Introduction

There are hours of work to take a digital concept to finished product. For example, we have a checklist with twenty-eight steps to produce a final 4-color print ad from an approved design. While none of this is the fun and creative part of the process, it is necessary to deliver a quality print-ready advertising file for production in a magazine or newspaper

Credit: https://conversations.marketing-partners.com/2013/05/prepress-file-preparation-your-production-checklist/

Designer

1. Size and crop all images in PhotoShop
2 Merge all drop shadows with images; flatten layers
3. Place images in document (encapsulated), not linked
4. Spell check all text blocks
5. Check text layer(s); make sure that all text is on non-art layers
6. Check stroke and line weights on all elements (not text)
7. Remove unused colors from color palette/swatches
8. Check colors (CMYK, spot, spot conversions, grayscale)
9. Save document copy for web-safe PDF production, needed for step 19.
10. Convert each text block to outlines
11, Group each text block
12. Check color of each text block for shift
13. Set black text to overprint
14. Create crop marks and bleed area
15. Set document properties
16. Save document as Creative Suite compatible file, EPS, and PDF
17. Check EPS for color shift and layering problems (make sure that all type is visible, that there are no gradient replacements, and no loss of transparencies)
18. Print proof with crop marks
19. Open web-safe PDF from step 9 and create preview PDF, down-sampling images to 150 dpi or less
20. Send 4 documents and placed images for proofing

Prepress

Proofing

1. Create copy of file for proofing
2. Check file size dimensions, bleed area and safe area
3. Print color separations (check colors); proof each plate for inclusion elements against color proof provided by designer
• Type set to overprint
• Only correct color plates (no additional spot colors)
• No dropped elements
• Choke and trap set when required
• No transparent elements that may color shift
• No overprint light colors over dark
4. Proofread text backwards, comparing to text document or marked-up client approval copy
5. Pre-flight images for resolution and size
6. Compare color proof to client-approved printout for all elements
7. Close file — DO NOT SAVE. If changes are needed, send notes to designer.
8. If proof passed, package original file from designer for publication; traffic

Conclusion

Most of the steps in our checklist are simple and normal creative production workflow. Some are the result of experience earned on how to make a file most likely to be compatible for any print publication and reduce the risk of unintended color shifts and "drop outs". We also clearly separate the proofing from the design function. It's important to have a set of "fresh eyes" view the files. Here's a digital example of why making the time for separate proofing steps is important – we ran across this ad on a wind industry website.