

File Formats

More and more people use the Internet to search and download images for print projects. For those just beginning, file formats can be quite confusing. Often images cannot be opened or manipulated as the person wishes, or the image prints poorly from the output device.

Those with experience will not need the following information. But less-experienced people may find the information helpful.

Keep in mind...

What are you going to do with the image? If you are printing off your laser printer or using it only for monitor viewing, then RGB (red, green, blue) images work well. Most images from the Internet are RGB. But if you are going to offset print, the images need to convert to CMYK (cyan, magenta, yellow, black -the four colors used in offset printing). A printing company can convert the images but often charges extra.

If you use an image that appears to be black, verify that the image is a gray-scale image and not RGB. If you try to change the color from black to a spot color and the program does not allow you to access the colors, then chances are the image is RGB. There is no problem if you print a "black" RGB image from your printer, but this needs to convert before using in a file that conventionally prints.

Resolution must be considered when printing. Most images pulled from the Internet are 72 dpi (dots per inch). Printing companies want images that are 150 - 300 dpi at 100%. If used at 50%, the image should reproduce okay but verify this with your printer.

General File Types:

The following file types are available for multiple operating systems...

The EPS (Encapsulated PostScript) file format is the sharpest file format available and stays sharp when resized. EPS requires software such as Adobe Illustrator or Macromedia's Freehand. If you have EPS based software and plan to resize or edit the image, EPS is the recommended method of download.

Note regarding ".eps" files in Internet Explorer for PCs: When attempting to download .eps files, Internet Explorer will automatically change the ".eps" file extensions to ".ps." To ensure the integrity of the file, please change the file extension back to ".eps" when downloading. Be certain to open the file using an imaging-editing program. Simply double-clicking the saved item in your hard drive will not create a proper file association, and the file will not open.

The TIFF (Tag Image File Format) file format is used extensively for World Wide Web graphics. Gif's (Graphic Interchange Format) unlike JPEG's (Joint Photographic Experts Group), support transparency so using this file format allows you to insert the graphic onto a web page in a more seamless design.

The JPEG file format is used extensively for World Wide Web graphics. The JPEG file format is a "lossy" format. That means each time the JPEG image is opened, manipulated in any way and then resaved the image's quality will degrade.

File Formats

Window File Formats:

The following file types are available for users with the various flavors of the Microsoft window operating system...

The BMP (Basic Multilingual Plane) file format is the Windows default file format. Default software such as 'Paint' can read BMP easily. The BMP format is similar to the GIF format above.

The TIFF file format was created for photographs, but unlike JPEG does not lose information or introduce noise when resaving the image. The TIFF file format works well with page layout software such as QuarkXPress, Adobe Pagemaker, and Corel draw.

Macintosh File Formats:

These file types are available for Macintosh users...

The PICT file format is the Macintosh default file format. default software such as Scrapbook and the latest versions of Quicktime can read the PICT format easily.

The TIFF file format is very similar to the Windows version of TIFF, but saved particularly for Macintosh brand computers.

And now for...

PDF (Portable Document Format) is a universal file format that preserves all the fonts, formatting, colors and graphics of any source document, regardless of the application and platform used to create it. PDF files are compact and can be shared, viewed, navigated and printed exactly as intended by anyone with Acrobat Reader software (which is a free download). Adobe Acrobat is a product that generates PDF files through an intermediary PostScript processing step. PDF is the actual file format. PDF files can be published and distributed anywhere: in print, attached to an email, on corporate servers, posted on Web sites, or on CD-ROM.

PostScript is a computer, document-description language, not a file format. In most electronic publishing applications, when the operator hits "Save," the file is written to a storage medium (hard drive, floppy disk, CD) as a file in native format. If the operator selects "Print," and chooses destination printer, the file is written across a network to an output device. If the operator selects "Print," and chooses destination "File," the digital information is written to the disk in PostScript code. Once an application file is converted to PostScript, it is embedded with certain characteristics of the target device and may not output on any device other than the one intended when the file was converted. Converting the file to PostScript renders the file uneditable, which means the file must be created to match the specifications of the prepress service provider.