



DESIGNING FOR PRINT

Need help?

Reach out to us! Call 850.893.7346 or email Josh (josh@rapidpress.com). Translating your vision from a mental picture to an actual design on paper can seem daunting. This will help you understand the basics about creating anything from a simple business card to a multi-page magazine. We're always here to help if you have any questions.

What should I use to design my piece?

The [Adobe suite of products](#) (Illustrator, InDesign, Photoshop, and Acrobat) are the gold standard for creating print-ready files. While they may seem intimidating, it is time very well spent whether you're a full-time designer or just trying to create a simple business card for yourself. For those who'd rather not take the full plunge into the professional versions of Adobe products, they offer a lighter version called [Adobe Express](#) that is much more user friendly and pretty intuitive.

[Canva](#) is becoming extremely popular with home designers, and even professionals. You'll be designing in minutes and have a finished product before you know it. The free version of their software is surprisingly robust.

Basic Printing Specs

Like any manufacturing process, commercial printing has some basic requirements to help us produce the best-quality product we can. Care must be taken to ensure that things like bleeds and image resolution are up to snuff. Read on for things to pay attention to.

Bleeds

Bleeds refer to images or backgrounds that extend beyond the edge of where your piece will trim. These are incredibly important as they ensure that you won't end up with slivers of white space around the edge of your piece after it's cut to final size. In the below graphic, you can see that the pink background on the left is *larger* than the actual document., while it stops right at the edge on the right one.



You should have at least 1/8" (0.125") bleed on all sides for any images/backgrounds that sit on the edge of where the piece will trim. Note that this will increase the "size" of your file (an 8.5" x 11" letter with bleeds will actually be 8.75" x 11.25" if they are set properly since we're adding 1/8" to each side).

Clear Zone

Printing (like many things) is extremely precise but not exact. There are minute shifts that can occur during printing, folding, or cutting, that may lead to tiny shifts in where your pictures and copy land on the page. To that end, it's a best practice to keep critical images, copy, etc at least 1/8" (0.125") from where your piece will trim. You can almost think of it as the opposite of bleeds if that's helpful.

Image Resolution

Nobody wants blurry pictures in their brochure. To that end, make sure any *critical* pictures or graphics that you use are at least 200 DPI (Dots Per Inch) and preferably not more than 300 DPI. It's advised to not use pictures that are substantially more dense than that though, as 200-300 DPI ensures solid print quality without creating excessive file sizes. Also keep in mind that enlarging a very small file will result in a blurry mess in most cases unless that 1" file is a vector image.

The exceptions to this rule are things like simple background colors and special effects like transparencies or drop shadows. These do not need a great deal of resolution to achieve their desired effect and it's preferred that those are kept lean and/or flattened whenever possible.

Colors

Most web graphics and digital artwork is designed with a mix of Red, Green, and Blue (RGB). Print, however, utilizes Cyan, Magenta, Yellow, and black (CMYK). When setting up your file, make certain you are designing in CMYK and not RGB, especially when your images are color-critical.

If you are utilizing spot colors or dielines in your design, make certain those are set to spot (not process). Dielines should also be set with **overprint on**. Overprint will allow your dieline to sit on top of the art rather than knocking it out.

File Types

Rapid Press prefers print-ready PDFs in a vector format when possible. PDFs are very much the industry standard file type for commercial printers, but we can accept other types assuming they are up to snuff in terms of resolution and quality. JPGs, PNGs, TIFFs, EPSs, and AIs can all print cleanly if they are properly designed. Note that if you plan to upload your project to our InSite platform, it will only process the following types: pdf, ps, tif, tiff, jpg, jpeg, and eps.

We typically prefer to avoid using "native files" such as InDesign or Illustrator documents but there are instances where they might be helpful. Always reach out to us if you're unsure about what type of file will work best for your project.

Saddlestitch (Stapled) Books

Saddlestitch books are the most common type of "magazine", consisting of multiple sheets of paper folded in half with staples binding them together along the fold. These can be as small as 3" x 5.5" and as large as 12" x 14.25". These must be designed in multiples of 4 (so you can have an 8, 12, or 36 page magazine but not a 10 or 20 page).

Perfect Bound (Glue bound) Books

Perfect binding is the industry term for loose sheets of paper that are glued along their spine and have a larger sheet of paper (typically cover stock) wrapped around them to form a book. This is perfect for thicker documents with many pages and can be as thick as 2". This does not lend itself well to very thin books and we don't recommend perfect binding anything thinner than approximately 0.25".