



How to Choose and Use a Documentation Printer

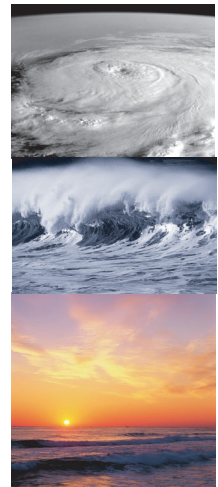
A Survival Guide for Meeting and Conference Planners

*By
Richard Smith, Ph.D.*

How to Choose and Use a Documentation Printer

A Survival Guide for Meeting and Conference Planners

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For our customers, who have taught us so much . . .

In the spirit of returning the favor

Sharon's February conference, devoted to continuing professional education, meets for a full week at a convention hotel. Sharon starts coordinating this event in August, and it consumes most of her time and energy for the next six months. She sends out preliminary and follow-up announcements to the membership, schedules trainers and lecturers, sets the meeting agenda, coordinates with the venue, makes travel arrangements, and compiles information that is sent to a printer to duplicate into conference binders. Two days before the event she loads up a rental truck with the printed binders and drives to the conference hotel.

Sharon's job involves a huge effort to coordinate the contributions of many people, all under a looming deadline. Reflecting on this, Sharon told me "My main worry is that someone I'm depending on will let me down."

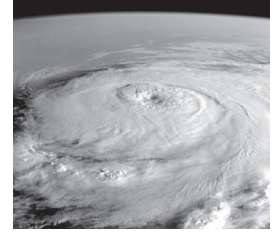
There's No Substitute for Experience

I've been in printing since 1978 and I can tell you that getting Sharon's work done is a complicated, challenging business, both for people in her position and for their supporting printers.

These challenges, I've learned in my 25 years of printing experience, are compounded many times because we're talking about time-critical documentation—mailings, programs, binders, manuals, and handouts that must be compiled, proofed, printed, bound, and delivered by fixed and inflexible dates.

If the meeting or conference meets Monday and the printed material arrives on Tuesday, it's a disaster.

What, then, can people in Sharon's position do to ensure that they have a successful experience?



"It's usually December when I start waking up in the middle of the night," Sharon said.

Sharon directs a North Carolina professional association that puts on two conferences a year for a statewide membership. She described her December anxiety to me while I was interviewing her in her office.



Sharon will be better off the more she understands about printing, and especially about how to choose her documentation printer.

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How to Stop Worrying and Love your Documentation Printer: *Price is Not the Most Important Consideration*

Sharon's feelings are real and deeply felt. The wise printer would do well to understand them.

But the reverse is also true: Sharon will be better off the more she understands about printing, and especially about how to choose her documentation printer.

And this may require a shift in mind-set on Sharon's part. Because budgets are always a concern, it's been my experience that meeting planners expend a lot of time and energy on sending out bids and seeking the lowest printing prices.

This, I'm here to say, may well be penny wise and pound foolish.

The best advice I can offer meeting and conference planners for successful management of their printing responsibilities is: spend more time choosing your printer and developing your relationship with your printer, and less time worrying about getting the lowest possible price on every transaction.

Take your cue from professional print buyers. People who buy printing full-time for a living understand the creative and demanding realities of the print production process, and know they "can't buy service," so they invest heavily in researching, sharing information, and building strong working relationships with their vendors. Finding printers they can count on is more important to them than raw price. Besides, they know that unless they're dealing with a printer who is not well equipped to do a particular job, comparative prices will all tend to be in the same ballpark anyway.

Professional print buyers look for printers who are curious about them and their business. They seek printers who put ideas on the table, who help them design for economical production, who are willing to juggle their production schedule to meet emergencies, who upgrade their

equipment to meet their evolving needs, and who generally work for everyone's peace of mind. To mangle a well-known phrase, the pros recognize that in printing, "familiarity breeds success."

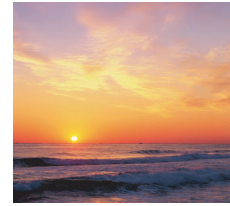
An example from our own work illustrates how meeting planners can benefit from emulating the pros. For many years we've worked with a local council that stages four major conferences a year. The council staff faces the challenge of producing a complex book for each conference. Much of the book's contents come from conference speakers and sponsors, who send in biographies, forum outlines, advertisements and so on, which council staff and our staff have to pull together. Needless to say, often this contributed material comes in later than it's supposed to, which means that we all scramble to meet the time-critical conference deadlines.

