



Secrets to Designing a Great Printed Catalog

Businesses that have numerous products to sell often rely on printed catalogs as a quick way to display their wares to the buying public. Laying out a catalog might seem like a daunting task at the outset, but there are a few things you should know that can make the process easier.



Map out your pages

The first thing you need to decide is how many pages your catalog is going to be. Books, magazines and tabloids are all printed in four-page increments. Imagine one large sheet of paper that runs through the press. This paper then gets folded in half to create the front and back cover and the inner pages. So right off the bat you know your catalog can be no smaller than four pages - a front cover, two inside pages and the back cover.

Once you've figured out how many pages your catalog is to be, it's time to get an overview of what's going to be on each page. You can do this by either drawing up boxes that represent each page or simply by making a list. This sounds tedious, but if the foundation isn't rock solid at this point, the rest of the design process is going to be a nightmare.

Prep your images

No catalog would be complete without nice photos of the products being sold, so here's where you gather your images and prepare them for printing.

It's best to use high-resolution digital photographs or pictures that have been scanned at no less than 300 dpi from a digital scanner. Once you've assembled all of your images into their own folder, it's time to prep them for the printing process.

Use a good image-editing program like Adobe Photoshop to prepare your pictures

for the press. If your catalog is being printed on an offset press you'll need to change your images' color mode from RGB to CMYK, or if you're printing your catalog in black and white, change the images to Grayscale.

Once you're satisfied with how your pictures look, save them as TIFF files at a resolution of 300 dpi. The paper quality you'll be using to print on will be a major determining factor in what resolution to use, so check with your printer to be sure.

Some people assume that saving images at resolutions of 700 dpi and above will make the print quality better, but that's not true. Most commercial presses print with moderate line screens, so the extra resolution is just wasted file space.

Layout

Now that all of the prep work is complete, you can begin laying out pages. In order for this process to go as smooth as possible, it's recommended that you use a professional layout program such as QuarkXPress or Adobe InDesign.

You can choose to lay out the pages individually or you can create the actual spreads the printer will use.

If you want your layouts to stand out, try making one of your images dominant on the page and place the smaller photos around it. This is not only a good design technique, but it makes it easier on the reader to navigate the page. Remember, you want them to look at everything, so a dominant image with smaller, satellite images forces the eye around the page. Just keep in mind to create a nice balance on each page and you can't go wrong.

A word about copy

Pictures are great, but you need to give your readers compelling product descriptions and other information. It's tempting to play around with fancy fonts installed on your computer, but resist this temptation at all costs.

Readability is key, which is why using a standard font like Helvetica, Times or Verdana is your best bet. You can always create visual interest in your type by making your headlines bold and keeping your copy in a standard font.

A small catalog of four to eight pages can be easily laid out in a few hours. In fact, most of your time will be spent preparing your images for the press. Once you get to the actual lay out, though, you're home free.

About Us

Since 1985, Spectrum has provided better printing and service to nearly 5000 small business marketers, business owners and graphic designers. Spectrum combines state-of-the-art capabilities and the industry's best digital and offset sheet fed and web printing equipment with experienced print professionals and color specialists to deliver quality, consistent color matching and 99.8 percent on-time delivery. By offering a 100 percent customer satisfaction guarantee, Spectrum also stands behind every order, every time. Spectrum is your success story!

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