



**KEYPOINT**  
INTELLIGENCE

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**SERVICE AREA:**

Business Development Strategies

# ANALYSIS

## TIPS FOR WINNING PRINT SAMPLES

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# contents

## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	2
Key Highlights .....	2
Recommendations .....	2
Conduct a Print Sample Assessment.....	3
Demonstrating Technical Proficiency .....	4
Building Application Stories.....	4
Transaction/TransPromo Regulated Communication Support Package .....	5
Marketing Communication Support Package .....	5
Promoting your Kit.....	6
InfoTrends' Opinion.....	7



## Introduction

Although images and print samples are a great way for print service providers to demonstrate the technical capabilities of their presses, they do not tell a story that will intrigue a content creator or brand owner. Today's content creators and brand owners already expect their partners to be able to produce brilliant prints. What they are really seeking is a partner who can bring them ideas, and becoming that source of ideas starts with building the very best portfolio of print samples. This document explores some of the ways that print providers can differentiate themselves with their print samples.

## Key Highlights

- ◆ When conducting a print sample assessment, the goal is to understand the type of print samples that will work the best.
- ◆ The goal is not to assemble a single print sample kit that will be all things to all people—it is to create a series of print sample kits and then keep them fresh.
- ◆ Vendors can help prepare a talk track to answer questions about image quality variations on different substrates.
- ◆ Application samples that tell a story or navigate a campaign give an opportunity to differentiate solutions.
- ◆ Think creatively when building samples and expand beyond what is currently done.

## Recommendations

- ◆ Begin your print sample assessment with a dispassionate evaluation of the customers that are currently being served, and build a profile of your ideal customer.
- ◆ Consider the types of work you do and the industries you serve, then select images that will highlight your capabilities and resonate with customers.
- ◆ Some companies use their samples as an opportunity to promote themselves, so consider building a catalog of your print and finishing options as well as product brochures for each option.
- ◆ If you do not already have a social media strategy, introducing a sample kit can be a way to arrive with a splash.



## Conduct a Print Sample Assessment

Most print shops have a pile of print samples that are delivered by their vendors during sales pitches and technology updates. They show the technical capabilities of the current equipment and might even highlight features that will be available with the next set of feature and function upgrades. They often incorporate landscapes with broad views of the sky to illustrate how well the devices produce continuous color, or images of models to emphasize how well skin tones can be rendered. They might include graphic artwork with big blocks of color to demonstrate how well the color is managed. Bird images are also popular for highlighting the fine detail of the colors and the feathers. All of these images can demonstrate the technical capabilities of a press, but they will not intrigue content creators or brand owners.

Today's content creators and brand owners are seeking a partner who can bring them ideas, and this starts with building the best portfolio of print samples. Begin with a dispassionate evaluation of the customers that are currently being served, and build a profile of the ideal customer. Are your customers transaction and regulated print buyers or commercial print buyers? To what extent do they base their purchasing decisions on price? Do they have flexibility? Do they request for new ideas for communication? How much of their print spend do you have? This is just the beginning of the assessment that should be undertaken. The goal is to understand the type of print samples that will work the best.

With the assessment completed and the answers in hand, it is time to build a print sample collection that will be relevant to current customers, while also opening the door to new types of conversations (even if they are with the procurement team). This also provides the infrastructure for the search for new customers.



## Demonstrating Technical Proficiency

If your salespeople are simply assembling print samples based on whatever is left over from print jobs and grabbing them whenever they need to demonstrate print capabilities to a customer or prospect, they are taking the wrong approach! The odds that the work will showcase your full capabilities and meet the requirement of intriguing the customer are slim. Even print sample kits that are developed to show all of the available options rarely fit the bill. The goal is not to assemble a single print sample kit that will be all things to all people—it is to create a series of print sample kits and then keep them fresh. This type of work should have an accountable owner.

