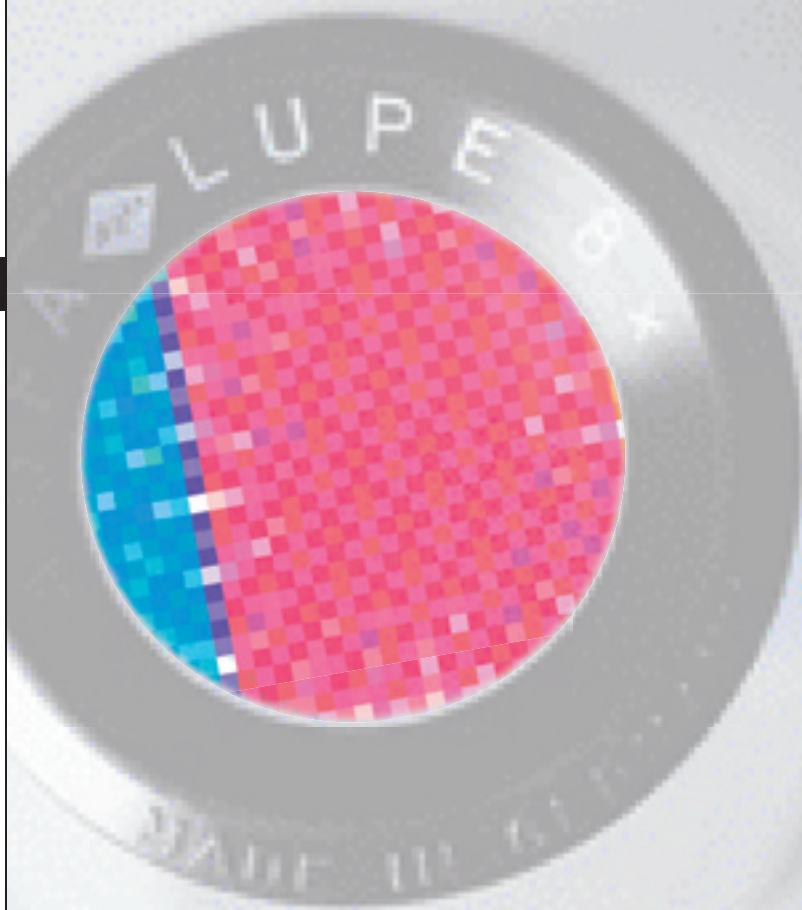


In the loupe

What to do before, during and after a press check

By Tom Kubinski

16



A while back, a long-time customer came in for a press check. We started as we usually do, having fun, talking, joking with each other and looking at the proofs/press sheets. Then she asked me, “Tom, I’ve been doing this a long time, picked up a lot along the way, but never have been shown how to do a proper press check.” At first, I thought she was kidding, but she assured me that she wasn’t. “Can you help me?” she asked.

“Certainly,” I replied, and we rolled up our sleeves and jumped in.

First things first

Here are some things that should happen before a job goes on press:

- >> Establish communication with your printer early on in the process.
- > Discuss specs, budgets, expectations and deadlines.
- >> Talk about the vision of piece: the desired impact and the look and feel you want. How is the end recipient expected to react when handling piece? Is it something that will be looked at once or a high-profile project with a long shelf life?
- >> Review the actual design, images, techniques and any special requirements. Let your printer know if you are open to options that might enhance your piece.
- >> Ask your printer to explain how a computer creates color (RGB) vs. a printing press (CMYK).
- >> Determine your separation expectations. Are you going for overall pleasing color or must specific areas match an original? Some colors are easier to reproduce than others. How will the chosen line screen impact the final result? The more dots an image contains, the greater the number of potential tones—but only if you’ve used a high-res image.

Design | Work with your printer to plan for such things as crossover hook ups, images above or below each other on the press sheet, and four-color process tint stripping vs. using a PMS color for more controllable, even printing and consistent color.

Paper | The substrate used will impact your images’ final color as well as sharpness, print contrast and level of gloss and detail. Evaluate brightness, whiteness, smoothness, flatness, type of surface (gloss, dull, silk, matte, uncoated), the weight and its opacity. If you’re doing a series or “family” of pieces, stick with the same stock and coatings. *Note: The same images and PMS colors will print differently on different paper brands, paper coatings and coatings like varnish, aqueous, UV, etc.*

Coatings | Aqueous and varnish can protect as well as enhance images. You can even add a level of tactile richness that would otherwise be impossible.

