

Artwork Guidelines

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How to prepare print-ready artwork for promotional products, packaging and commercial print.

Built for practical use by clients, designers, procurement teams and production partners.

About this guide

This guide helps clients and design teams submit artwork that can move quickly from quotation to proofing and production. It covers file formats, color, resolution, typography, bleed, dielines and production checks.

Who it is for: Marketing teams, agencies, graphic designers, procurement teams and anyone supplying logos or layouts for branded products.

Important: production feasibility, minimum order quantity, print area, substrate behavior and color output can vary by product. Final specifications should be confirmed in the quotation and approved proof/sample.

1. Quick submission checklist

- Preferred artwork: vector PDF, AI, EPS or SVG whenever possible.
- Color: CMYK or approved Pantone/PMS references for print; avoid relying on RGB appearance.
- Images: 300 dpi at final print size for most high-quality print applications.
- Fonts: convert to outlines/curves or package fonts when requested.
- Bleed: typically 3 mm on commercial print and packaging layouts unless a supplied dieline states otherwise.
- Safe area: keep essential text/logos comfortably inside trim, fold and cut lines.
- Dielines: keep structural lines on a separate, clearly named layer and do not flatten them into artwork.
- File naming: include company/project, item/code, version and date.

- **Proof:** do not authorize mass production until the digital proof or sample is approved.

2. Preferred file formats

Format	Best use	Notes
PDF	Preferred final artwork	Export as print-quality PDF; preserve vector paths and embedded images.
AI / EPS	Logos and editable layouts	Keep linked assets packaged; convert fonts to outlines where possible.
SVG	Vector logos / web-to-print assets	Suitable when the production workflow supports SVG.
PSD / TIFF	High-resolution raster artwork	Use at final size and appropriate resolution; preserve layers if requested.
JPG / PNG	Reference or simple raster graphics	Not preferred for logos if a vector original exists. PNG transparency may not translate to all print workflows.

3. Vector vs. raster artwork

Vector artwork is built from paths and can be scaled without losing sharpness. It is strongly preferred for logos, icons, line art, spot-color printing, laser engraving, pad printing and screen printing. Raster artwork is made of pixels and is suitable for photographs, textures and full-color graphics when the resolution is sufficient.

- **Use vector for:** logos, wordmarks, icons, simple illustrations, cut lines and engraving artwork.
- **Use raster for:** photography, complex gradients and photo-realistic full-color designs.
- **Do not:** re-save a low-resolution JPG inside a PDF and treat it as vector artwork.

4. Color setup: CMYK, RGB and Pantone/PMS

Screen colors and printed colors are produced differently. RGB is designed for screens; CMYK is the standard process-color model for most print. Pantone/PMS spot colors are used when a defined brand color reference is required and the selected production method supports spot-color matching.

- Supply brand color references as Pantone/PMS values where available.
- For full-color print, convert or design in CMYK and review a proof rather than judging color only from a monitor.

- Exact color matching can be affected by substrate color, coating, ink system, surface texture and print method.
- When printing on dark or transparent products, a white underbase or white ink may be required.

5. Resolution and image quality

Artwork type	Recommended starting point	Why
Photography / raster graphics	300 dpi at final size	Helps maintain detail in standard high-quality print.
Very large-format graphics	Often lower effective dpi can be acceptable	Viewing distance may allow lower resolution; confirm with production.
Logos / line art	Vector preferred	Avoids pixelation and supports spot-color or engraving workflows.

6. Bleed, trim and safe area

For printed sheets, cards, brochures and many packaging layouts, artwork that reaches the edge should extend beyond the final trim line. A common starting point is 3 mm bleed on each side, but the supplied template or dieline always takes priority.

- Keep text, QR codes and critical logos away from trim and fold lines.
- Do not place important content directly on creases, seams, zipper lines or curved edges unless the product template explicitly permits it.
- For shaped promotional products, use the manufacturer print-area template rather than assuming the full surface can be printed.

7. Fonts and typography

- Convert final logo and headline fonts to outlines/curves where practical.
- Check small text carefully; very fine text may not reproduce well in pad printing, embroidery, engraving or on textured materials.
- Avoid ultra-thin strokes in reversed-out text.
- Keep editable source files if future copy changes may be required.

8. Lines, strokes and small details

Minimum line thickness varies by method and material. Fine lines that look clean on screen may fill in, break up or disappear during production. When in doubt, simplify fine details and request a production review before approval.

9. Dielines, cut lines and structural layers

- Place dielines/cut lines on a separate top layer named clearly, such as DIELINE / CUT / CREASE.
- Use a non-printing spot color or the supplier template convention for structural lines.
- Do not move, scale or redraw a supplied dieline unless approved.
- Keep artwork and structural information separated so production can identify what prints and what cuts/folds.

10. Special production considerations

Requirement	Artwork consideration
White ink / underbase	Provide a white layer when requested, especially for transparent, metallic or dark substrates.
Laser engraving	Usually 1-color/vector artwork; gradients may need halftone or may not be suitable.
Embroidery	Simplify tiny details; thread cannot reproduce every print-level detail. Digitizing is required.
Sublimation	Best on suitable polyester-coated/light substrates; full-color raster artwork should be high resolution.
DTF / heat transfer	Avoid unnecessary microscopic detail; transparent backgrounds and edge quality must be checked.
Foil / emboss / deboss	Use clean vector shapes; fine gaps and very small lettering may need adjustment.

11. Proofing and approval

1. Submit artwork and product/order reference.
2. Pen Promo reviews technical compatibility and print area.
3. A digital proof/mockup is prepared where applicable.

4. Client checks spelling, logo placement, size, color references and product code.
5. Production begins after documented approval.
6. For high-risk color/finish requirements, request a physical or pre-production sample where available.

12. File naming and delivery

Recommended naming pattern: CLIENT_PROJECT_PRODUCTCODE_VERSION_DATE.ext

Example: ACME_EVENT_PZ6559_V03_2026-08-11.pdf

Final preflight checklist

- ☐ Correct product code and print area template used
- ☐ All copy proofread
- ☐ Logo is vector where available
- ☐ CMYK/PMS references supplied
- ☐ Images are high enough resolution
- ☐ Fonts outlined/packaged
- ☐ Bleed and safe area checked
- ☐ Dieline layer preserved
- ☐ No missing links
- ☐ Final proof approved

Need a technical artwork check? Send your artwork with the product code and required quantity to Pen Promo before final production approval.