Creating Print-ready Design Files

TRIM and LIVE AREA
Add trim or crop marks to your design to indicate the design's visible ("live") area. These marks will instruct your printer where to trim (cut) the paper. All design elements inside the borders of the trim/crop marks is considered the "live" area of the design. Make sure all trim/crop marks are correct/consistent from page to page.

PAGE LAYOUT
Use single page format **(not spreads)** if the design includes more than one 4-page signature. Do not create double sized or oversize pages in the application. Be sure the page sizes are the same from file to file. For spines with wrap around images, please contact us for dimensions in advance.

BLEEDS
Any design containing images or elements that touch the trimmed edge of the page should include bleed, which is the extension of those images or design elements beyond the trim edge by at least 9pts or 1/8" (0.125in / 3.175mm). Wide/large format printing requires 1/4" bleed as standard and 1/2" bleed for materials of 3/16" thickness or more.

MARGIN
If your design contains critical content (excluding bleed) that cannot afford to be clipped/trimmed off the final product, it is best to allow for a 1/4" (0.250in / 6.350mm) safety margin inside the trim area.

RULE WEIGHTS
Using predefined "hairline" rules in many applications creates problems in output. The minimum designation for hairline rules should be .25 points (1pt for wide format) to help ensure uniformity. Our system will automatically adjust hairline rules to this minimum. Whenever possible, simplify lines on designs. Working with designs that have excessive anchor points can affect processing time.

RGB to CMYK Color
Convert all RGB colors to CMYK in a graphic editing program such as InDesign, Photoshop or Illustrator. RGB is a digital representation of color and is not meant for print applications. Although your printer may be able to convert your file from RGB to CMYK, doing this yourself and referencing a Pantone Matching System (PMS) color guide will ensure the file matches your design intention.

SPOTS COLORS
When using spot colors in your design, please make sure the swatches are set to the specific Pantone spot colors in the design software application to ensure we use the correct ink.

EFFECTS
If your design utilizes any special effects such as emboss, deboss, UV, spot varnishes, or requires die-cutting…they should be built and positioned correctly on a separate layer within the application as VECTOR art format and should be built with the least amount of points as possible.

FONTS and IMAGES
When transmitting your design file to the printer, include all postscript screen and printer fonts. Creating outlines on a typeface is also an option. Raster images should be CMYK and 300dpi and sized accordingly in the document.

FILE PACKAGE
For best results and to make file collection as simple as possible for native file submission, please use the "package" feature in InDesign. These features will gather everything Lithographics needs to produce the product into one collected folder.

PDF FILES
Export your design file as a press-ready PDF with bleed and trim marks checked in the dialogue box. Use single page format **(not spreads)** if the design includes more than one 4-page signature.

FILE TRANSMISSION
Please upload your design files directly to our Hightail file sharing server (formerly YouSendIt.com) by clicking here: https://spaces.hightail.com/uplink/Lithographics. If you need to send your files using DropBox, please share the file location with your sales or customer service representative and follow-up by phone or e-mail to ensure it has been received so that we may begin working on it.

Additional Tips for Troubleshooting Print Design

COLOR
There are many variables that can create discrepancy between how a design is perceived on a monitor vs. how it looks on paper after it's been printed. The type of monitor (LED, LCD, Retina, etc.), how well it's been calibrated, and the paper selection are the most significant variables faced by designers when it comes to designing for print. To make sure you're designing with the finished print result in mind, it's best to identify the desired spot or process (CMYK) colors to use by comparing and selecting them from a printed Pantone Matching System (PMS) color formula guide. The Coated and Uncoated version of the formula guides are the basic starting point to understanding how color choices will ultimately appear on paper. They're a great tool to help you achieve your desired look.

TRAPPING
When a project requires the perfect registration of adjacent color layers or when overprinting or adding a foil, some minimal trapping may be required to avoid unsightly gaps (white spaces). Even with the most precise press or printing process, those gaps can occur if there's any instability in the paper/media.   "Trapping" is the creation of overlaps (spreads) or underlaps (chokes) between adjacent design elements to account for any shifts in registration. A good printer will use trapping to make sure there are no exposed white areas that develop during the printing process.

PAPER GRAIN
Planning your design to account for the grain of the paper is important. Be sure to consult an expert from your printing company if creating a design that requires folds, especially of heavier stock papers (i.e. for packaging). If making a folder or box, designers can expect to see small cracks along one edge of the box, where the fold goes against the grain. A good printer can help minimize these cracks with matrix scoring, which essentially creates indentions in the final product that help guide the folds.