

Different types of proofs

There are various options for proofing, whether at the design/artwork or print stage.

Before artwork sign-off stage

Through the design and artwork stages of a job, proofs are generated by L&B for checking layout, copy, image selection and cropping etc. These can be pdf "soft proof" or paper proofs "hard copy".

Soft proofing – pdf:

PDF (see our section on different types of PDF) is a completely brilliant invention for ongoing proofing through a job (it does have limitations as a final proof, which is mainly to do with screen display). PDF (portable document format) was invented so that documents could be viewed no matter which programme they were created in – even if the creator and viewer were on different platforms. This revolutionised proofing – we work mainly in Quark XPress (a professional design package which would be of little use to most people we work for) on Macs, whereas most of our clients view our proofs on PC through Acrobat Reader.

Paper proofs:

We generally print out black and white proofs on an A3 laser for copy checking. We do have a colour laser which we use for visuals – it can be useful for seeing the split between colours, though not the precise shade. Accurate colour proofs need to be run on a proofer.

Amends at this stage are done by us, chargeable or not depending on how many amends are included in the cost of the job.

After artwork sign-off stage

After repro stage, proofs are generated by the printer or repro house. These are for two purposes: checking the reproduction of the images, and ensuring that the file has not behaved unexpectedly when processing through the RIP. The options are:

Post RIP PDFs:

These will show up file issues, but are not accurate for image quality or colour because they will be viewed on a monitor. If colour is not a particular issue, or if the job is a reprint which can be matched to a previous printing, PDFs are fine

Colour lasers:

Although printing companies' lasers are better than office machines, they are not colour accurate so should only be used if exact colour is not an issue. Lasers will, however, show up file issues if they are post RIP. They are cheaper than digital proofs.

Digital proofs:

These are the most accurate of the normal proofing systems, and we recommend them for most of our work. The files have been through the RIP, so any problems will show up, and the colour is up to 98% accurate if the proofer is accurately calibrated and the printer adheres to international standards. Proofers are extremely sophisticated and can be set to mimic all sorts of print set-ups – eg European sheetfed, US web etc, though most are not set up specifically to simulate uncoated stock. Generally, the proofer only uses one type of paper – typically a "silk" finish – and has built-in

settings to simulate the paper colour of the finished job. For example, if a job is to be printed in a large run on a web press it will probably be on thin, cheap paper which will “show through”, so the proofer lays down a very fine tint down overall to simulate the finished result. It is, however, still an impression and of course the feel of the surface and weight will not reflect the printed job. Digital proofers can be set up to print extremely high quality results, but for our purposes they need to simulate the end result as accurately as possible, within the limitations of the machine which will print the final job. Their main purpose is to avoid nasty surprises! There’s no point in seeing a fantastic proof if the printing machine can’t possibly match it when the job is on press.

“Wet” proofs:

These are actually a very short run on the press – which is necessarily very expensive. Obviously these will be printed with the correct paper so colour will be accurate. Paper has a major effect on colour – especially uncoated letterhead stock which can turn a colour which prints a nice daffodil yellow (PMS 116) on coated stock into a bright orange! Before the advent of digital proofs, “wet” proofs were slightly more common (though still expensive!) and were produced on a flatbed press. These have now all but disappeared.

For all proofs after artwork sign-off, it can get very expensive to start changing design or copy. Of course, if you do spot a mistake, it can be amended, but it will be chargeable, and may delay the production of the job.

We trust that you find this information interesting and useful, and we welcome your feedback at info@landb.co.uk.