

A Brief Explanation of Printing Terms

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Many of you work closely with your printer or designer on your marketing projects. Sometimes printers and designers are hard to understand. Well, because of this, I thought that you would appreciate a little help understanding our lingo.

- **Bleed:** I know that this really confuses some people. No, your printer/designer is not going to commit a crime. This term really means that the image that is being printed runs off the edge of the sheet of paper. This technique is a very useful design tool, but requires that a larger sheet of paper be used for printing. The paper is then trimmed to the final size after printing.
- **Camera Ready Art:** Now don't get your cameras out when you hear this one. In printing, type and pictures are both considered to be artwork. Camera ready means that all type, pictures, illustrations and other elements are already in position on paper, exactly as you want them to be produced.
- **CMYK:** I bet a lot of you have thought long and hard about this one. CMYK stands for the four colors used in four-color process printing (see below). They are cyan (C), magenta (m), yellow (Y), and black (K). I don't know why K stands for black, maybe they found it hard to say CMYB?
- **Four-Color Process:** This one is like it sounds. It is a printing process made up of four colors. The four colors are CMYK (cyan, magenta, yellow, and black). They are used together in a series of dots at different angles. Four-color process printing is used to produce full color photos and is more expensive than multi-color printing.
- **Halftones:** Here is a popular one. It almost sounds like a musical group, doesn't it? Actually, any photograph can be converted into a halftone. A halftone has a pattern of tiny, varying dots. The viewer's eye is fooled by these tiny dots. A high density of dots appears dark and a light density of dots appears light.
- **Make Ready/Set Up:** OK, we all have to do this when we get up in the morning. For some of us, it takes that first cup of coffee until we can "make ready". Most printers will charge you a make ready or set up charge. In printing, there are many steps required to begin the printing process. The make ready or set up charge is for the costs involved in these steps.
- **Marginal Words:** These have nothing to do with swear words or the gossip you heard at the water cooler. Marginal words are used on multiple-part business forms when it is required that a part of the form, go to a particular person. For example, on a two-part form, part one may say customer copy and part two may say office copy.
- **Multi-Color Printing:** This is an easy one. This means that the printer will be printing in multiple PMS colors.
- **PMS:** We all love this one! If you are a man, this has nothing to do with your wife! PMS stands for Pantone Matching System. This is an international system used to mix inks to standard colors used by printers. It is similar to paint matching systems used at paint stores.
- **Register:** Has your printer/designer ever asks if your job registers? If so, I bet this one gotcha for a minute. In printing, register is the act of printing two or more colors together with accuracy. This means that the ink colors touch each other on the paper.
- **Screen:** We all have them on our windows, right? A screen in printing is actually a varying shade of a color. A screen is made up of tiny dots, like a halftone. More dots mean a darker screen. Fewer dots mean a lighter screen.
- **Spot Colors:** We all learned about Jane and Spot when we were young. Well, in this case spot stands for a specific color in a design. Usually a spot color is printed with a PMS color instead of four-color process.

I hope that this brief explanation of printing terms helps. If you have any questions or comments about my explanations, please e-mail me at stacy@dmatters.com.