive surface treatments before an image can

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PRODUCTION NOTES:

This newsletter
is printed on a 40-inch
Man Roland lithographic
four-color press
using process inks and
Sappi Lustro Offset Enamel
Gloss Cover; Basis 80.



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SHERPAS Continued from page 1

be put on the sheet). Because the Sherpa's proofing paper is roll-fed, clients can review proofs as either imposed press forms or as cut-to-size page proofs.

Is a Sherpa the perfect proof? Nothing is perfect. The two limitations of our Sherpa proofs are poor lightfastness and no water resistance. Sherpas will fade over time under extreme light conditions, and their color will run off the sheet if exposed to liquids. However, since neither of these factors affects image quality, and the life of a color proof is usually several days (until the job goes to press), we don't see these limitations as being significant.

Other Proofs You May Have Met

Digital proofing systems abound. Continued high demand and falling purchase prices have contributed to their proliferation. Dozens of manufacturers introduce new models every year.

LASER PRINTERS

The most common proofing system is the color laser printer. Introduced in the early 1990s, these toner-based imaging devices use lasers or LEDs that are driven by digital data from computer systems. Laser printers are the least expensive way to produce a color proof to review before sending a file to the print shop. They are also the least accurate devices for color matching to printer's ink. This accuracy limitation is due to the fact that toner chemistry is very complex and susceptible to color batch variations. Also, any light-driven imaging will readily change based on lamp capacity or common electric voltage variations.

The popularity of color laser printers endures because of their small price tag. Low-end models (less than \$500) don't even have color servers or "controllers" to drive the imaging process. This makes it virtually impossible to match any RIP-driven proof coming from a print shop.

THERMAL PRINTERS

Thermal transfer printers use digital files of text and graphics to control heated printheads. The printheads melt and place spots of dry ink on donor ribbons or sheets, then transfer the spots to receiver sheets. They are a significant step ahead of laser proofing systems and carry a heftier price tag.

Properly calibrated thermal printers will create more accurate proofs than laser printers simply because the imaging process is no longer toner-based. However, the waxy "dry" inks have significantly different formulas than commercial printer's ink. Formulation differences and the fact that the printer cannot produce a distinctive printing "dot" hinders accurate color matching. Thermal prints most often produce a more saturated color image than what will occur on press.

DYE SUBLIMATION PRINTERS

"Dye sub" is an alternate thermal transfer system in which the solid inks on the donor sheets are replaced by subliminal color dyes. In use, the thermal head converts the dye spots to gas spots that condense on the receiver sheet. Dye sublimation's limiting factor is similar to dry ink transfer systems. It is a dye — not printer's ink — that creates the color image.

The Process That Never Ends

No matter what kind of proofing system you use, proof early and proof often. The sooner you find errors and make changes, the less it will cost you. The complete proofing process may require four or five reviews. Proof the typed manuscript before turning it over to the design department, ad agency or freelancer. Read it again carefully after layout proofs are returned. Then, when the printer's proof arrives, remember that the files have been handled by yet a new player, and something could have changed since the first round of proofing. ■

NEW USPS RULES

As the United States Postal Service continues to refine its automation equipment for more cost-effective mail processing, tighter regulations are being systematically introduced. It is important for direct mail users to be aware of these regulations and keep them in mind during the mailpiece design process.

The most recent significant change for mailpiece design is the creation of a surcharge for automation-incompatible mail. The USPS calls this a “nonmachinable surcharge” and applies it to both regular and nonprofit mail. Mail designed as “flats” is not subject to the surcharge because flats are not required to be machinable. As of July 1, 2002, all letters became subject to surcharges.

The surcharges are

- 12¢ per piece for first-class letters
- 4¢ per piece for standard mail letters
- 2¢ per piece for nonprofit letters

To simplify the complex jargon of new postal service regulations, we have created a checklist that allows you to test your mailpiece before it is designed, printed and mailed. Also included is a brief explanation about why each restriction was introduced.

If all 10 statements below are true, you will NOT pay a surcharge.

1) The shape of my mailpiece has the proper rectangular proportions (aspect ratio).

How: If you are unsure that your mailpiece has the proper aspect ratio, you can test it with a “letter-size mail dimensional standards template.” These templates are free and available at any USPO Mailing Requirements office. Anyone who designs printed material for mailing should own one. If you do not have access to a template, you can determine the aspect ratio of your mail piece mathematically. Divide the letter’s length by its height. If the answer falls between 1.3 and 2.5, its aspect ratio is correct.

Why: Mailpieces that are proportionately “too square” will tumble through the USPS sorting equipment and not properly seat themselves in front of the sorter’s OCR scanner. This means the mailpiece requires extra handling, which costs the USPS more money.

2) My mailpiece is not polybagged, polywrapped or enclosed in any plastic material.

Why: Plastic wrappers will not travel through sorting machines. They stick to each other, stick to the equipment and build up harmful static charges that can disable a sorting machine.

3) My envelope does not have a clasp, string-and-button, or other external bulky closure.

Why: They jam up the sorting machines.

4) My mailpiece does not contain any loose rigid items that make its thickness uneven.

Why: They jam up the sorting machines.

5) My mailpiece is flexible enough to bend and travel through the curves of a conveyor belt.

How: Measuring this feature is difficult. If in doubt, take the proposed piece to the Mailing Requirements office for approval.

Why: As each piece travels through the mailing equipment, it is eventually routed through several “sub-sorting” units. This travel requires a piece to be flexible enough to bend around an 11-inch-diameter curve.

6) I’m using a minimum paper weight thickness of 9 points (.009”) for my BRM postcards when they measure more than 4.25 inches high or more than 6 inches long.

