

## PRINTING ISSUES: TYPES, QUALITY & COSTS

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The world of printing is somewhat confusing to those who are not familiar with it. Printers are similar to restaurants. They come in a wide variety. There are the family owned Mom & Pops; the small operations with one or two locations, the franchises and the big commercial enterprises. With each one you will have pros-and-cons. There are differences in capabilities as well as costs. And even though you use the same printer, order the same thing each experience will be slightly different.

**The big questions are:** 1. Can you — and your prospects and clients — tell the difference between a \$3, \$5, and \$9 hamburger? 2. Is sales, service and quality checks important to your final output? For Coca-Cola it is critical, for a small manufacturing plant it may not be that much of an issue.

The cost of printing is a concern for almost every business. Many factors in the printing process influence the final result and will have a direct impact on your budget. These include quantity, paper selection, number of ink colors, the amount of ink coverage, and finishing work like binding, folding and stapling.

### A Quick Overview:

Digital Print	Quick Print
<p>(Kinkos, Digital Color Shops, Your Home Printer)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Takes orders over the counter</li> <li>• Sales people change hourly</li> <li>• No press checks</li> <li>• Outsource some print jobs</li> <li>• Business Card Prices: Start around \$95.00+</li> </ul>	<p>(Often a Franchise, Sir Speedy, PIP, etc.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Takes orders over the counter</li> <li>• Sales people are full-time staff</li> <li>• Generally no press checks. Will require proof</li> <li>• Outsource some print jobs</li> <li>• Business Card Prices: Start around \$150.00+</li> </ul>
Small Commercial Print	Large Commercial Print
<p>(Mostly works with designers and agencies)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appoints a sales or service person</li> <li>• Sales people are full-time staff</li> <li>• Press checks optional. Will require proof.</li> <li>• Can handle most print jobs in-house</li> <li>• Business Card Prices: Start around \$200.00+</li> </ul>	<p>(Works with the trade only)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appoints a sales or service person.</li> <li>• Sales people will cater to you</li> <li>• Press checks often required</li> <li>• Can handle most print jobs in house</li> <li>• Business Card Prices: Start around \$250.00+</li> </ul>

## PRINTER TYPES: WHAT TO EXPECT FROM EACH

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### Digital Print

- Pros:** Can take all file types.  
Quick turn-around.  
No set-up, press charges.
- Cons:** Limited paper selection and sizes.  
Output will not match professionally printed pieces.  
Usually can't do envelopes.  
Limited quality and color control.  
Price-per-unit does not drop like on a press.
- Ideal for:** Small runs (1,000 or less)  
For 4-color printing, may be cost effective over 1,000.  
If your content is changing and you don't want to commit to content or a large run.

### Quick Print

- Pros:** Quick turn-around.  
Lower prices.  
Generally good service.
- Cons:** May outsource some jobs.  
May or may not give opportunity for proofs and press checks.
- Ideal for:** Lettershop, business cards, flyers.  
Cost effective at runs of 1,000-2,000.  
1 & 2-color print jobs.

### Small Commercial Print

- Pros:** Generally full-service.  
Bluelines and press checks are optional.  
Good for both quick print and high-end printing needs.
- Cons:** May not work directly with public.  
Not cost-effective for short-runs.
- Ideal for:** 2, 3 & 4 color printing.  
Brochures, flyers, CD covers.  
Custom inks, die, embossing, etc.  
Medium-to-large runs.

### Large Commercial Print

- Pros:** Best quality printing.  
Most options in paper.  
Outstanding sales and service  
Can check every step of the process.
- Cons:** Works only with the trade.  
Small-runs may be cost prohibitive.
- Ideal for:** Sophisticated, complicated print jobs.  
High volumes. 10,000 and above.

## PRINTING COSTS: TOP TEN WAYS TO KEEP PRINTING COST DOWN

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### 1. Plan ahead of time for your printing needs.

The ability to make smart printing decisions needs to be thought out ahead of time. Consider it an investment. Leave time for proofing, decisions on quantity, paper, and design. Many printers have rush charges if you need it right way.

### 2. Limit the numbers of colors you need to print.

Color cost money. The number of inks needed is a consideration, as a plate needs to be made for each one and depending on the type of press used, it may need to go thru more than once.

### 3. Limit the amount of ink coverage in your design.

The more ink coverage the more a printer will charge for running the job, because the more difficult the job will be to print. Bleeds (where the color runs off the side of the page) also cost more. After the printing is completed, the paper must be cut to the finished size and oversized paper must be ordered to accommodate this.

