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PRINTtips

Creating Successful... Printer-Customer Relationships



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If printing services is a budget line item for your company or organization, chances are someone is in charge of managing that budget by finding a reliable printing vendor – a company that charges a fair price, is dependable, has expertise in the kind of printing you need, and has the necessary production capability and capacity. When a company or organization that has a regular, recurring need for printing and finds a print vendor with the ability, intention, and willingness to meet that need, the two have a basis for forming a successful printing-customer relationship.

The Benefits of Establishing a Relationship

Establishing a relationship with your printer pays big dividends. Besides saving money overall on your printing, you'll get better customer service, more help in exploring production options, consultation on related services like mailing and large format printing, and assistance in marketing and business development. These benefits are in addition to competitive pricing on individual projects and great print quality – something that we at TechneGraphics offer as standard service to all our customers.

The Printer's Part of the Relationship

To make the relationship work, we as the print vendor have several responsibilities.

- **Dependability.** We must deliver your printing order on time, exactly as ordered, and at the agreed-upon price – every single time. This



relieves you of the burden of continually checking on your order and frees up time for your other tasks.

- **Consistency.** We must ensure that your company or organization looks good in print. That means consistency across all printed materials, including logo reproduction, typography, design, and page layout. We may suggest refreshing or even redesigning an item if needed to achieve consistency, or printing an item that was previously printed on desktop equipment to improve image quality.
- **Expertise.** We must know when to take your order without comment and when use our professional expertise in print production and management to offer alternatives.
- **Trust.** We must earn and hold your trust by offering you fair pricing. This includes ways to

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“Successful relationships are based on mutual responsibilities.”

“Proof reading is your responsibility, even when we are preparing the document layout...”

save money with alternate production methods, materials, or volume buying. It also means providing a cost estimate or quotation prior to beginning work on job, not proceeding with work you have not authorized, and honoring the price quoted so long as the specifications don't change.

- **Production management.** Although this is largely invisible to you, it is essential to our maintaining control of the production process. Printing is custom manufacturing, with each job having its own unique specifications. Each step of the printing process must occur in a specific order and requires an allotted amount of time. We use production standards to determine the time and resource requirements for all jobs, then use this information to formulate a daily production schedule. Our production manager monitors progress throughout the day to be sure that both the schedule and the quality standards will be met.

The Customer's Part of the Relationship

Successful relationships are based on mutual responsibilities. Here are the responsibilities for the print customer.

- **Honest communication.** Tell us the actual day the job must be ready without adding a fudge factor, or give us two due dates — desired and must-have. We will deliver on time. Similarly, if we ask whether a budget has been established, be truthful and share the amount or the range. Sometimes we can tell without formally quoting the job that the budget is inadequate. This allows us to shift the conversation to changing specifications so the job can be done within the budget.
- **Complete specifications.** Job specifications are the production instructions, so they must be complete and unambiguous. To dispel ambiguity, printers use specific language to write specifications. If you're interested, we'll gladly teach you the basics. Job specifications are also the basis for pricing; a failure to be complete could affect your cost.
- **Industry-standard document preparation.** Microsoft Word is an industry standard for writing a report, but not for designing a brochure or creating a mailing list. Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop are industry standards for drawings and illustration or photo manipulation and color correction but not for page layout. While many programs can make PDFs, not all can produce an industry-standard PDF that can be used for printing.
- **Proof reading.** Proof reading is your responsibility, even when we are preparing the document layout (though we do have an obligation to produce a proof that is free of typos and misspellings of common words). Only you can proof read for uncommon words such as industry jargon or names, contact information, proper nouns, etc.
- **Timely input submission.** When you are providing inputs – a PDF file, text, photographs, illustrations, mailing list, postage deposit, etc. – we will give you a due date for each element. That date is the latest time you can provide the input if the job is to remain on schedule. While we might remind you of upcoming due dates, the final responsibility for timely submission rests with you.
- **Respect our pricing.** We use a rational basis for determining the price of a job that includes the cost of production materials, labor, and equipment; an allowance for overhead; and profit. If you find a lower price somewhere else, it isn't because we padded our quotation. It is because the specifications were different or the other printer has equipment that is more efficient at manufacturing that particular job. We will work with you on price by changing specifications or production methods, but we won't automatically price match to a competitor.
- **Prompt payment.** For us, the job is not complete until the invoice has been paid. If we have delivered your printing order on time, exactly as ordered, and at the agreed-upon