After wrestling with this situation, we sat down with the council staff and reviewed how the books were being produced. This led us to see that if we trained the council staff how to use a more sophisticated page layout program we could eliminate a time-consuming step in the publishing process.

The result: we shaved a work week off book production time, saved the council about \$8000 a year in print preparation costs, and helped lay the groundwork for the council's growth, since they now put on more events with about the same level of staffing.

These benefits are much greater than our client could possibly have achieved from price shopping and competitive bidding, and obviously would not have been possible without close understanding and collaboration between all concerned.

It is in the spirit of promoting such positive and profitable relationships that I've written this guide, and with the conviction that the more wisely you choose from among your printer options, the easier your job will be and the better you will sleep at night.



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A relationship is not something that you pursue; it's what happens when you serve the dreams of your customer.

Tom Peters

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People, People, People:

What to Look for in Your Documentation Printer

Printing is through and through a service business, albeit one that happens to put ink on paper. Service is the key. Printing is all about people, and the relationships between people, and people working together to solve mutual problems. People who click can make beautiful printing and—with the help of modern technology—get it done in an amazingly short time. People who don't click, can't. It's as simple as that.

So before you look at a printer's prices, or look at his equipment or beautiful job samples, think hard about how well you communicate with the people in the print shop you'll be depending on.

Here are a few good questions to ask yourself that will help you get started with the right printer:

Does your printer's sales rep work for you? Your sales rep should listen more than talk. He or she should respond to your concerns with knowledgeable options and solutions. He should help you improve your process. More than just a revenue-builder for his employer, you should feel that he makes real, positive contributions to your work.

Does your sales rep keep his promises? The samples your sales rep promises to put in the mail today should be in the mail. The quote he promises for Monday should be on your desk Monday. Evaluate how he does on the small things. If he comes through in the everyday details, you can count on him when the game is on the line.

Are your sales and customer service reps accessible and responsive? Voice mail, e-mail and mobile phones are basic, but how are they used? A good guideline: your messages typically should be answered in one hour.

Do your sales and customer service reps clarify things in plain English? Printing is full of arcane terms and concepts. Your

reps should make these clear to you whenever necessary. They should encourage your questions and respond helpfully.

Do your reps have quick access to additional tech support?

In the world of digital printing file issues crop up that go beyond a sales or service rep's ability to solve. When this occurs you need access to your printer's file technicians for a fix. Your documentation printer must provide this second layer of support.

Were you impressed with your shop tour? Always, always insist on touring the plant of any printer who is going to play a critical role in your publishing success. Inspect for cleanliness, order, and a clear workflow. Do jobs move through the shop in a logical progression? Talk to the crew as you move through the tour. Do they seem happy? Do they speak positively and enthusiastically about their equipment and their work?

Do you sense good intangibles on your tour? A good documentation printer should have a do-what-it-takes spirit, a 24/7 attitude, and a corporate culture that values teamwork, speed, and communication. And you should get the feeling that they really want to understand your challenges and get to know you.

Would you want to hire your customer service rep? This is an acid test. Your CSR is the vital link between your organization and the print shop as a whole. Since your printer creates every job anew as it comes in, every item of information is critical to success. CSRs are special people who can retain a myriad of details about your jobs and deadlines, while at the same time juggling and expediting a dozen other jobs they have in-house at any given moment. Your CSR must be an ultimate multi-tasker. If you can say of your CSR "I really wish he or she were my personal assistant," then you have found a documentation printer to stick with.

What Technology and Special Services Should You Look For?

Digital technology has revolutionized printing during the last 20 years. Nowhere are these developments more important than in the fast production of time-critical documentation for meetings and conferences.

Here's what to look for from a well-equipped documentation printer:

A useful Web site. This means more than a site with helpful information about the printer's services and definitions of printing terms. It means a site you can use to get your job done. Look for user-friendly interfaces that let you easily enter order specifications, upload files, and review proofs. Digital print files are often very large, so the Web site must be able to handle these. Sending files as email attachments isn't always workable because of the file size limitations imposed on these attachments, and because of potential file corruption. The site should be supported by a T1 or similar dedicated, broadband data line—not a dial-up or cable modem connection. Ask about this.

