

# SIX TIPS to chose paper wisely for the greatest church communication impact



It's easy to get buried with paper choices for your church communications, but this article will help you choose what is most effective.

As we go into the holiday season, many churches are tempted to use colored papers to print brochures, flyers, newsletters and other materials. Lots of orange, brown, green and red paper will be used and though these colors might be appropriate to the season, they may not be the best to get across your message and help people show up to your events. Following are SIX TIPS on paper choice for the holiday season and year round to make for more effective church communications.

## #1 Remember Readability

The most important aspect of the paper you use is how well it contributes to the readability of your newsletter or other communication. If people can't read your message nothing else really matters.

People don't judge a holiday communication based on how fancy the paper is, what color it is or if it is slick or not. What matters is how easy is it to read. If a publication is difficult to read, today's busy, stressed out readers will simply put it aside and won't read it.

With these comments in mind, let's look in more detail on:

- Paper opacity
- Paper color
- Publication reproduction method

### How opacity affects newsletter readability

Opacity refers to how much or how little bleed through there is in the paper; how much or how little you can see what was printed on the opposite side. If you can see the images or words or blocks of color from the opposite side of the paper faintly showing through, it makes a publication harder to read.

Unfortunately, the paper used by many churches for newsletters and other publications, your standard 20# bond, is not very opaque. It allows more or less bleed through depending upon color. Darker colors allow less bleed through, but they have their own problems as we'll discuss later.

## To increase opacity (and therefore readability) there are several things you can do:

1. Buy better paper. You will probably need to go to a Paper Merchant to get good paper. It is often NOT much more expensive; but your general office supply stores just usually don't carry it. You find Paper Merchants in the Yellow Pages or in Google or other search engines.
2. Buy an opaque paper. The paper label should literally state "Opaque." What this means in paper terminology is that a clay-like substance has literally been ground into the paper as a finishing step at the paper mill. This fills the paper fibers and makes the paper more opaque. To test how opaque it is, the stores usually have sample sheets. Just hold one over some print (on a label or anything in the store). If you can see the print through it only faintly or not at all, you have an opaque paper.
3. Buy heavier paper. Instead of 20# bond, at least go to 24#, and better yet is 28# or 38#. Again, there is very little cost difference. With the heavier paper, not only will it look better, but the publication will have a more substantial feel.

## #2 Limit your color choice

Use colored paper with caution—there is a lot more to paper color choice than deciding to use red for Christmas and bright orange for Halloween (both of which you should *never do*).

A key factor in ease of reading has to do with the contrast between the paper color and the print.

Though we wouldn't think this, the **second** highest contrast, and the *second* easiest to read contrast between print and paper is **black print on white paper**.

*FYI, the first highest contrast and the easiest to read is actually black print on bright yellow.* That is why that color combination is used on caution signs, but it is too jarring for everyday reading.

There is a reason all national newspapers, magazines, books and bibles are all printed on white paper—it is the easiest to read, next to yellow (which would be distracting because of the color). If you want to make your publications easy to read, stick with white paper.

If you want color, **use an accent color in your ink choice**, such as a royal blue or forest green for section headers or graphic elements, but keep the print black on white. For the holidays, use the orange, green, or red color as an accent or in your graphics, but please don't print on highly-colored paper.

## A few more notes on color

I have found in talking to hundreds of people doing publications in churches that the reasons people usually use colored paper are:

1. They think readers get bored with white paper. They don't. The person doing the publication gets bored with it, but readers in general do not want paper in all sorts of colors that change constantly. You never find letters to the editor of your local paper asking them to please print the paper on yellow or pale lavender paper.
2. Be especially careful of red and green paper. A large percentage of the male population is red/green color blind. To a color blind person, red or green paper looks a shade of grey. Red and green paper is hard enough to read for people with normal sight, but for many who are somewhat color blind, it is next to impossible to read.

3. Be careful about using color for headlines. You might think it provides a nice color contrast, but headlines in color (blue or green for example) are almost always harder to read than plain black. Again, black on white is the best to use if you want to get a message across.
4. If you do use color in print, but sure it is a dark, saturated color (no pink, orange, light blue, etc.).
5. Keep the color in the artwork or as decorate lines or icons.

## Paper color and online newsletters

In addition to a print newsletter many churches are also creating newsletters online. Though a different media, many of the same guidelines still apply:

1. Do not design an online newsletter (or website for that matter) on top of a colored or printed background. I have seen some extremely hard to read online materials with crosses or fish in the background. Please don't make treasured symbols in the church become tools of irritation. Stick to plain background.
2. Use a second color for emphasis and navigation if you want color. Headers in perhaps a dark blue or other accent color (red or green OK here for Christmas) is OK. One of the best things to do is to match your print colors with your online colors, but be as restrained in using them on the web as you are on paper.
3. Again, if you do use colors, be sure they are darker, saturated ones. I used green as a header color on this website, but tried many shades until I found one that was dark enough to provide some visual interest and yet remain easy to read.

## One more question, once you decide on white paper: Slick paper or not?

Unless you have lots of money and are having your newsletter printed by a high-end printer, slick paper is not necessary. Again, the readability factor comes up. Slick paper, because of the reflections is harder to read. Magazines tend to use slick paper, but not for ease of reading. They use it because advertisements (often in full color) print better on slick paper and advertisements are what pay for magazine publication.

But slick paper is reflective and makes it harder to read, if again, reading comprehension is our primary goal.

For church communications, uncoated paper makes the easiest to read publications. Uncoated paper is also essential when you are creating a publication that needs to be written on later such as a CONNECTION CARD or form you want filled out.

