

Hints and Tips for Designing Disc Artwork for Print

Designing your own artwork for print can be a daunting task. By following some basic guidelines, picking the right tools for the job and doing some simple preparation it can be a very straight forward and rewarding process.

Before you start your design on the computer, get a basic idea in mind. Things to consider include what colours and fonts to use, any images or logos to be included and the focus of the design e.g. brand awareness, marketing material, product catalogue etc

Which print method is right for you? This is a tricky question, and is where we come in. When it comes to disc printing there are many ways to go about it, each with their own Pros and Cons. Once we have discussed your design and know the quantities required, we can offer helpful advice to ensure you achieve the best print possible.

Thermal Printing – Short-run printing either for full colour images or plain black text using heat and pressure to apply the print from a **CMYK or Black only transfer ribbon** directly on to the disc surface. Provides high quality vibrant images with a durable glossy finish. Full colour thermal print is perfect for photographic images and vivid designs. It is not suited to very light tints and gradients. Black thermal print produces a sharp finish for plain text and simple logos.

Inkjet Printing – Short-run printing, full colour. Inkjet systems will sometimes use 1 combined CMYK cartridge or typically 4 or 6 separate **CMYK cartridges**. Gives a high photo quality print which handles more subtle gradient images and skin-tones due to the mixing of inks directly on the disc surface. A glossy or matt finish will depend on the media used. Image is not physically fixed to the disc surface, so if moistened the print may smudge.

Litho/Offset Printing – High volume printing full colour. **Four plates (CMYK)** need to be manufactured from your original artwork. Each plate is used to transfer an inked image onto a rubber blanket that has been mounted on a cylinder. The rubber blanket then transfers (or offsets) the inked image onto the disc as it passes through the press. As the disc moves through the press, the four colours combine to create a high resolution picture on the face of the disc. With offset printing, the colour resolution is much greater. This printing process works best when using CMYK plates plus a WHITE base plate and will create the highest quality and most detailed print finish available. This process is therefore ideal for realistic photo images. Litho is a great alternative to Silk Screening for those highly detailed photographic artwork designs though this process does not lend itself to large block areas of solid colour.

Screen Printing – High volume printing using up to 5 **Pantone, PMS or "spot" colours** giving the advantage of an exact colour match to your corporate colour/artwork guidelines. This gives a high quality durable finish. In this process ink is pushed through a screen mesh so the print is made up of very fine dots. This is best suited to solid block colours, the lower the tint of a colour, the lower the density of dots printed. At very low tints the print may take on a spotted appearance. For this reason, light tints, drop shadows and gradients etc. are best avoided.

(Short run = Up to 1000 discs High Volume = 1000 discs and above)

How your job will be printed will affect how your artwork needs to be designed. You will need to know how your job will be printed before setting up the artwork. If printing in CMYK, you must ensure your artwork is created using CMYK settings not RGB. If printing using Pantone (PMS or 'spot' colours) you must make sure that these colours are correctly specified within your file. A combination of both is often possible, but can be more expensive.

What colours to use? Most commercial print will use a CMYK 'four-colour' process (Cyan, Magenta, Yellow & Black). This means that colours will be made by mixing varying amounts of these separations. These colours will NOT match those seen on your screen, computer monitors display colours in RGB and are backlit, meaning colours will appear much brighter than on the printed material. Print techniques using Pantone (PMS or 'spot' colours), which are standardised colours (a bit like those on a paint chart), allow for consistent results. Companies will often have strict corporate guidelines and specific Pantone colour references for logos or corporate colours.

Use the right tools for the job. There are a plethora of software packages out there, choose the most suitable for high resolution disc printing. For example, you can create effective and striking screen presentations in Powerpoint®, but it's next to useless for creating artwork for print. Ideally use an 'industry standard' design software package like Adobe® Illustrator®, but not everyone has access to these tools. Speak to our designers and we will be able to offer you advice on the best way to create your artwork with the tools at your disposal.

Sizing. Create your artwork at the correct size from the start and include any bleed that may be required. This will avoid your artwork having to be re-sized, which may result in a loss of quality. If your artwork needs to be re-sized it can alter the scale, perspective and positioning of elements within your design and may also have detrimental effects on the print quality of your artwork. Use images of resolution 300 dpi (dots per inch) or more and try to avoid increasing the size of pixel based (raster) images such as JPGs and TIFFs. When you enlarge an image you do not increase its resolution. Think of it as only having enough paint to cover one wall, you could try to spread it thinly to paint the entire room, but it won't look as good. Taking into account the finished size of your design, what to include will be limited by the actual space you have (on a CD for example). Think about the scale and don't try and include too much. You may be able to fit a lot more into your design by making everything smaller, but will someone be able to see it easily? Rather than using tiny illegible text, consider adding a paperpart such as a DVD wrap or CD booklet to give more information. A design with a few, well proportioned elements will always look better than having too many elements 'competing' for attention.

Fonts. Fonts come in literally thousands of different forms, but you don't have to use them all at once. Often choosing fonts from the same family and using varying weights (Regular, Light, Bold etc.) will produce a more cohesive and attractive piece compared to one where many different font types are used. Due to the fact that so many different fonts are available across both Macs and PCs, we may not always have the same fonts as you. If we need to edit your artwork for you (to make colour/text changes etc.), we will not be able to carry out the necessary edits without the font. One way to ensure text compatibility is to select all text used within the design and select the "Create Outlines" option (usually found under the "Type" menu), this will convert the text into vector objects (graphic shapes) and eliminate the need for the font. Once this is done

however, text is no longer editable, so it is wise to pre-save a separate copy with the text as fonts in case you need to edit the text at a later date. Very small font sizes and very fine text should be avoided wherever possible, particularly when against a dark background. Try to use a minimum of 6pt, also for crisp print results try to avoid drop shadows and gradients on text. If you are emailing fonts with your artwork, put them into a Zip file first. Fonts can become easily corrupted when being sent by email.

Whilst the tips and tricks given here will not cover every single aspect of designing your own artwork I hope at least some of the points will help. We have gathered a handful of handy tips and put them below, if you like you can cut them out and keep them by your computer!

You may also find our Artwork Guidelines helpful which can be downloaded from:
<http://www.cdteam.co.uk/Assets/Downloadablefile/CD-Team-Artwork-Guidelines-15422.pdf>



CD Team Design Tips Card

- If in doubt, give us a shout! Call us on **01491 636373**
- Drop shadows and gradients are best avoided.
- Tints/percentages of solid colour need to be above 15%.
- Use Rich Black (50% C, 50% M, 50% Y, 100% K)
- Always add bleed (a minimum of 3mm).
- Remove keylines before sending us your artwork.
- Keep text and images atleast 3mm away from any edges on paperparts.
- CMYK colour values must not exceed a total of 300%.
- Remember...we're here to help.

If you have little or no graphics knowledge our skilled design team are always here to help. We can create or re-create your artwork whether have a detailed design brief or just a sketch on a Post-it note. It is always best to discuss artwork at the creation stage so that we can offer advice and avoid delays at a later date.