At least two high-speed digital duplicators. The most modern duplicating machines print industry-standard file formats such as PDF. They have productivity features like multiple paper drawers and “post-processor inserters,” special drawers for inserting pre-printed covers, inserts and tabs directly into a job as it prints. These inserters are essential because they greatly increase the speed and accuracy of document assembly. Two machines are essential to a modern shop for job juggling and reliability.

Updated equipment. Innovation in digital printing moves very fast nowadays. Every three to four years manufacturers bring out a new generation of machines with improved speed, productivity and quality. The quality of prints you can expect from modern digital color and black and white printers now rivals and at times exceeds that of offset presses.

Here is where it makes sense for you to start looking at print samples. Do you see bright and vibrant color prints? Does the shop have a high-speed color copier-printer (40 copies per minute or more)? Modern

black and white printers output offset-quality pages at more than 100 images per minute. Ask to see some. Large solids should appear black and crisp. Half-tones (dot screens) should be sharp. Even fine detail should reproduce well.

Multiple color technologies. A color copier-printer is basic, but advanced shops recognize the growing role and demand for color in business documentation, so they will also feature digital color presses by manufacturers such as HP-Indigo and Heidelberg.

These machines blend features of copiers and printing presses into a unique technology that produces high quality color in affordable quantities with fast turn-around times. Digital color (or “direct image”) presses bridge the gap between color copiers and conventional offset presses. The best ones produce full-color at 1270 dots-per-inch resolution, while also allowing you to economically add special touches such as spot and metallic colors and varnishes to your pieces.

A complete and automated bindery. Often overlooked by clients, the bindery is the critical area where your work is given its finishing touches and final look. It is also where a lot of work takes place that can make or break deadlines. A good bindery that can support today’s complex documentation requirements will be full of large and capable machines.

In your shop tour look for such items as

- a large, programmable paper cutter
- a high-speed paper-punching machine
- multiple coiling devices
- a high-speed folder
- a high-speed booklet-maker
- large table spaces for document assembly and packaging.

Custom index tabs. Most printers buy index tabs from specialty manufacturers, a process that adds time and cost to many projects. If tabs are important to your documents, seek a documentation printer with high-speed tab manufacturing equipment in-house. You will save time and money.

Fulfillment. Another service found in many documentation print shops, fulfillment involves the print shop taking responsibility for receiving and managing collateral materials for you, and kitting these together with the products they print for you. Fulfillment may also involve delivery by freight or parcel service to your end users.

If your work involves managing, for example, large inventories of binders, it may be less costly to arrange for your printer to do this for you. Your printer may offer automated re-ordering services, as well.

Mailing. Suppose you've found that ideal shop with great people you can really relate to and communicate with, supported by a helpful Web site and featuring current digital printing and automated bindery equipment. Then look for that added service that gives you one-stop shopping. More and more documentation printers are offering mailing as an added service. Mail processing typically involves special folding, gluing and ink-jetting equipment.

More important, the printer must understand the US Postal Service mailing regulations. Look for a printer who knows enough to help you design mailing pieces that can be produced efficiently and mailed at the most economical rates. Also, look for a service-oriented printer who will help you with list acquisition, and show you how to set up and manage your lists for efficient processing.

Ten Easy Ways to Save Time and Money on Your Documentation Project

Here are the most important things you can do to help insure that your project is done on deadline, and for the lowest cost.

- 1. Talk to your printer early.** Include your printer in the early planning stages of your project. Solicit ideas about the best way to achieve your cost and time goals. Printers really want to help with these questions! Give your schedule. Be as specific as you can about when you expect to have different components of your project ready, when you may be out of town or unavailable, who to contact with questions in your absence, what your schedule is for pre-event mailings and, of course, when your event takes place. Be sure to plan a few days into your schedule for proofing.
- 2. Be specific about special needs.** Let your printer know if your logo is a particular ink color, or if you require particular paper stocks, so he'll have time to order these materials. Inform him of your delivery requirements. Will you be using his delivery service, his shipping or mailing service, need single or multiple deliveries? The sooner he knows these details the better.
- 3. Submit originals for tabs, color covers, and color inserts first.** Since modern digital printers insert these items on the fly, your printer needs time to prepare them in advance of receiving your text. Letting printing machines automatically insert covers and tabs will save you money and result in a more accurate product. Ask your printer when the shop will need your collateral items for streamlined production.
- 4. Prepare digital files carefully.** File trouble-shooting can be the trickiest and most time-consuming part of the whole process. It can also be costly, since the printer has the right to charge for time he puts in making your files work.