## #3 Get to know your local Paper Merchant

I love paper warehouses. I always get a little bit of the designer's "kid in a candy store" kind of feeling there—so many neat papers, so many ideas! Mint green paper with silver specks, parchment in pale blue, pastels that don't look too fluffy, card stock in colors and all kinds of sizes for door-hangers and table tents, oh my!

Your local office supply store probably won't carry many of the papers they have. They are open to the public and though they may seem intimidating when you first arrive, you can get lots of inspiration from seeing what is available. Usually the sales people at these stores also have advice and knowledge about their products that is invaluable if you take the time to ask them questions.

One more thing while you're there, ask if they have any paper company sample books. These have great publication ideas—keep them in a sample file and look at them when you need inspiration.

If you can't get paper sample books from a local printer, check out this link where you can buy them: <https://www.thepapermillstore.com/swatchbooks> It is worth an investment to buy several to get ideas.

When I had a full-time design business many years ago this was one of my favorite sources of design inspiration because not only did they have incredible ideas, but you knew that if you did a certain process, you knew exactly how the final product would look on a specific paper.

Paper choice will make one of the biggest impacts on the perceived quality of your communication. Picture a stunning graphic design and quality typesetting on flimsy #20 lb white paper from most church offices. No matter what the design, the publication will still look cheap. Picture the same design on heavy, opaque paper—it makes a huge difference. Don't destroy your design work or reputation because you were too cheap to spend a few extra dollars a ream on quality paper.

## #4 Church Communications production methods and how they affect paper choice

Gone are the days of one way to reproduce printed material in the church office. Today we have:

- Desktop multi-function printers
- Digital duplicators
- Copy machines in black and white and color
- RISO ComColor Printers

The important thing to remember here in dealing with paper and color is that each system will handle color on paper in VERY different ways. No one of them is better than any other at reproducing color in the church. You always have to balance:

- Cost
- Quality
- Time for reproduction

A desktop photo printer might produce a slick brochure that looks great, but it isn't a good way to produce hundreds of brochures (though I knew one church that did it that way....it took hours and huge amounts of money).

Your color copiers produce high quality prints by fusing toner with high heat as it applies it to paper. You need your high quality copier for many jobs, but others can be done with less expensive to operate machines such as RISO Digital Duplicators and ComColor printers.

A digital duplicator will produce a softer image, but it is true ink on paper and because it doesn't need the heat, it can print at a fraction of the cost of a copier and at very high speeds.

If you haven't seen the newer RISO ComColor printers, they can be a great option for your print needs. I've been incredibly impressed with them as they are inkjet technology (though they look like and are the size of a copier) that operates at very high speeds and very low-cost. [CLICK HERE](#) to go to their website for more information, but I STRONGLY recommend you contact a local dealer to see one in action. As I'm recommending in this article, take various kinds of paper and some of your files to the Dealer to test and see how they look printed on their machines.

The RISO ComColor printers and the new RISO Digital Duplicators will amaze you at their upgraded quality and what they can do to help your church produce communications. Go to <http://www.riso.com> to find a local dealer.

## **There are two things that are really important to do here:**

1. Talk to the dealer who sold you the machine you have or are looking at for the paper recommendations
2. TEST, TEST, TEST different kinds of paper

The machines produced today vary widely in the kinds of paper they can use most effectively and how the machine prints on the paper. To the end-user it often makes little sense, but the dealer who sold you the machine can help. Here again there is a big difference in the type of the machine and the paper it can take. Copiers work best on a limited choice of papers because in part because of the heat they generate. RISO Digital Duplicators and ComColor machines can print on almost anything: construction paper, envelopes, card stock, all kinds of paper at a great range of weights because they do not generate heat as they print.

For ideas on how various inks look on papers, many paper companies make sample books that show you how different papers give different (sometimes VERY different results). The link below is a WONDERFUL resource where you can order swatch books from a variety of paper production houses. They are invaluable resources if you really want to upgrade the quality and look of the paper you choose. Sometimes your local paper merchant will have some of these to give away for free, but this doesn't seem as common as it was in the past.

For samples of PAPER SWATCH BOOKS, [CLICK HERE](#).

## **Always test your paper on the final printing machine you will use**

A few years ago, I designed a brochure for a men's retreat at church. On my inkjet at home the colors I used looked fine on the paper I had in mind. I like to collect nice papers, so I had some great samples from my paper merchant to try out the design.

At the church, I tried the same design on a similar colored paper (but far from the same kind of paper—it was the typical 20# cheap church paper) on our digital duplicator. Because the paper at the church was low quality and absorbed the ink, my great design looked like mud. We changed the paper to one that had more of a filler in it (a more opaque one) and the design came out great. It only took a few more dollars to get quality paper from the paper merchant, but the end result looked incredibly different.

## **#5 To save time on paper choice create a print sample book**

If you have a variety of reproduction machines at church take time to run the same design on all the kinds of paper and keep it in a clearly labeled notebook. For example, if you have a digital duplicator with a variety of ink cylinders, you can then see that blue ink can turn greenish when printed on yellow paper, which can either be a wonderful design element or terrible surprise, depending upon the results you wanted. Most papers absorb ink from printing with a digital duplicator, but with a toner-based printing system such as a color-copier, the toner will sit on top of the paper and will remain a true color.

One result isn't necessarily "better" than the other. It depends on the design you are going for. That's why a notebook of color choices from all your machines can make publication planning an exciting design experience instead of a disappointment.

## **#6 The most important thing**

All design elements should never draw attention to themselves. All of them, including your paper choice, should support your message, never upstage it. Ultimately your color choices in ink and paper should

never be what is noticed in your newsletter or any other communication piece.

The church has been entrusted with the words of eternal life; your individual church has life-changing messages for your community. Your church has programs that can help who are needy in emotional, spiritual, and physical ways. Choose paper and ink colors so that they are not noticed but are the best choices so that people will see and respond to what is most important—these messages.

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