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PAGE-COUNT SPECS AND THE QUOTE PROCESS

BY KEN MORRIS

What's a "work and turn" and a "work and tumble"?

According to the International Paper Pocket Pal, Millennium Edition, Copyright 2000:

"In both work-and-turn and work-and-tumble layouts, the front and back of the sheet are printed on the same form, and there are two finished units to the sheet... After printing, the sheet is cut in half for folding."

work and turn: To print one side of a sheet of paper, then turn it over from left to right and print the second side using the same gripper and plate but opposite side guide.

work and tumble: To print one side of a sheet of paper, then turn it over from gripper to back using the same guide and plate to print the second side.

We welcome your questions or observations.
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SPECIAL DELIVERY

INFORMATION YOU CAN USE

For years, designers have told clients that the page count of any publication should be divisible by four. In basic terms, that's appropriate advice. In most cases, however, they would save money by thinking bigger: Printers using large sheetfed and web presses think in 16s and eights.

Efficient thinking

It comes down to efficiency. If your printer can run eight letter-sized pages on one side of the sheet, that's a 16-page signature—eight pages on each side. Four pages on each side of the sheet makes for an eight-page signature. Larger, more efficient printers seldom think four pages at a time.

Here's how that breaks down: In four-color sheetfed printing, whether each sheet yields four, eight, or 16 pages, each sheetwise signature (printing different plates on opposite sides of the sheet) is going to require eight plates per signature, or four plates for each side (This is different for a "work and turn" or "work and tumble." See the explanations in the box at left). Also required is a make-ready for each side—time prepping the press for that run. Each printed signature is going to require folding time. And, with more signatures, more time is involved both on press and in the bindery (collating, stitching, trimming, etc.). For each different-size signature, there is a separate folder setup.

Sweet sixteens

Where most things come cheaper by the dozen, printing comes cheaper by the 16s. If your printer runs a small operation and prints a 16-page four-color project on a small press, he's limited to four four-page signatures. That comes to 32 plates, eight make-readies, four blocks of press time, and four times the folding—not to mention other costs.

If your printer's press is large enough to run 16-page signatures, he's only using eight plates, two make-readies and one folding session. And binding goes much faster.

Some printers are limited to eight-page signatures, and while that's better than the smaller press, they're just not as efficient as running 16 pages at once. If you're running a job divisible by 16 through a printer limited to four- or eight-page signatures, you're probably wasting money.

Respectable specs

The difficulty comes in bid specifications that ask for a plus-or-minus of four pages—as though by cutting four pages money will magically be saved. If the job works in 16s or eights, to subtract four pages actually adds a signature—and more money. For example (both versions are four-color, self-cover):

32-page sheetfed book

- two 16-page signatures
- press time for two signatures
- 16 plates (four for each side of each signature)
- four make readies for two signatures
- one folder setup for two like-sized signatures

28-page sheetfed book

- one 16-, one eight-, and one four-page signature
- press time for three signatures
- 24 plates (four for each side of each signature)*
- six make readies for three signatures*
- three folder setups for three different size sheets

*Run sheetwise, printing different plates on opposite sides of the sheet. Once again, if the printer can combine smaller signatures on one sheet, or configure smaller signatures on larger presses as work-and-turns (see notes in box at left) he can save on plates and make-readies. Still the efficiency—and economy—is in larger presses.

And, for high quantity jobs that would be more efficiently produced on the web press, a difference of four pages can require running an odd four-page signature on a much slower sheetfed press. Since time is money, that four-page signature can run the cost of a project way up. An eight-page signature would have run cheaper than a four, since it would have more likely also run on the web press.

Pick up the phone

If you are drawing up quote specifications, call a printer you trust to help plan the job. Even if the project is going up for bid, a service-oriented printer will be glad to help you determine the most efficient way to run the job, and then give it his best shot in the sweepstakes. If he won't help, call someone who will. At the very least, you will have found out just how good a printer's service attitude really is.

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