A good pre-press department loves to help you do it right the first time, so don't hesitate to ask your sales or service rep to connect you with a pre-press technician for additional help.

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Ask your sales or customer service representative early on about supported software programs and appropriate printer drivers, and whether you should present your files in application, Post-Script or PDF format (this can vary from machine to machine). If you don't have the required drivers and job options on your computer, your printer can provide them.

A good pre-press department loves to help you do it right the first time, so don't hesitate to ask your sales or service rep to connect you with a pre-press technician for additional help.

- 5. Is that headline supposed to be in Courier?** Printers aren't mind readers, so you'll help them immensely if you send in a printout along with your files. It doesn't have to be pretty. A reduction in all black and white is OK.

The printout helps the printer identify fonts or graphics that may be missing in your files, and gives him a better shot at turning out the document you have in mind. It also helps the printer get things right the first time through, avoiding delays and re-proofing costs.

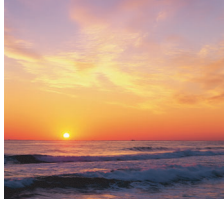
- 6. Review proofs immediately.** Review proofs immediately! Review proofs immediately! Respond to your printer with changes or an approval in no more than 24 hours. This is the most important thing you can do to help keep your project on schedule.
- 7. Minimize last-minute AA changes.** AA (Author Authorized) changes result in extra charges and threatened production schedules. Prepare your original early enough that you have time for a thorough internal review before you send it off. And review that proof immediately!

- 8. Consider using the printer's house paper stocks.** Most printers stock a variety of all basic papers. They usually get good prices on these papers, since they buy them all the time. Special-order papers require extra ordering time and will probably cost you more, so use them only where you need to for special impact.

- 9. Stick to standard paper sizes.** Plan your mailers, booklets and manuals around 8.5 x 11, 8.5 x 14, and 11 x 17 inch sheet sizes (and their tri-fold and half-fold equivalents) to reduce waste and cutting charges. Standard postcard sizes are 4.25 x 6 and 5.5 x 8.5 inches.

- 10. Print just what you need.** It's been shown that one of the biggest costs of business documentation is not duplicating it, but throwing away what you don't use. So estimate your needs carefully, and remember, once the job has been set-up, it's relatively easy to do a second run because of the low machine make-ready time of digital duplicators. So if you have a last-minute surge in enrollments, your documentation printer can probably run out a catch-up order faster than you think. Just remember to keep him informed of what you're doing and expecting.

Technical Tips



Here are the basic rules for checking proofs.

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A few more words about those proofs. Here are the basic rules for checking proofs:

- If your proof comes to you on-line, print it out.
- Look at graphics and half-tone (dot screen) resolution, and check for movement of text boxes or changes in line or page breaks.
- Look at highly designed pages upside-down.
- Read important text (reply addresses, headlines and so on) backwards.
- Check bleeds (areas where color runs to the very edge of the paper) and cuts by physically drawing out the cut lines using the crop marks on the proof
- Check traps (areas where two different colors abut) to make sure you see no white between the colors
- Always have a colleague or professional proofreader check your work. It's amazing what you can overlook in your own material.

Choose your software well. Microsoft Word is ubiquitous but it's a poor choice for complex document production. If you know Word, you can easily learn PageMaker (their underlying logic is quite similar) and you'll be surprised at the extra power it gives you.

PowerPoint is designed for display on monitors, not for printing. Duplicators and color copier-printers can print out PowerPoint slides, but it is not a good program for digital offset printing. Whenever possible, use software designed for printing applications, such as PageMaker, QuarkXpress, InDesign, and Illustrator.

File Formats. If your printer prefers to receive your originals in print file (versus application file) format, be sure to prepare them using his required job options and printer drivers. Generally speaking, Word and PDF formats are fine for output on black and white duplicators and color copier-printers. Your printer may prefer InDesign, Quark, PageMaker

or other application formats for materials to be printed on full-color digital presses.

Paper. A few guidelines about choosing paper:

- Black print on white paper is the most readable, so avoid color paper for major bodies of text.
- 24 LB bond/60 Lb offset paper is generally heavy enough to minimize second-side see-through.
- 80 LB gloss or dull text is a good choice for brochures and tri-fold mailers.
- 80 and 100 LB gloss or dull cover are good for color covers.
- 12-point C1S is a standard postcard stock. It's heavy enough to withstand mailing, the coated side prints a sharp color image, and the uncoated side accepts ink jetting for addressing. ("C1S" means Coated-One-Side.)

