Large Format Graphics
File Preparation Guidelines

Acceptable File Types
The preferred format is a native Adobe Illustrator file. Include bleed and ensure that the artboard is the correct size. Please work in the CMYK color space. Provide all links and fonts.

The following native files are also accepted (in order of preference) and should adhere to the guidelines listed in this document:

Adobe Illustrator CS6 (.ai, .eps)
Adobe Acrobat CS6 (.pdf)
Adobe Photoshop CS6 (.psd, .tif, psb)
Adobe InDesign CS6 (.indd)

Working in the Right Software
Prepare your art in the program best suited for the task. Illustrator is a drawing (vector) program, ideal for large format graphics. Photoshop is a pixel-based (raster) program that lets you size, color-correct and manipulate digital images such as photos and flat art but should only be used when a large file is necessary such as a tractor trailer wrap, building wrap or large scale mural. InDesign is best suited for multi-page layouts and creates multiple, unnecessary clipping masks when exported for prepress. This can make your project take longer to prepress.

Build to Size
Build your files at actual size unless your final size is too large for your software to accommodate. If the final size is too large for the software's artboard, please use a common scale (1/4, 1/2, 1/10, 1/20). If you must work at a scale, please use one common scale for all files. Incorrectly specified page settings cannot be fixed by simply scaling up or down, so make sure your document is built at the correct size.

Bleed
The area beyond the trim edge of your page is considered the bleed area. When butting a color or image up to the edge of your page, it's required that the color or image "bleed" beyond the edge to prevent an unwanted white border from showing when the document is trimmed. When exporting to PDF, check the export settings so that the bleed is included in the final document. Here are the specific bleed requirements.

1/4" bleed for any file under 48"
1/2" bleed for any file above 48"
1" bleed for any banners
2" bleed for any murals
5" bleed for any vehicle wraps

Trim and Cut Marks
The trim area indicates the finished size of the document. Please include crop marks in your file. For graphics that will be cut to shape, please seperate the dieline into a new layer, preferrably on top.

Safe Area
Remember to keep important elements within the safe margin (at least 1/4" from the edge) to ensure that they aren't cut off when your document is trimmed or in a frame.

White Ink
White ink can be printed along with CMYK or alone. Please create a new top layer named "White", create a swatch specifically named "Spot1" (spot color not process, can be any CMYK value) and make sure to check that it is an overprint fill or stroke in the Attributes window. Be sure to preserve overprints in the transparency box when saving.

CMYK vs. RGB

CMYK (cyan, magenta, yellow, black) are the ink colors used in the printing process, whereas RGB (red, green, blue) are the colors used by screen displays such as your monitor. Your document should be created in CMYK mode so that the colors you see on the screen most closely match the final printed product. Many of the bright values produced by our monitors' RGB displays cannot be reproduced in print.

CMYK Process vs. Spot Colors

Process and Pantone match colors may look identical on screen, but they will RIP and print differently. If you need to convert a spot color to process, use a conversion guide or ask us for a recommendation. The best case scenario is for the RIP to handle converting spot colors, in many cases we will manually match certain spot colors. Since we use various ink sets (CMYK, CMYK-LC-LM, CMYK-MB-LG-PB-CR) most spot colors are achievable, there are certain spot colors (fluorescent, metallic) that can not be accurately reproduced via inkjet printing.

Rich Black

Since our equipment uses 4-8 colors of ink, use rich black as much as possible. The rich black combination we prefer is C - 50, M - 40, Y - 30, K - 100.

Keep Track of Your Colors

Delete unused colors from your swatch palette before submitting your file. If the piece is printing entirely in CMYK, convert any spot colors you may have used. This eliminates any question as to whether you want the color printed as CMYK or matching a spot. Having said that, it's still best to indicate the color specs when you upload your file, especially if you want it to print with matching spot colors.

Fonts and Linked Graphics

If working in Adobe Illustrator, graphics should be linked within the file and fonts should be converted to paths. If you do not convert your fonts, be sure to include them with your document when you upload your files. Use of Postscript Type 1 fonts is encouraged. Include fonts for any embedded graphics. Take advantage of the "Package" feature in InDesign as well as Illustrator. It will help you collect all the fonts and images used, and search for missing items. (Your document may show the placed image, but the actual file may have become unlinked when saved in a folder that differed from its original location. Missing links can cause graphics to print out low-res or not at all.)

Maintain Image Quality

Images must conform to the specifications for minimum image resolution – 100 dpi at 100% size. Photoshop provides tremendous pixel control, however, raster software cannot enlarge images without a loss in quality. It's better to start out big when producing a digital image, as you can scale down with impunity. If you need to make an image larger, it is best to re-scan or re-shoot it at a higher resolution. Vector graphics, however, retain high image quality at any size.

Make Image Changes Before Importing Them

Placed images should not be scaled, cropped/masked or rotated within the page layout application. Instead they should be manipulated in a proper image editing program (i.e., Photoshop) and then imported into the page layout program at proper size and position. If done in a page layout program, these steps consume a lot of computer memory.