

Aligning paper selection with business objectives is an obvious priority within the publishing industry, especially considering that often more than 50% of total book production costs are the price of paper. The specific needs of the company will indicate which types of paper are most suited to their projects. When paper grades are as many and as diverse as they are now, especially with traditional categories like groundwood and fine paper becoming increasingly blurred, establishing corporate goals and the goals of each specific project helps to streamline the paper selection process. Important considerations like environmental targets, cost reduction and the need to compete will vary in priority for every publisher. It's also essential to stay on top of market trends in order to achieve any of these objectives.

Below are ten key considerations that any publisher faces when making decisions about paper selection for book production. For each requirement, Webcom has developed a successful strategy comprised of several solutions. To request **specific information** about any of these considerations in relationship to your publishing needs, visit: <http://www.webcomlink.com/tech/paper.htm>

## I. Environmental Goals

The natural first step to take in the book publishing and printing industry is to print books on paper made from recycled content and maximize the amount of post-consumer waste used. As recycled grades have become increasingly available and affordable, further questions are raised about what can be done to minimize the impact book production has on the environment. In combination with the use of recycled paper, certification programs such as the Forest Stewardship Council and endorsements such as Ancient Forest Friendly™ help to indicate sound environmental selections.

There are, however, less obvious options that can have significant savings for the environment; if a book is not intended for archival purposes, an acid-free paper may not be necessary or even advantageous. Groundwood paper and groundwood hybrids (a combination of mechanical and fine paper pulp) are made from all parts of the wood fibre, rather than only certain parts, and so uses trees more efficiently and responsibly for a much higher yield than other paper making processes. Using acidic groundwood paper rather than non-acidic fine paper can result in the use of approximately 30% fewer trees for the creation of the same amount of paper according to the Environmental Defense Paper Calculator. Recent years have seen increased blurring of the line between groundwood and fine paper as pulping processes improve and groundwood becomes brighter and more functional, offering durable hybrids.

For titles like mass market paperbacks that are intended to have a shorter life-span, groundwood has long since been a common choice of paper. Now with the increasing proliferation of hybrid papers and higher quality groundwood papers, this efficient, cost-effective type of paper is becoming increasingly suitable for trade paperbacks at any stage of life cycle, offering a realistic alternative to low-yield, high-cost prestigious paper. Although not as obvious a choice as using a grade with recycled content, this change would still have a significant impact on preserving forests and cutting down on waste, and provide a healthy cut to the cost of production, often yielding over 25% cost savings.

## **2. New Title Strategy**

Historically, frontlist titles are printed in hardcover editions, driven by the need for critical success and for the appearance of high value. Recent years, however, have seen a change in both marketplace demand for paperback originals and in book critic reaction to first edition paperbacks. Although per-book profits on hardcover titles are usually higher than paperback titles, publishers agree that for every hardcover they sell, they can usually sell two paperbacks. The advantage of going straight to paperback is undeniable in the context of the current economic climate, when readers will be far more willing to buy a paperback than spend upwards of \$20 more on a hardcover book by an author they have never heard of.

The stigma of the soft-cover title as cheap and chunky has slowly begun to evaporate, and the elegance of a hardcover is easy to achieve with printing techniques like cover flaps, enhanced specialty cover treatment and ragged-edge pages that give a title the look and feel of quality fiction. Even if a paperback book proves to be only a modest seller, booksellers are less likely to return all of their copies, whereas often more than half of all hardcover titles shipped to retail outlets are returned unsold. With the heavy competition between hardcover books and the increasing need for both the publisher and the end-customer to minimize cost, printing straight to soft-cover is currently a viable and advantageous solution when working with new authors and new titles overall.

## **3. Intended Book Audience**

The vast range of titles printed by a single publisher goes hand in hand with the need to work with a printer that can provide an equally versatile and extensive range of paper and printing capabilities. When publishing books that have varied or multiple target audiences, each should be printed on a paper grade tailored to its end user. Printing a book with heavy ink coverage like a graphic novel requires thick pages with high opacity, to minimize show-through and ensure sharp, punchy images. Reference or instructional books with images need a white, pristine looking appearance for maximum contrast and professional appearance. Cookbooks, for example, tend to have large color images, often taking up full pages, which entice the reader into purchase when they pick up and flip through the book when browsing a store. The success of that strategy will depend on the printer having high brightness paper that prints well with heavy ink coverage, as well as the expertise to identify the best paper choice based on more than just cost or trim size.

Publishers working with Webcom to produce books are assured the availability of paper lines developed for the explicit purpose of addressing multiple intended audiences. Moreover, this secured inventory program supports quick turnaround on paper that helps publishers achieve competitive retail pricing.

## **4. Competitive Look and Feel**

When faced with tough economic decisions and competitive retail forces a publisher's budget often directs investment to a book's cover with a trade off in text paper. While design and marketing are essential parts of the process of making an eye-catching and well-selling title, the publishing company should also be able to go to their printer for enhancing the look of the book's exterior. A thick spine and heavy volume gives a title gravity and authority, making it stand out on a shelf. Thicker pages result in a bulkier book, which gives the impression of value and intellectual superiority, as does a natural, cream-colored paper. These attributes are especially valuable for

the period of time when a book is being reviewed; book critics usually take a book more seriously when the publisher spends the money to print with heavy, old-fashioned looking pages.

