

Understanding the McCourt Label Proofing Process

The proofing procedure is an extremely important transaction that takes place between a customer and a label manufacturer. We rely on proofs for copy, spelling, design and layout, as well as color. There are a variety of proofing methods available and each one can play a different role. Our goal here is to educate you on your proofing options and to help you gain a better understanding of the process.

Soft Proofs - These are proofs that are viewed on a computer monitor. Various solutions are available but the most common form is PDF (portable document format), an increasingly secure method of proofing. The benefits of PDFs include low cost, speed and convenience. However, there are drawbacks. Unless you're an experienced user, it can be difficult to spot problems which can effect the printed result. Also, accurate color reproduction isn't possible unless you've invested in a sophisticated professional color calibration solution. Only rely on a PDF proof if you have no other option. NEVER rely on a soft PDF proof if you need to make sure your colors reproduce as expected, or if you can't afford the cost of a reprint if things go wrong. If color matching is imperative, ask for a color-calibrated printed proof.

Prepress Proofs - A prepress proof is a hard copy analog or digital proof that uses ink jet, toner, dyes, overlays, photographic, film, or other techniques to give a close approximation of what the finished piece will look like. While analog prepress proofs use photographic or film techniques, digital prepress proofs print directly from the digital files to ink jet, laser, and similar printers. Unlike a press proof, the prepress proof does not use the actual printing inks; therefore, color proofs may not be quite as accurate as a press proof. There are various levels of color matching ability with a prepress proof. The lowest level would include digital proofs printed on uncalibrated ink jet or laser printers on standard copy paper. These proofs are low cost and can give a close representation of the artwork that was submitted, but cannot be relied on for color matching. Inexpensive analog prepress proofs include contact proofs, such as bluelines, used for checking positioning or where exact color is less critical.

There are many more expensive but increasingly more accurate digital and color overlay and laminate proofs. These proofs use color-calibrated systems and can be relied on for close color representation. Digital halftone, bluelines, Color Key, Matchprint, and Cromalin are common types of brand name and generic prepress proofs. This type of proof will give you a close representation of what to expect for color but it does not replace a press proof. Variations in inks and material substrates used on press will slightly modify the final product produced.

Contract Proof - The contract proof is a prepress proof, usually a hard copy color proof, that is looked on as a contract between the printer and client - the final proof before going to press. Currently, the de facto standard for a contract proof is a Matchprint or laminate proof. If a soft copy or non-color calibrated digital proof is used, that will be marked "NOT FOR COLOR". The contract proof is the one that says to the printer, "Everything looks good, let's go to press."

Press Proof - A press proof (AKA "press check") is the most accurate system and is from the printing press, plates, and actual inks specified for the job. A press proof is used to verify images, tone values, colors, and imposition. Because it involves setting up the job and running a proof on the actual paper to be used, it is normally done with the designer on-site (and sometimes the customer as well). It's the final chance to "get everything right," and will add additional cost to your job. By the time you get to a press check, typos should be fixed, and layout, font, and image choices finalized. Use the press proof or press check to confirm paper and ink colors and their interaction. Check for registration, page-to-page color printing/color consistency and the overall appearance of the type and the absence of stray marks or hickeys.

Color Matching - If you require specific color matching, the preferred method is to include the Pantone color in your artwork and request a precise color match. We use the Pantone system throughout our workflow and will match that color at press. If you do not have a Pantone color, we request that you forward a "live" sample, a matching logo, letterhead or a color printout of what you want the color to look like on the final printed piece. In most cases, we can closely match that color through our proofing system and at press. If we cannot match the samples submitted, we will work with you on getting a close representation. Please note that matching a printout can result in additional time in the art room and additional cost. If your label is being affixed to letterhead or another piece that will have a similar logo or color theme, please send a sample to us when at all possible. That way, we have a color target to shoot for so we can help to insure that all pieces of your mailing or package match.

Summary - In addition to the above proofs, we will also always send you a detailed proof sheet. Please always take the time to review the information on this document. It will include things such as the size, spacing, finishing width, wind direction, and material to be used. When you receive your proof, make sure you check it carefully. It is also a good idea to get another set of eyes on the proof to make sure you don't miss anything. If you notice any errors, compare the proof with the artwork you supplied. If the problem is due to an error with your artwork, there could be a small charge to cover the cost of making the corrections or handling your revised artwork. Always ask for another proof to ensure any corrections have been carried out successfully. The overall goal is to make sure everything is accurate up front. It is much less expensive to correct a problem at the proofing stage than after the product is printed. We want to make sure we meet and exceed your expectations from start to finish. Should you have further inquiries regarding the McCourt proofing process, don't hesitate to contact us.

