

Working with Spot Color

Spot colors make your documents elegant and your wallet happy.

Process color design grabs your reader and makes them look. But there are many reasons to use a subtler, simpler or less expensive approach. These approaches are the province of spot color printing.

Just like it sounds, spot color printing puts one or more exact colors on the page instead of simulating thousands of colors by combining the four process inks. Because spot color printing generally uses less than four inks, it is usually less expensive than process color. That does not mean that spot-color design looks "cheap."

One of the many uses of spot colors is for duotones—photographs printed with a combination of two inks—which have a subtle and elegant look. Furthermore, adding one spot color to black ink and the color of the paper actually gives the designer a complicated palette of many shades that can be combined to create more colors. Spot colors are also more precise than process colors—printers can get almost exact matches to existing spot colors, which can be very important for matching corporate colors.

However, spot colors are very difficult to reproduce and describe

exactly by looking at a computer monitor. This is why we use Pantone Matching System (PMS) inks and swatch books. Pantone sells inks and swatch books made from those inks. The swatch books contain the precise recipe for creating each color in the book. By choosing a Pantone color, we can come very close to the exact color that you specify (as long as the paper is similar to the swatch book paper). Although spot color printing is usually less expensive than process color, it is also more difficult and expensive to proof because most proofing systems use CMYK inks.

There are several important tricks to remember when working with spot colors in computer design:

1. Do not assume the spot colors will render accurately on the screen. Instead rely on the Pantone spot color swatch books.



2. The name of a spot color in a graphic must exactly match the name of the spot color in your layout program. For instance PANTONE 1805 CVU is not the same color as PANTONE 1805 U (each color will print on a different plate).

3. Proof your spot color design by printing separations. Make sure each color plate contains the correct page items (red text on the red plate, blue image on the blue plate and so on).

If you follow these guidelines, spot color printing can please both your eye and your budget. 