



**COURIER  
PRINTING**

A CONSOLIDATED GRAPHICS COMPANY

**PRESS  
CHECKING,  
LIKE  
BEAUTY,  
IS IN THE  
EYE OF THE  
BEHOLDER**

BY KEN MORRIS

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## SPECIAL DELIVERY

### INFORMATION YOU CAN USE

**U**nless you reduce it to the mechanics of wavelengths and the stuff of physics and science, color is subjective. Every pair of eyes sees color differently.

The industry does as much as it can to standardize the conditions for perceiving color. Viewing booths use daylight-balanced 5000°K lights with standard gray walls. Process and Pantone™ inks are manufactured to exacting standards. The problem doesn't arise in formulas or standards. The problem comes during press checking—trying to make the pressman see the changes you, the customer, perceive need to be made.

Levels of satisfaction at press checks range from the customer looking the sheet over once and saying, "Looks fine to me," to the pickiest and finest of adjustments ink-fountain-by-ink-fountain. When you attend a press check, here are a few things to bear in mind:

### **Trust the pressman**

The fellow running the press works on that platform every day. He knows the machinery and its nuances well, and he knows all of the things that make it behave the way it does: differences in paper stock, humidity, mechanical temperament, etc. And he's there to make the product match your eye as much as he can. Before he calls you to the press to look things over, though, he's going to be confident that he's got the product close to satisfaction. But, you are the person he's going to satisfy, and your eye is different than his. You may see violet where the hues should be purple. Someone important in a photo may have cheeks and nose too red and you don't want them to look inebriated.

### **Speak in general rather than specific terms**

Instead of trying to impress the pressman with your command of printing knowledge ("I'd like you to increase the magenta in this area by six percent"), tell him what you are seeing and find out if he sees the same thing ("You know, this strip here looks like it could use a little more red. What do you think?").

The pressman knows how much ink is flowing and if the solution lies in adding the color that's

weak (to your eye) or perhaps it rests in dialing back the other colors slightly to allow the weaker color present to come through.

### **Be thorough, but make your adjustments as efficiently as possible**

This is especially true on the high-speed web press. Work with the pressman to get the product well into the ballpark. When, but for a few minor details, the color is acceptable, tell the pressman to start the counter and begin saving copies. You can make the last minor adjustments as the press is running copies for finished product.

On a sheetfed press, the adjustments are made before the press starts running finished copies, but bear in mind that time is money and the more time you spend tweaking color, the more the press time adds up.

While time is important, be thorough. Take a lupe and look at registration at the edges of photos and colored type. If you can, move other items of color outside your vision area so that extraneous color in your peripheral vision won't pollute your eye's perception. Compare current press sheets with earlier ones in the signature so you can evaluate color changes.

### **Beware the proof's limitations**

Whether the proof you and the pressman use is digital (CTP workflow) or analog (film-based workflow), the manufacturer has made every effort to make the color expressed as accurate as possible. The difficulty, however, lies in how the proof material presents itself to the eye in comparison to the paper the ink rests on as it comes off the press.

Whether it's a laminate proof such as a Chromalin™ or a digital proof like DuPont WaterProof™, the surface of the proof reflects or passes light differently than the surface of the paper. If the proof has a high-gloss finish, the color will likely look deeper and richer than what unvarnished or uncoated printed product will appear. If the proof has more of a satin finish, it may reflect more light than does the paper coming off the press. If you

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are using a matte or dull sheet, or are applying a dull varnish over the color, the difference will be significant and the colors may not appear as rich as those in the proof. This means that allowances or adjustments likely will need to be made in your eye's perception of proof color versus printed color. Then it becomes a team effort between you and the pressman to get the most out of the press that it will deliver—realizing that while you may well match the color hue of the proof with the printed product, the depth of color in the proof may be difficult to match exactly on press.

## Keep an eye on what color images run in line with each other

As the paper runs through the press, an image that places itself on the paper as it passes through first may affect the color quality in an image that follows in the same portion of the sheet. In those cases, the pressman becomes a negotiator to find a balance between the two images, and neither image running in line may be as close to the proof as you would like—to match one image closely would adversely affect the color fidelity of the other. And, while the more savvy graphic designer could probably design around this possibility, the pressman's compromise is almost always good enough to not have to spend that mental energy

in advance. If, however, you know that the color quality expected in a product catalog is not going to be open to compromise, the designer may want to have a discussion with the printer in the early stages of the project.

## Watch out for crossovers

When an image crosses over the fold, match the printed product to the proofs as usual, but then make sure that at the crossover you match one side of the sheet to the other. While in theory, if you match both sides of the crossover to their respective proofs then the color should match across the gutter, in practice it doesn't always work that way. At that point, the color match from one side to the other becomes more important than an exact match to the color proof.

## And that's for starters

There's more to it than this, but these are good rules for starters. Once again, trust the pressman. Customer satisfaction is the most important thing to the printer doing your job. The pressman is going to do his best to make sure you get what you are after on press.

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