Proofing | While there are many options, no proof can duplicate the final result perfectly. Remember that proofing materials will look different than the printed piece. First check the whiteness, brightness, gloss, etc. of your proof material against your project’s stock. Even the coatings will affect your final outcomes. For example, a blue stock to proof material means that your colors will have a

Check it out

Sappi offers an excellent, free publication: "How to read a press sheet." Order it at www.sappisamples.com.

cooler look/feel, while adding a coating like varnish, aqueous or UV to the printed piece might mean colors are more rich or vibrant than the proof.

Most printers' proofing menu is similar to Sexton's:

>> **Digital dylux:** An imposition proof is used to check copy, size, positioning of artwork and pagination, etc. Ours is a CMYK, two-sided proof that also gives you color designation. A digital dylux shouldn't be used for color-critical projects, but will suffice as the sole proof for less exacting color jobs.

>> **Match proof:** This contract color proof is imaged at a high resolution and can simulate both coated and uncoated press sheets. The proofing system is ICC profiled to press conditions and provides excellent proof-to-press color matching. Varnishes, dielines, fifth and sixth colors are shown on a proof overlay.

>> **Press proofs:** These provide an actual printed piece using your images/stock of choice to see how they'll reproduce. A press proof is expensive and time consuming and should be used only when other methods can't simulate the effect.

Proof checking

The environment in which color is viewed can change it dramatically. When checking color, ensure that you are in a color balanced and controlled room. Have all supporting materials on hand, such as dyluxes, final color proofs and companion pieces.

Start with a reader sheet—a makeready sheet used for proofing content (but not color). Check copy changes noted on dylux, design elements and positioning of art and type. Ensure that paper, weight and finish is correct.

The second sheet

Mark sheet No. 1 and number all subsequent ones to track your moves. Look at print quality, evaluating overall color and balance, flesh tones, registration, PMS color (vs. the book) and type (edges should be crisp, there should be no broken type and knockouts should be clean). There should be no hickies or scratches. Densities should be consistent across a page. Pay close attention to cross-over hookups.

Prominently circle any areas of concern. Draw a line out to the white area of the sheet so your queries are clearly visible.

Take your time with the second sheet. Don't try to do it all at once. Compare the sheet to your color proof and understand where compromise might be necessary. Unless you are a color expert, offer general rather than specific color adjustments ("less red"). Let the press operator determine what the press actually needs to do to get there.

Subsequent sheets

When you're finished with the second sheet, continue to mark sheets in numerical sequence. Double check previous adjustments (where you've been). Check tints—with each color move they might have shifted. Look at side-by-side similar colors, especially crossovers. Confirm areas that are correctly coated or uncoated. Check quantities and version differences. Finally, ensure that any changes you've made haven't impacted other critical areas due to the signature layout.

Don't be afraid to cut or fold sheets so you can lay them next to one another. This is especially important with cross-over hook ups.

Signing off

When you like the sheet, sign it. If the piece will be reprinted or is part of a group, ask the printer to make a note of the final settings for future reference.

P&MB

Contact Kubinski at tkubinski@sextonprinting.com.

Check your list!

- >> Bring all supporting materials: companion pieces, sign offs, etc.
- >> Look at final proofs and dylux.
- >> Number all press sheets in upper right hand corner consecutively with the changes you are making.
- >> Look at overall color to see if it needs adjustment.
- >> Provide general color adjustment comments ("Whites are too dirty").
- >> If crossovers are present, check color consistency of different positions.
- >> If using four-color process tints, check color consistency throughout.
- >> If PMS colors are being used, check against PMS book or color chip.
- >> If color is not adjusting properly, check registration marks.
- >> Before the final sign-off, check for hickeys or similar artifacts.
- >> If coating with varnish or aqueous, check for registration and smooth application.
- >> If mailing and using a coating, is a knockout necessary for inkjetting, laser printing or written information?
- >> Note any last concerns or details for the operator to watch as he or she gets up to speed on press. Ask for the desired number of press sheets to take with you.
- >> Sign off!

Author, author

Tom Kubinski is an 18-year veteran of the graphic arts. He has worked with major ad agencies nationwide, as well as direct manufacturing, medical, non-profit and many other market segments. Kubinski says the three years he spent estimating, planning and coordinating projects have shaped his perspective. "It gave me a full understanding of various equipment capabilities," he explains. "I can help customers ensure we meet their design intentions within the desired time frame."

Kubinski offers Sexton's customers a wealth of educational resources, including "TK's Korner," his online newsletter at www.tkskorner.com.

About Sexton Printing

Sexton Printing is a St. Paul-based printer of multicolor marketing materials and publications for some of the leading corporations and non-profit organizations in the Twin Cities area. The company features one of the industry's strongest customer education and technical support programs complemented by knowledgeable sales consultants like Tom Kubinski.