Why: The former approved thickness of 7 points is now too thin for automation processing. Note that 7 points is still an approved thickness for BRM postcards that are less than 4.25x6 inches in size. The following paper weights meet the minimum required 9-point thickness:

80# uncoated cover

100# coated (gloss, matte, dull, cast) cover

80# bristol cover

110# index

125# tag

10 pt. coated-two-side postcard

10 pt. coated-one-side postcard

7) My delivery address is placed parallel to the longer dimension of my mailpiece.

Why: In order for the mailpiece to travel acceptably through the sorting equipment, the longer dimension must be parallel with the conveyor belt’s movement. An address or label that is not parallel to that longer dimension would not be recognized by the OCR reader.

8) My “folded” self-mailers have the folded side at the bottom of the piece, and my delivery address runs parallel to that folded side.

Why: NOT having the folded edge at the bottom of the piece (as it travels along the conveyor belt) encourages jam-ups in the sorting equipment.

9) My “bound” self-mailers have the bound side at the bottom of the piece, and my delivery address runs parallel to that bound side.

Why: NOT having the bound edge at the bottom of the piece (as it travels along the conveyor belt) encourages jam-ups in the sorting equipment.

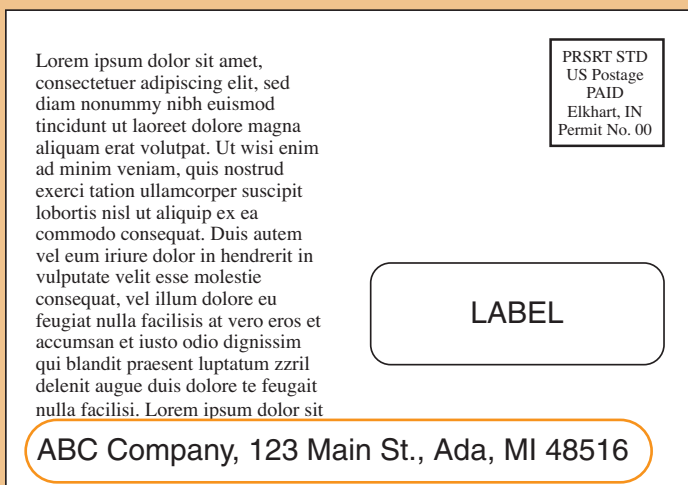
10) My mailing does not request “manual” sorting. ■

Correct Postcard Layout



- Return address is above label information and is positioned to ensure that first class mailing is returned to you if undeliverable.
- No vertical divider "line" is included.
- 4" x 5/8" of white space in lower right corner is available for USPS barcoding at bottom.

Incorrect Postcard Layouts



- Return address is below label making it likely that the card will deliver back to yourself.
- No white space has been left at bottom right corner for barcoding.



- Return address is still below label making it likely that the card will deliver back to yourself.
- Do not use a vertical divider line. It interferes with USPS barcoding.
- Not enough white space has been left at bottom right corner for barcoding.





DIGITAL CONTRACT PROOFS TO LIVE BY.

For contract proofs you can bet your life on, insist on the Sherpa Digital Proofing System from Agfa. Unrivalled for accuracy, consistency and predictability. Unmatched at matching color. Agfa provides the entire proofing system.

Featuring high-resolution Piezo™ ink-jet imaging technology, fully integrated advanced color management software, a comprehensive proof quality management system and Agfa's innovative digital proofing base, providing a wide color gamut and guaranteeing stable contract proofs. Call Howard Printing—your closest Sherpa provider—for samples and more information. They'll show you color to die for.

AGFA 

KUDOS GO TO...

Recent Award Winners



Creative Text + Page and Howard Printing shared a regional AHA Merit Award for the design and print production of the **Fontana Chamber Arts** Summer Festival 2001 season-ticket mailer. This is the third award that **John Townsend**, owner of Creative Text + Page, has received for Fontana collateral design work. The annual AHA awards are underwritten by Heritage Paper Company and hosted in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Kalamazoo Public Schools received an Honorable Mention Award from the National School Public Relations Association for their 2001-2002 School Calendar. **Tom Krol**, owner of Tom Krol Typography, was art director for the project.

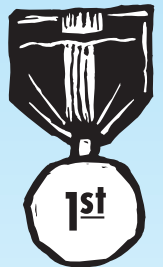
Three clients of Howard Printing won Certificate of Merit awards in an international competition sponsored by Printing Industries of America (PIA). "Benny Awards," as they are referred to (after the father of printing,

Benjamin Franklin), are given annually through PIA's Premier Print Awards Competition. More than 4800 entries were submitted from countries around the world. Coverage of the competition will appear in the December, 2002 issue of *Graphic Arts Monthly* magazine.

Battle Creek Community Foundation won in the "Business and Annual Reports" category for their 2000-2001 Annual Report. The creative/production team consisted of **Tom Mills & Associates** (design) and Howard Printing (print).

Pharmacia's Corporate Internal Communications won in the "Newsletters Using Four or More Colors" category for their 2002 Strategy News. The creative/production team consisted of **GCI BoxenbaumGrates** (agency), **G2** (design) and Howard Printing (print and fulfillment).

Merck's Global Public Affairs won in the "Media Kits" category for their Heart Protection Study Media Kit. The creative/production team consisted of **Hands-on Design** (design) and Howard Printing (print). ■



Keep Us Informed

If an item we have printed for you becomes an award-winner, send us a memo on it. We will include a notice in our newsletter. E-mail your announcement to messages@howardprinting.com or fax it to 269-329-1966. We look forward to hearing from you!

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