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Going Beyond Ink and Paper Leveraging Full-Service Printing To Create Business Solutions

To the typical businessperson, the notion of full-service printing often conjures up images of color swatches, the smell of fresh ink, or a line item for bindery on an invoice. To some, printing is a necessary business expense, and to others it's an art.

It's the savvy businessperson who recognizes the power of full-service printing as a tool for making business happen. This successful person understands how to see beyond printing as a commodity production service, and seeks ways to turn printing into a strategic process that impacts his business.

What is a Business Solution?

A business solution is a system that generates results for your strategic initiatives. Most people do not associate printing with business solutions. To them, printing is a service—just a small slice of the larger business initiative.

Printing-based business solutions use the elements of full-service printing—offset printing, digital printing, bindery, pre-press, web-based fulfillment systems with reporting capabilities, versioned collateral management and more—as tools, not services. A solution-oriented full-service printer will take these tools and use them to craft a completely customized system that addresses your strategic business goals.

The Business-Solution Mindset

The most important thing when going beyond ink and paper is to break the paradigm of printing as a commodity service, and the printer as a vendor. Think bigger—force yourself to stop seeing a project in terms of its individual components like planning, design, printing, mailing and follow-up. Think of those components as part of the big-picture goal, and seek ways to meet that goal, not handle those components.

Selecting A Solution-Driven Printing Partner

Now that you're in the business-solution mindset, it's important to make sure you partner with a full-service printer who can keep up with your desire for solutions and results. It's important to have realistic expectations, because not all printers bring a solution-oriented approach. Here are some ways to gauge how solution-oriented your printer is.

- **Take A Look At Their Marketing Materials:** Look for printers whose marketing materials talk in terms of addressing the issues you face. Avoid printers whose materials tell you all about their equipment, with no mention of how you can utilize their services to accomplish your critical objectives or increase ROI.
- **Ask Specific Questions:** Challenge them to help you find a way to lower your cost of ownership on your next project, or better achieve your business goals.
- **Distinguish Equipment From How It's Used:** If their materials are chock-full of stunning photos of printing presses and other equipment, chances are they are not focused on your business results. A great printer knows and loves his equipment—but is far more concerned with how he uses that equipment to help you meet your goals.



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- Ask Yourself Critical Questions: Is the printer actively engaged with our company and departmental goals? Do they have the longevity to keep pace with our growth?

How To Work With Your Printing Partner On A Strategic Level

Now that you're in the business-solution mindset, and you've discovered a printing partner who is too, you're ready to go beyond ink and paper to leverage the full potential of your partnership. Here's how to make the most of it.

- Meet Early—Planning to discuss your project with your printer in three weeks? Engage them now instead. Invite their ideas as early as possible during the strategic planning phase. Their important insights into production may impact your entire project.
- Show Them The Bigger Picture—Make sure your partner knows what you're trying to accomplish with the entire initiative, and how printing fits into the picture.
- Share a Sense of Ownership—Make your printing partner realize that you're depending on their partnership to make your program a success. This sense of ownership will make them more engaged in your business solution.

Calculating Return on Investment

Quantifying your results will not only make your boss happy, it will reinforce your partnership decision. While you may pay more for the services of a quality partner, your improved results and streamlined process create a greater value than using a traditional printer. Every business initiative and solution is totally unique, but ask yourself these questions to quantify the return you've earned on your investment.

- How much total money would I have spent if I had used multiple vendors for printing, bindery, fulfillment, mailing, etc? How much did I save by consolidating?
- How much more of my valuable time would I have spent if I had been managing multiple vendors?
- What results would I have achieved if I had used multiple vendors?
- How much simpler and more streamlined was the process with my full-service printing partner?
- How much better were my results from using my full-service partner?
- How much easier will it be to begin a new initiative next time with a single partner who already understands my business needs?

Create Your Solutions

It's clear that while traditional printing may be about putting ink on paper, a strategic-level partnership with a full-service printer can help you create powerful business solutions. To make this partnership a success, you must first be in the business-solution mindset yourself, and you must find a partner who subscribes to your solution-oriented approach. Invest your energy in developing the right partnership, and you'll appreciate the results more and more with every initiative you team up on.