### 4. Choose your paper carefully.

Paper is one of the biggest cost considerations in printing, especially in large runs. Quality paper cost more. Quality paper prints better. Ask your printer for recommendations. Sometimes a paper can be substituted to lower the cost of the project. Also, the finish of the paper — glossy, matte, dull — may effect the look of your piece. It is amazing how the different finishes will effect your final result. Mostly it is a matter of personal preference.

*For example, if you print your business cards on glossy stock and your letterhead on an unfinished stock so it can go thru your laser printer better, there is a good chance that the two will not look the same.*

### 5. For business cards, letterhead and envelopes use pre-converted paper stocks.

Ask your printer what paper families they recommend. Some of the more common ones are also available at office supply stores and paper warehouses in case you need extras. Converting an envelope can be more than the cost of printing it.

### 6. Print everything at once.

If everything is the same color, then printer can run the jobs together. You will save on set up charges and the ink for all the material will be more consistent.

### 7. Order more than you think you will need in the next few months.

The most expensive piece that you print is the first piece. The art charges, ink charges, set-up charges are all a fixed cost to the printer. Letting the press run after it is set up only incurs nominal costs. Have your printer quote ranges of 1,000, 2,000, 5,000 and 10,000. The cost may come out something like \$351, \$365, \$421, and \$491. If you break that down to a cost per unit you are looking at a per-piece cost of \$0.35 to \$0.05.

### 8. Choose the right printer-type for the job you need.

Each printer type is designed to cater to specific customer. Getting the right printer for the right job is critical.

### 9. Design with cost considerations in mind.

The more sophisticated the design the more it cost to print. Images, color, type, die cuts, special sizes can create a wonderful look, but may be cost-prohibitive to print. You can have your printer give you quotes *before* you start the design process.

### 10. Ask your printer or designer for advice on how to lower the cost of what you want. It is Free!

## PRINTING ISSUES: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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### 1. How do I find a good printer?

Ask for a referral from someone who's material you admire. Also, you can contact a few printers to see which is best suited for you. Be specific about what you need, otherwise you will not really be able to tell if their capabilities are a good match.

### 2. If they do a re-print for me will it cost less.

Yes, if they already have the artwork without changes. The art and blueline charges are generally not included on reprints. Be aware that some printers will give you a really good price on an initial run because they want you as a customer. Ask how long the quote is good for. Paper cost are always changing. They may have to increase some cost to reflect that.

### 3. The same printer printed the job twice, but the colors do not match the previous set. Why is that?

Printing is both art and science. The end of a large run may not look like the beginning if the pressman is not careful. The best thing to do is to make sure they have a copy of material you have printed in the past. Ask them to match it.

### 4. I had several printers quote the same job, why is there such a big difference in price?

If there is more than a 10%-15% difference, there generally is a good reason. For example, if you are having a Mom & Pop operation quote one and large commercial printer quote the other, that will make a difference. The smaller operation is also more limited on what types of presses they have and the quality of their output. Sometimes a small operation will outsource and mark up jobs they can not handle in-house and larger operations have to pay the overhead of all the equipment they have even if you are just using their small press.

Be sure to ask if that includes everything: art charges, output, samples, die cuts, tax, shipping. You don't want to be surprised later. Also make sure they are quoting it on the same paper. One glossy paper may cost more than another glossy paper. That will make a big difference in both costs and results. If the printer you like the best came in at a higher price, let them know of your other quote. As long as you have quoted the job apples-to-apples, they will most likely match it if it is reasonable.

### 5. Should I go to a press-check?

That depends on how important the end result is to you. Ask about their policy. Some operations, like Kinko's for example, outsource their printing. Press checks are generally not possible. You might asked to see a blue-line or a digital proof. Most good printers will require you to sign off on one. At this point you should be just checking for the quality of the output, not making changes to content. But, if you do see something you need to change – this is your last chance.

Printers are not responsible for content, typos, etc. They are responsible to make sure the output — such as color, images, type and paper is to industry standards and the customers expectations. You should bring hard copies or print-outs of what you want them to match.

### 6. I made something on my home computer. Can a printer use that?

Not usually. The only exception may be a digital printer. Unfortunately the most home computer systems do not have professional image programs on them. The biggest difference is that printer's use ink (Pantone/PMS color or CMYK) not RGB (Red/Green/Blue). Home computer programs use your the light in your monitor to create color. It works for sharing documents electronically and laser prints — but not for professional printing.

If you have an output you like, take a copy to your printer to see if they can reproduce it for you for print.

### 7. Other than printing what costs are involved?

The use of images, type and designs may or may not have cost associated with them. Some are royalty-free and others charge for each use. Royalty-free does not mean that they are free, just that you can use them as much as you want after they are purchased.