

Top Ten Tips

When looking for a printer

Looking for the perfect print provider for your firm? There are literally thousands of options, meaning finding the appropriate printer for your particular needs is not so simple. The following ten tips will help you to make smart, effective decisions to narrow your search, avoid making mistakes and find your perfect printer.

1. Think of yourself

Every buyer is different. If you are honest with yourself about what you're looking for in a printer it will make the selection easier and quicker.

Think about what matters the MOST to you; price, quality, customer service, lots of hand holding, locality. Will you need to work with a printer who lets you make a lot of decisions or will you want a 'print smart' company who will help you with production matters and processes?

Why not write it down, it will change over time, but you can quickly identify the printers who seem like a good fit.

2. Don't forget your friends

Find people in your industry who buy a lot of print. Luckily buyers are almost always generous and only too glad to share information with you.

Ask them questions like:

- Who do you use for x, y or z products?
- Why do you use them?
- How's their quality? Price? Service?
- How do they treat you?
- Do you like your sales and service reps?
- What do they do best?
- Do they have any weaknesses?

3. Don't get hooked up on heavy metal

Some print buyers choose printers based on their equipment. We don't recommend this, but it is a good idea to take a look anyway to get a sense of what they can produce in-house.

Key things to know are; if they do digital printing, have a pre-press dept, what finishing do they have on site.

4. Don't think that bigger is better

To find your perfect printer you need a good sense of what they can or can't do with the equipment they have.

You need to determine what products the printer produces and who for. Do not take "we do everything" as an answer, push for exact examples of types of products and profiles of their typical customer.

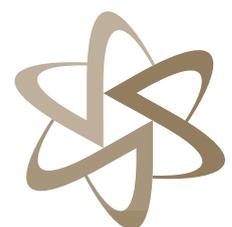
Naturally you also need to know how good their print quality is, though you probably won't be able to tell the difference between printers when shown a stack of printed material.

5. Ask about Pre-press

Today a printer's pre-press capabilities are just as important as their press capabilities. Nearly 100% of jobs sent to printers are digital, that is they are files created by the customer and sent digitally to a printer.

Key questions to ask:

- What systems do they have/support Mac, PC?
- What software programs do they have?
- Do they have an FTP site to upload your artwork?
- How do they proof the job to you, hard copy, e-mail?
- Can they make amendments to supplied artwork?
- Do they offer Graphic Design?



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6. Interview your reps

Meeting with a sales rep for the first time is an important step in the selection process.

Things to look for:

- Do they listen more than they talk?
- Do they seem trustworthy?
- Do they ask questions about what you need in a printer?
- Do they know anything about your business & industry?

What to find out:

- How long have they been in business?
- Who's the customer service rep (internal support)?
- How do they work as a team?
- Who will be the main contact?
- Get names of references

When all is said and done, TRUST YOUR GUT.

7. Don't use a printer without a Customer Service department

Work with a printer who has a Customer Service Dept. Your sales rep maybe your contact but their internal contact or customer service representative is the person you will be working with most of the time.

A good CSR will proactively manage your print projects. They will keep you informed about progress, especially any issues with artwork, proofing, printing or finishing. They should be able to advise you on stocks to use, processes to use and anything else that will help your job run smoothly.

8. Be wary of no on-line presence

Generally a business that does not have an online presence should be avoided. Unfortunately those who do have an online presence don't always do anything with it. Beware of a website that hasn't been updated for months.

Your printer's website should be a source of information for you to help you make the best decision on how to print your job.

9. Beware the grumpy estimator

Estimators can be a law unto themselves and it isn't unheard of for some print providers to take days to do what seems like a simple estimate. Here are some important tips to get your estimates nice and quick and most importantly accurate:

a. Get it right first time.

Get the specification right, you will be amazed how often the size, quantity, paper stock or binding methods are left off the brief.

b. Keep the options down, preferably one or two.

If the specification changes when the job is near to be ordered it is much better to ask for a re-quote later on. Producing quotes with lots of different spec's can be very time consuming.

c. Ask for advice if you need it.

A good estimator will be able to advise you on many aspects of your job. They should be able to advise on how to save money by recommending best size so you don't waste any paper or best production methods.

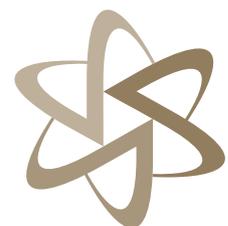
10. Don't forget the environment

Historically the print process was an environmentally unfriendly process with significant amounts of waste being created and harmful pollutants being chucked into landfill and sewers. Thankfully this has all changed and most printers will, as a minimum, have changed their processes to comply with recent legislation.

Ask printers about their environmental policy:

- Do they measure how much waste they collect
- How much of this is recycled
- How do they dispose of pollutants
- Do they offer environmentally friendly papers as standard

Be concerned if your account manager or CSR cannot answer these questions.



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