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price, show your appreciation by paying within terms. If something we are not aware of was wrong with the job, call it to our attention not by withholding payment, but by letting us know right away so we can fix the problem.

Loyalty: The Relationship Rewards

If we are successful in building a solid printing customer/vendor relationship, the reward will be loyalty on both sides. We will be loyal to you

by continuing to fulfill our responsibilities to be worthy of your trust. You will be loyal to us letting us know when there are new opportunities within your company and by recommending us to others.

If you are interested in taking the first steps toward building a relationship and gaining its many benefits, contact us and we'll arrange a convenient time and place to meet.

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Business Vocabulary

AAs: Abbreviation for author's alterations. Refers to changes made after a job has been submitted (such as changes in design, layout, copy, graphics, or photographs). Printers charge for AAs.

Bindery: the department in a print shop where finishing work is completed. Sometimes called post press.

Contract proof: A proof made from film negatives or from the digital file from which press plates will be made.

Estimate: an approximation of pricing on a job offered when specifications are not yet firm; sometimes presented as a range. An estimate is not binding on the printer.

House sheets: selected grades and sizes of paper that a printer carries in inventory.

Manufacturing capability: the aggregate of equipment, supplies, and staffing that defines the possible range of products that can be produced by a company.

Manufacturing capacity: the total amount of work that can be produced in a given time.

PDF: an acronym for Portable Document Format, a universal file format that preserves the fonts, images, graphics, and layout of any source document, regardless of the application and platform used to create it.

Preflight: evaluation and analysis of a digital file to ascertain whether it has all the elements necessary for accurate output and conformance to printing requirements.

Proof: a print made from the artwork (electronic or mechanical) that will be used to produce the press plate or digital image.

Quotation: a firm offer to produce a job exactly as specified. Considered binding on the printer unless specifications change.

Specifications: A listing of exactly what will be used to produce a printed piece – paper, ink, sides to be printed, number of pages, bindery requirements, and the finished size. May include customer-provided inputs (such as artwork or copy).

Trade printer: a printing company that provides printing for other printers and does not work directly with the end user of the printing.

“House sheets: selected grades and sizes of paper that we carry in inventory.”



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A Reorder Rule of Thumb

“...allow one working day for each step in the order entry, printing and delivery process.”

Reorders are best handled routinely, when your remaining supply will last long enough for us to reprint the job in our normal turnaround time. An easy-to-remember rule of thumb is to allow one working day for each step in the order entry, printing, and delivery process.

Here are the typical steps to filling an order:

- 1. Order entry** – we receive your order, enter it into our production management system, and order any exceptional materials that may be required (such as paper we do not stock).
- 2. Prepress** – the job goes to our prepress department for digital file retrieval, raster image processing, and platemaking.
- 3. Press** – the job is printed on press or digitally.
- 4. Bindery** – post press work such as trimming, folding, numbering, perforating, padding, stitching, or booklet making is completed.
- 5. Packaging** – the finished job is shrink wrapped, boxed, or packed in cartons.
- 6. Delivery** – the job is ready for pickup or scheduled for delivery..
- 7. Invoicing** – for us, the job isn't complete until we have completed the invoice.

Of course, not every job requires all steps, and we may finish more than one step in a single day (such as packaging, delivery, and invoicing). But as a rule-of-thumb, allow one day for each process.