



Tips for Printing with Digital Plates

Digital plates can improve overall print quality and productivity for a flexographic printer. To get the best results, it is important to understand the differences between digital and conventional plates. Please take a few minutes to review these tips. If you have any questions, please contact us. We're here to help.

PLATE PREPARATION

- **Trimming** – Trim plates to size with the polyester backing down, using a standard cutting knife or paper cutter. To avoid jagged edges and prevent the plate from delaminating, bevel the edges by cutting at a 35°–45° angle. You can accomplish this by holding the knife blade at an angle or placing cardboard on the bed of the paper cutter.
- **Mounting** – On digital plates, it can be hard to see the marks that show how to line up the plates for mounting. If you have trouble seeing them, rub mounting chalk or a thin layer of ink over the marks on the surface of the plate to improve their visibility.
- **Tape** – You can use the same tapes that you would use for your normal printing process (low- or medium-density). Your current tape may be satisfactory, but we recommend that you test different densities to find a tape that gives you a good combination of solids and screens.
- **Anilox** – Select the same anilox for digital plates that you would use for conventional plates. As a general rule, your anilox should be higher than four times your line screen. Most high-quality printing is done with anilox that are five or six times the line screen. Because digital plates are more uniform, you will see that your screens run cleaner. Your goal should be an anilox that produces good solids without printing dirty screens.

PRESS SET-UP

- **Cleaning** – Once the plates are mounted and in the press (but before inking), wipe them one or two times with film cleaner or 50% alcohol diluted ethyl acetate to remove any residue from platemaking or handling. Don't wipe them more than once or twice as the chemicals could damage the plates.
- **Impression** – Digital plates have less relief than conventional plates. It's important to properly set the impression to gain the best quality and productivity. Follow these three steps:
 - 1) Set anilox impression. Give adequate anilox impression to ensure uniform ink coverage across the plate without over impressing.
 - 2) Set the plate to substrate impression. Set the plate to achieve a good impression with all areas of the plate printing. Digital plates do best with a slight over impression, so set the impression to slightly over kiss.
 - 3) Reset the anilox impression. Once the plate to substrate impression is correct, fine tune the anilox impression by backing off until the image begins to fade, then come back in just enough to correct the fade with uniform image quality across the web. (Be sure to reset your anilox impression whenever you reset your plate to substrate impression.)

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Tips for Printing with Digital Plates (continued)

- **Inks** – Because the highlight dots on a digital plate are very small, you may need to use “wetter” inks to get them to print. It may look as though the highlights are not printing due to impression or uneven plate surface, but the actual reason is the ink drying before it reaches the substrate. Your ink representative can provide the correct additives.

PLATE HANDLING AFTER PRINTING

- **Cleaning** – After printing, clean plates immediately with a soft, natural bristle brush and a gentle cleaner. Do not use solvents such as acetates, heptanes or naphtha, which could damage the plates. Thoroughly clean the plates until all ink is removed, but be careful not to scrub dots off the plates (dots on digital plates are smaller than those on conventional plates). To dry plates, blot with a lint-free cloth or blow dry. Do not rub dry.
- **Storage** – Before storing plates, check to make sure plates are thoroughly dry. Place plates in envelopes or drawers to reduce their exposure to UV light (from sunlight, incandescent, or fluorescent lights). If you stack plates, place paper or foam between them to protect them from damage. Do not stack plates more than 6 inches high.
- **Reorders** – We recommend that you store your original plate proof (or a copy) with your plates, so you can easily determine the file number and date. Without this information, we may need to charge an extra fee to locate your job.