



Offset or digital printing?

Offset printing uses CMYK (also known as ‘process’ or ‘full colour’) and Pantone spot colour (PMS). Offset printing uses ink and plates to transfer an image onto paper and produces high quality, cost-effective results for long print runs.

With offset printing, the unit cost goes down as the quantity goes up because the set up fee for large print runs is absorbed by the diminished price per piece. A single page A4 flyer would typically require a minimum quantity of around 1000 copies to be cost effective via offset.

While a colour proof is generated from the approved file to be checked before printing commences, it is not printed on the chosen stock, so final colour matching is still made ‘on press’ as the job is run.

Digital printing can print both CMYK and RGB, although colour shifts may occur with RGB content. Short runs of any quantity less than 1000 copies are typical for digital printing. Digital printing offers quick turnaround times for small print runs because it doesn’t require printing plates and so involves less time and expense to set up a file to print. This means that a finished file can be proofed and the final quantity run within a short time period.

Proofs can also be printed on the final stock choice for accurate colour checking. The largest sheet size used in digital printing is an RA3 which is slightly larger than an A3 page. Digital machines will usually run paper stock from about 80 to 300gsm and are the most affordable method to customise marketing materials such as direct mail pieces.

So which process is best for my publication?

The characteristics of the two processes will determine how best to print certain jobs. For instance, you may choose digital printing based on price, the quantity required and the time available, but as offset printing offers the ability to specify PMS colour, offset may actually be the better choice to achieve the desired result.

Digital printing has made huge strides in respect to quality and two copies of the same design — one via offset printing, the other via digital printing — may appear identical to the untrained eye. Offset does however provide more impressive results than digital printing for solid areas of colour, especially within certain colour ranges, and is superior for high resolution printing where fine detail and a more permanent print is required.

Do you need a special paper or finish, unusual printing surface, or unique size? While the options are continually increasing for digital, offset printing still currently offers the most flexibility.

Need some guidance? Ask us for recommendations that work within your budget, quantity and quality requirements. We’ll ensure you achieve the best possible print job for your money — whether it’s offset or digital.