Consider building a series of kits that will be kept up-to-date. Start with technical samples on all of the substrates you are willing to support that demonstrate mastery of printing high resolution images, large blocks of color, and complex color mixes. Peacocks are often quite popular because they can show a variety of colors and fine detail, but do not limit yourself! Consider the types of work you do and the industries you serve, then select images that will highlight your capabilities and resonate with customers. If you are serving the retail market, consider images that feature the types of products that your customers sell. If you are serving the manufacturing sector, look for images that are relevant to that area. Do not be afraid to spend a little extra money on high-resolution images from a quality photo provider. Seek images that are crisp and colorful, and avoid images that fade to blurs as they often cause customers to question print quality.

Test every image you select on the best substrates you have, but do not forget to test them on your lower cost substrates, as well. Prepare a talk track to answer questions about image quality variations on different substrates. Your vendor can help!

## Building Application Stories

Beyond the technical samples, you should have an array of application samples that will resonate with existing customers and target customers. In addition to showing off your print quality, they should highlight your capabilities for different types of folding, finishing, and inserting.

Application samples that tell a story or navigate a campaign give you the opportunity to differentiate your solutions. Some companies start by asking clients who have interesting campaigns if they can reprint their work and give them visibility. Those customers are few, but they might be a fast path depending on relationships. Alternatively, you might assess the work you do and have your designers create something that reflects the type of work your customers buy.

Your application kits can vary widely based on the types of customers you serve. Here are some ideas for application kits that can be built.



### Transaction/TransPromo Regulated Communication Support Package

If you print regulated communications, your customers probably cannot help you with print samples. You are likely only printing a portion of the prints they use. Therefore, consider building a sample kit that shows not only transaction work, but also supporting communications. Your kit might include:

- ◆ A plain transactional document
- ◆ A TransPromo document that mixes marketing messaging with the transactional communication
- ◆ A customer letter to provide account information
- ◆ A direct marketing postcard with an offer

Create four or five variations for each item. Highlight where variable data can be used, especially on marketing communications. Show how color can make it easier to highlight mission-critical information, such as past due amounts or due dates. Create documents on different substrates so that the print quality and the feel of the document can become part of the discussion.

### Marketing Communication Support Package

Marketing materials can be as simple as postcards and flyers or as complex as catalogs and “magalogs.” They might include brochures, posters, or even wide format print. Your kit should include a sample of each type of print you can support. If you gain permission from existing clients, you might be able to build a kit with examples of work you are doing today. In some cases, however, client sensitivities preclude you using their work. In cases like this, you are left with the opportunity to build a kit that shows off all your capabilities!

Think creatively when building your samples and expand beyond what you do today. Create a brand image that reflects your company and fill in the marketing support pieces you can think of. You might include:

- ◆ Direct mail postcards
- ◆ Catalogs or magalogs
- ◆ Customer care letters
- ◆ Product brochures
- ◆ Flyers
- ◆ Posters



Some companies use their samples as an opportunity to promote themselves, so consider building a catalog of your print and finishing options, and product brochures for each option. The more options you create, the more you can demonstrate. If you are constrained on resources, build your kit over time and add to it slowly.

It is very important not to forget the most important thing about print samples: They expire! They have a sell-by date. They become stale. Any way you say it, the point is that building a sample in January and using it for the entire year is fine, but using it for multiple years is not. You should be constantly refreshing your sample kits with new images, stories, and options. Consistent refreshes will give your sales team talking points and keep all your capabilities in front on clients on a regular cadence.

### **Promoting your Kit**

Never forget to tell the world that you have a sample kit, and consider making it available beyond your sales team. Some of the most innovative printers in the world make their sample kits available to interested parties through their web pages or by inviting people to request them via Twitter, LinkedIn, or Instagram. If you do not already have a social media strategy, introducing a sample kit can be a way to arrive with a splash.



# opinion

## InfoTrends' Opinion

Whatever your strategy for promoting your print samples, remember that demonstrating your technical capabilities is not enough. Your samples must tell a story about your company that will intrigue content creators and brand owners with new ideas and innovations that they might not have considered in the past.





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