



*”What You See Ain’t Necessarily What You Asked For”*

Life has a funny way of dealing from the bottom of the deck. There you sit with a pat hand and, out of the blue (or grey) somebody lays down four aces. Happens everyday, usually when you least expect it or can afford it. So it should come as no surprise when you decide it’s time to produce a brochure or catalog that you are embarking on a dark and dangerous journey, full of potential pitfalls. Kind of like doing a reconnaissance behind Yankee lines while wearing a sign that says “shoot me”.

As with everything else we’ve had the pleasure of taking a pot shot at, planning what you’re going to do is the quintessential element. And as we’ve pointed out before, most of the people you are going to do battle with are little better than carpetbaggers and scalawags. But that shouldn’t come as a big surprise.

A brochure and a catalog serve different purposes: one sells you and your company; the latter sells product. One can be virtually timeless; the other, by necessity, must be timed and timely. Now that might sound pretty simple, sort of like knowing that “cush” is not a gourmet meal. [Editor’s Note: “Cush” was a Southern war-time delicacy of bacon, cornbread and water. The concoction was cooked until all the water was boiled out. Try it some time.]

Let’s say that you know what type of material you need; that you have followed all the rules for creative strategy and development; that you are ready to go to the printer. Here’s where it starts to get fun.

I’m going to run through a list of things that you might want to be prepared to answer before you walk out the door:

- Is your piece camera-ready, or is a layout needed?
- Does type have to be set and mechanicals made?
- If you have photographs you want used, do they have to be separated?
- If you have to set type, what font do you want and in what point size?”Printers think in terms of “point” size - with the standard usually 12 - and there are about as many font types as there are troopers in Sheridan’s cavalry. And, fonts come in two forms: Serif and Sans Serif. One has little hangy-down
- things and the other doesn’t. (For example, the headline for this article is sans serif and the text is serif type.)
- Do you need halftones, duotones, reverses, screens, bleeds, solids - or a combination of all of these?



- How many pieces do you need printed? What size is it supposed to be when you get it back?
- What kind of paper stock, with what kind of finish, color and weight would you like? Paper weight is figured on the weight of a ream (500 sheets) of a certain size - i.e., 500 sheets of a certain finish, sized 25" by 38" (to fit a press size), weighing 60 pounds is called 60# paper. What it boils down to is do you want heavy or light paper? "Finish" refers to whether the paper is coated or not; whether it has a dull look or a glossy look. 'Course you realize that a coated stock can also be dull looking if you get it in a matte finish. If all this seems about as clear as the James after a flood, join the crowd.
- Then we need to ask about how many colors of ink we are dealing with: one, two, three, four, etc. and what PMS (Pantone Matching System) colors. Are you going to varnish the piece? If so, that counts as a color - even if you can't see it.
- Now that you've answered all of these simple little questions, how do you want it to go together? Folded, perforated, stitched, perfect-bound?
- And then there are some of the more mundane questions like whether the pages are to be numbered, drilled, and if you want die-cuts.
- Last, you want to figure your time frame. When do you need it versus when you REALLY need it. Printers generally operate on their own calendar and clock which is something similar to Quantum mechanics. The usual response is "you want it WHEN...?" followed by reverberating and raucous laughter.

Now you probably want me to explain all of this, don't you?

Well, this Ol' Hoss hasn't got the time and space to do all of that in one sitting. And don't forget, the overriding contaminating variable is "HOW MUCH ARE YOU WILLING TO PAY!".

The better you want it to look, the more it's going to cost. But the question you have to ask is more important than cost:

If you had your druthers, would you prefer a piece that did what it was supposed to do; or one that "looked" good?

Sure, you can have both. But don't get bushwhacked getting it, either. We're trying real hard to give you an idea of what it's like to "see the elephant" without getting stepped on.

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Practically all of us take a certain amount of things for GRANTed. And, when we do, it usually results in some kind of major problem. Printing is one of those “things”, as we discussed last time. Everybody comes in contact with it; everybody uses it; very few understand it. It’s the lack of understanding that generally causes all of the chigger itches. And, if Johannes Gutenberg hadn’t updated the development of moveable type in the 1400’s you wouldn’t be in the quandary you’re in now and none of us would be where we are today - and you certainly wouldn’t be reading this column (somehow I’m not so sure y’all would put that in the major achievements of man but here we are anyway).

The mechanics of printing are driven by quantity: Offset is used for small to medium quantities; Gravure is used mostly for large to huge quantities - the kind needed to print all of those Free Standing Inserts (FSIs) you wade through by the ton in the Sunday paper. To be more specific, Offset is usually used to print sheets of paper while Gravure is used to print on rolls (also known as webs) of paper. Then, of course, there is the Perfecting Press - the kind that prints both sides of a sheet/roll of paper at the same time. And don’t forget that there are presses in one-, two-, four-, and six-color inking at one time. That means that the more complicated your job is, the more sophisticated the press needed to do the job. Complication and sophistication add up to M-O-N-E-Y.

Printing is a manufacturing process, albeit one that is generally considered custom manufacturing. Sorta like whether you like your hard cider from the suttler or from your own jug out of your own spring house. And to print a piece, let’s say a brochure, the steps are about as complicated as making a good batch of cider.

First you have to have a concept with an idea of what you want to say and what you want to show - that’s the easy part. Now you need to write the copy and pick the visuals you’re going to use. Let’s say you want your brochure to end up being 8 ½” X 11”. Well, the amount of copy and the number of visuals will determine how many pages you will have to print. Now if you go the other way and say how many pages you want, you might wind up trying to fit an elephant through the eye of a needle - just won’t do. So let’s say that your copy and visuals work out to four pages plus the cover: that works out to a total of eight pages to be printed, counting front and back of each page as one.

The next step is to set type and produce a mechanical or paste-up. The mechanical is the step that indicates what each page is supposed to look like and where the visuals are supposed to go. Before you set type and start work on the mechanical be sure that the copy has been “proofed” at each step - if an error occurs, and you let it get by, you may not be able to correct it later. Okay, you get one last shot to save your hide and that’s when the mechanical is completed and before the printing



plates are made. Remember to proof each mechanical to be sure that there are no typographical errors and that everything is where it is supposed to be. A one-digit change in an address or phone number can mean the difference in whether you get any sales or not. It goes without saying (that's why I'm saying it) that most errors occur in the elements that you take for granted. It amazes me how most typographical errors can happen with the most mundane elements of copy.

Once you have approved the mechanical it goes to film assembly, or stripping, where the pieces are put together to produce the plate. The film is put together in forms - the way the pages will be printed on a piece of paper. The size of the print surface of the press will determine the number of pages per form. If the form isn't utilized well you'll have a lot of excess paper trim, the more trim - the more paper you have to use to print. The more paper you use, the higher the cost. Oops. Miss Lucy has gotten her crinolines in a ruffle because we're running to hard, too long. Until next time, Don't chop anything but high cotton.

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