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SOURCING PRINTERS AND USING PRINT BROKERS

IT'S NO SECRET that printing is one of the largest expenses in the publishing industry. Finding ways to get the most out of your printer is the best way to keep the print manufacturing costs under control.

If we consider that the ideal printer relationship is a partnership where both you and the printer feel a sense of ownership and pride in the end product, how does one source a print partner they can trust and go on to develop that kind of working relationship?

There are many different types of printers to choose from and many things to consider when deciding which printer best suits your manufacturing requirements. Meeting and finding a suitable print partner does take a bit of legwork. Following these steps will help get you started.

CONSIDER A PRINT BROKER

If you do not have a lot of experience sourcing printers, a print broker can do some of the legwork for you. Once you have given them the specifications for your print requirements, they can take your quote to market and solicit prices from a variety of printers. This does not negate a thorough investigation of the printer you have selected before committing to doing the job with them, but typically the print broker will have an existing relationship with the printers he is soliciting quotes from and might be able to recommend the best printer for your needs. Most often a print broker will invoice you directly instead of the printer, and include a mark-up for their services. Sometimes you might get a better print price from a broker because they have existing price structures with their print partners based on an annualized volume of work.

INVESTIGATE WHAT TYPE OF PRINTER BEST SUITS YOUR JOB

There are several factors to consider when making the decision to print your magazine, such as:

- Print run quantity
- Trim size of the finished magazine

- Paper quality
- Bindery type
- In-house services, such as premedia, polybagging, or inkjet labeling
- Personalization/variable data capability
- Distribution capability
- Printer location

DETERMINE WHAT TYPE OF PRINTER YOU WILL REQUIRE

There are three types: sheet fed, web offset or digital printing. Typically, sheet fed is best for print runs up to 10,000 pieces. For 10,000 to 30,000 a mid-sized web-offset printer should be considered with the sheet fed printer for comparison purposes. Any print runs higher than that should be printed web offset.

PREPARE A REQUEST FOR QUOTATION (RFQ)

An RFQ will contain all the specifics of your print run. Having an RFQ will help structure the various quote submissions to help you compare them apples to apples. It's best to create a spreadsheet with all of the particulars including:

- Print run quantity
- Annualized frequency (Is this a one off?)
- Specific stock weights, paper grades and coatings
- Finished trim size
- Print requirements—4 colour process, spot colours, coatings
- Plate changes on press for regional splits or version changes
- Bindery method
- Insert, outsert or polybag requirements
- Prepress, file preparation, or archiving requirements
- Mailing requirements
- Freight estimate request
- Turnaround time request—typically the time it takes from file delivery to the printer, until the finished pieces are on the loading dock, ready to ship.

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GET PRINTED SAMPLES

A printer should be able to provide you with printed samples similar to the job you are asking them to do. Compare them to other printer samples and assess the quality.

ASK FOR CUSTOMER REFERENCES AND CALL THEM

When calling for a reference, be sure to ask detailed questions. Take the time to write a list. Following are a few suggestions for questions you might like to ask:

- How long have you printed with this printer?
- Have they delivered on time, every time?
- How many times have you experienced a delay in the process and how did the printer respond to get you back on track?
- What manufacturing problems have you experienced and how did the printer resolve your issue?
- Are you happy with the customer service you have received from the Customer Service Representatives in the printing plant?
- Have you been to the printing plant and what was your impression of the facility?

TAKE A PLANT TOUR

Go to the printing plants you are considering and check them out. Try to go when there is a job running on the press and on the bindery equipment. Check for cleanliness on the plant floor, ensure it appears organized and that skids containing unfinished product are well labeled. The pressmen should be reasonably clean and active while the equipment is running.

Once your assessments are complete and you are satisfied with the pricing you have been given, you are ready to negotiate. Remember that this is a working relationship and treat it as such—ask for what you need and give where you can.

Your printer is your partner and they will help you to be successful. Your shared goal will always be manufacturing the best quality product, at the best price, in the shortest amount of time.

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