Varnish. Some modern digital presses can varnish in-line, a nice touch you should consider. In-line varnish is quite economical and adds a lot to the look and feel of your work. All postcards should be varnished on the image side to protect them through the mail (they can arrive looking real ugly otherwise). Covers should be varnished to minimize finger printing. Consider using spot varnish to highlight your logo and special images.

Varnish also reduces the drying time of ink, and so can speed up the turn around of your work.

In Conclusion

What, then, in summary, is the best advice I can offer Sharon, and the many other meeting planners and conference coordinators who share her printing concerns?

Our advice is quite simple, but runs counter to what meeting and conference planners commonly do.

Recognizing that printing is a huge and diverse industry, Sharon should start by doing some wise shopping. Setting aside the typical print-shopper's concerns about pricing, price breaks, and print quality samples, she should seek first of all a company staffed with people she can communicate and team up with. This simply means empathetic people who respond to her promptly, keep their promises, take pride in their shop and equipment, and who go about their business as if they worked for her. Printing time-critical documents successfully is truly a team effort. Sharon should start by choosing her team. And she should keep in mind that this takes time and energy before the next deadline-driven printing project begins.

Next she should make sure the printer is equipped with everything it takes to do her kind of work, with a heavy emphasis on digital equipment, expertise and experience, as well as important allied services, such as a thoroughly equipped bindery and mailing service. A shop tour is the best way to do this.

Finally, and very important, she should do her part to learn, with the help of her printer partner, what she can do to make it easier and faster—and cheaper—for the printer to do her work (remember to check those proofs promptly!).

If she does these things, we'll all sleep better.

About Laser Image Corporate Printing

Laser Image Corporate Printing is a digital print shop owned and managed by Kelly Clark and Richard Smith. Laser Image serves a diverse clientele drawn from many industries and occupations, including meeting planners, trainers, personal publishers and business documentation coordinators of all kinds.

Kelly and Richard founded Laser Image Corporate Printing in 1987 to provide modern printing solutions—solutions based on the service, promptness, and quality organizations need to succeed in today’s demanding business climate.

Our investment has centered on modern digital printing technology, and associated training and expertise.

We are equipped to produce full-color, spot color, color copy and black and white products. We produce them quickly, at reasonable prices and in practical quantities.

Please contact us for more information.

Laser Image Corporate Publishing
2810 Meridian Parkway #132
Durham, NC 27713
919-361-5822
www.licp.com



Our investment has centered on modern digital printing technology, and associated training and expertise.

Helpful Worksheets

The following pages are four worksheets designed to help you plan your printing projects and compile production information to submit to your printer.

Please feel free to pull them out and copy them for your use.

Meeting Planner's
Document Planning Worksheet

Document Title: _____ Final Due Date: _____

Destination: Office Printer Mail House Venue Other _____

Due Date Control

	Due	Notes
Internal Copy		
Provided Copy		
Edit		
Design		
Proof		
Print		
Distribute		



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 phone 919.361.5822 ▼ fax 919.361-1930 ▼ www.licp.com

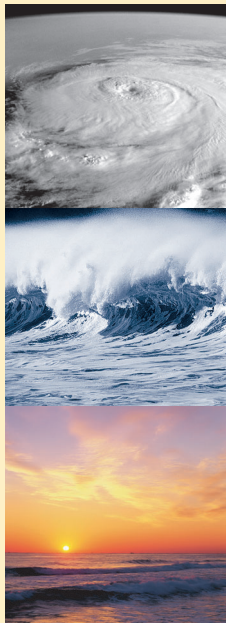
Meeting Planner's
Document Planning Matrix

	Internal Copy	Provided Copy	Edit	Design	Proof	Print	Distribute
Hold-The-Date Cards							
Preliminary Program							
Sponsor Material							
Presenter Material							
Registration Form							
Final Program							
Conference Book Cover							
Conference Book Tabs							
Conference Bood Text							
Handout _____							
Handout _____							
Handout _____							
Name Tags							
Tickets							
Room Signs							
Posters							
Other _____							
Other _____							
Other _____							



Month / Year





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Printing**

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