

What You Need to Know About Coatings

You Don't Have to Shy Away from Using Protective Coatings — Choose from a Variety that Protect and Also Enhance the Look of Your Printed Piece



Almost all printed documents are designed to be read by somebody. People handle them, pass them around, pile them, file them and generally manhandle them. All that activity can result in damage because inks can show fingerprints, scuff marks and scratches, particularly if the ink is a dark, solid color. Your printed piece has a better chance of holding up against all this abuse if you add a protective coating.

There are a number of different types of coatings, but they fall into two broad categories: those that are applied like another ink on the press and those that are applied during the binding phase after the ink is dry. Press coatings are generally thinner and less expensive to apply than bindery coatings.

You can select from three types of coatings: varnish, aqueous and ultraviolet. Varnish and aqueous coatings are generally applied on press, but ultraviolet coatings are usually a separate finishing operation. Because it is applied like an ink, varnish is the least expensive; it often costs about the same as adding another ink color

to your project. You can choose either flood or spot varnish. A flood varnish covers the entire sheet, whereas a spot varnish applies the coating only to a specific area. Applying a spot varnish to a photo, for example, can be a great way to emphasize it, since it can make the image look just as glossy as a photographic print.

As the name suggests, aqueous coatings are water-based. Aqueous coatings are often used on magazines because they do not crack or scuff easily. This type of coating generally covers the entire page, and can be applied on press if it is equipped with a coating unit.

Ultraviolet coatings offer even more protection than aqueous coatings or varnishes. These coatings are often used for heavy-duty uses, such as book jackets or packaging. An ultraviolet coating is essentially a type of plastic that is dried under ultraviolet light. Like other types of coatings, it is available in matte or gloss finishes. As with varnish, you can select a flood or spot coating. Because these coatings are cured with light, they don't release solvents, however, because they are so

thick, they can become brittle and crack when folded.

You don't need to do anything special to your artwork to add a flood coating. Explain to the printer the type of look you would like and check out samples of the various coating options. Then specify the coating you would like. If you opt to do a spot coating, you can set up the artwork yourself. Treat it as you would a separate spot ink color in your design (like a PMS color) so it will output as a completely separate piece of film. If you have questions or problems setting up a spot coating, please contact your printer's prepress department for more detailed instructions.

As with other finishing options, you always need to consider how your piece will be used. It is often difficult to write on a document that has a thick coating. Gluing and stamping can be problematic as well, so make sure you take that limitation into account in your design. However, with a little up-front planning, coatings can be a practical and eye-catching way to add a finishing touch to your piece. **■**