Cover treatment is also an excellent way of making a cover or spine stand out; Specialty FX Coatings, a glossy coating technique that comes in a wide variety of options, works as a great cost-effective alternative to embossing and is incredibly versatile in the ways it can be used to add visual appeal. The endless combinations of various effects like glitter, spot UV or raised UV lend themselves to all sorts of creative possibilities.

## **5. Size and Shape of the Book**

Trim size of a book is directly linked to the efficiency of printing, and so is also linked to the cost of production. It is worth considering that subtle changes in trim size can maximize efficiency of paper consumption and as a result have a significant impact on the price of printing a book. Reducing a book by as little as 1/8<sup>th</sup> of an inch, maximizing production efficiencies, can result in surprising cost savings.

At the same time, publishers need to be cognizant of the balance between optimizing cost effectiveness, conforming to industry or retail norms and attracting attention by printing a book with unique dimensions. Either way a broad-based paper inventory program will help to find that perfect balance.

## **6. Expected Lifespan**

From first editions of wildly popular novels to mass market paperbacks, every project will have a different expectation in terms of shelf-life. Planning for production of a book invariably takes into account how long the pages will need to last, and therefore the grade of paper needed to achieve the correct level of longevity.

While there is a valid argument to be made for consideration of the cost and environmental savings achieved by using high-yield mechanically produced paper, there are definitive reasons for prioritizing acid-free paper for a product intended to be archived for many years. First edition trade books, valued by collectors and often used at book signings, are expected to last for countless years as a keepsake. Non-fiction books, which are seldom read all the way through and then left on a shelf and are instead referenced now and then over a period of time, have a longer anticipated lifetime and are also more likely to sit in a retail outlet for several months between either being sold or returned.

## **7. Affordable Prestige Quality**

Heavy, premium papers are desirable for their high bulk, authoritative feel, and longevity, and are often expensive because they are such high quality. To cut costs without giving up the level of quality these paper grades afford, there are a number of opportunities to make small, subtle changes in order to get the best paper for the best price. The thick, natural colored paper grades that made for a high quality appearance are often available at a reduced cost within certain parameters. Webcom's new Select line carries a vast number of paper grades in industry standard trim sizes available at a reduced cost, offering the same characteristics for a lower cost thanks to the efficiency and abundance of certain popular trim sizes.

Another effective solution for getting a premium paper without paying the price tag of a premium paper is by selecting a grade with a slightly lower basis weight without compromising paper bulk. By printing a book with a 40-lb or 47-lb paper, publishers can achieve the same page thickness and color as a 50-lb paper while minimizing manufacturing and distribution costs – not to mention the added benefit to the environment resulting from a higher yield pulp.

## **8. Strategic Reprints**

Selecting paper for reprints presents heightened awareness of cost factors that can be achieved without compromising the characteristics of the book or positioning of the title. Regardless of whether reprints are done strictly to replenish the inventory pipeline or done in conjunction with a shift to a later stage of a title's lifecycle, ensuring a smooth transition is key to the overall success of a revenue generating opportunity. Choose a printer with a well thought out paper program that aligns bulk measures and brightness for consistency, as well as being stocked and priced for quick reprint turnaround.

## **9. Inventory Management**

Balancing between a quick turnaround of maximized sales volumes and minimal returns can be optimized by working with a printer who can support a publisher with comprehensive paper selection and production capabilities for large conventional or short-run digital printing. Advancements in digital printing are rapidly elevating the quality standards of finished books, offering publishers reliable alternatives to exorbitant costs of returns. The best proof of quality is to request a book sample from a printer to assess comparable specifications of bulk, brightness and opacity of text paper and appearance of 4-color covers. Incorporating an overall inventory strategy with a printer upfront will ensure overall cost efficiencies and quality consistency for a title from the early stages of planning.

## **10. Efficient Distribution**

The concerns of the publishing company don't stop after the book is finished being manufactured, and neither should those of the printer. Thinking ahead to shipping and distribution while still in the planning stage will save money down the road. Considering the total project expenditure of a first edition title that demands the look achieved from a heavier paper, consider how to prevent the costs of distribution from further increasing spending. By slightly modifying the paper selection as noted in point 7 above, the same bulk and characteristics can be accomplished while reducing the overall weight, which decreases the price of shipping. To take the savings even further in a situation where making the book appear larger is not a key consideration, a lower bulk paper and smaller trim size will reduce thickness to meet mail size parameters and increase carton quantity.

---

### **About Webcom**

The extraordinary circumstances of the economic climate calls for an extraordinary paper inventory program to support and strengthen the financial sustainability of publishers. To that end, Webcom expanded into a three-dimensional paper program focused on quality, environmental and economic options across all weight categories. Our passion for the printing business places Webcom at the forefront of providing publishers with intelligent solutions designed to ensure your success. We look forward to engaging you in a conversation about your specific business objectives. For more information, please see: <http://www.webcomlink.com/blackwhitegreen.asp>