

Before you begin your project, visit the customer service representative at a printing press. Start with a simple project with the goal of building rapport with the professionals you will be working with. To get an estimate, you will need to be able to answer the following questions:

How Big is the Book?

What will be the page size and how many pages?

You can save a lot of money if you stick to standard page sizes. Paper for presses comes in standard sizes which fold to form signatures. If you design a larger/smaller page size that is not efficient, you will pay much more for paper. There will necessarily be waste. Bleeds require more paper too.

Good Choices: 6x9 7x10 8.5x11 9x12 (with no bleeds)

You can also save money if you choose a page length that can be created by folding a press sheet into complete signatures. This is typically multiples of 8: 8, 16, 32, 64 pages, etc.

What Paper do you want?

You will probably choose text weight for the body and cover weight for the cover. The heavier the paper is, the more it costs. If it is coated it costs more too. Invest in acid-free paper. If you use the "house" paper it is often cheaper, because they have bought it in bulk and have already paid for the shipping.

Binding?

Decide this before the book is designed as it affects the way the layout is done for the press. Options depend on the thickness and proportion/scale of your finished book.

You can choose from saddle stitched (metal staples), perfect binding or wire-o binding.

Most expensive would be a hard bound book with stitched signatures. Is the binding is done in house? (shipping back and forth is an added cost)

Ink Color/s?

The cheapest option is black ink, a one color job.

Next cheapest option is a single color, still a one color job, but a charge for ink cleanup.

Next would be duotones with black and a color.

Finally full color or four color, involving color separations using black-magenta-cyan-yellow.

Every color you add means an extra set of negatives and plates and more complicated registration.

Expect extra cost for the added paper needed to achieve color balance and registration.

Varnish is considered an ink color and ranges from glossy to matte. Block varnish (often used on covers) which coats the entire page is less expensive because it does not require a special plate or registration. It is a wise investment for covers to protect the book from fingerprints and wear.

Varnishing only the images on each page is called spot varnish and requires more plates and labor.

How many Copies?

The more you run, the cheaper the unit cost will become. All you are

paying for is the extra paper and slightly longer press and bindery time. Cost of pre-press time and plates remains the same. 100 copies is a bare minimum. Runs of 500-1000 are more typical.

Other Questions to Ask:

How should the book be composed? The current technology is digital,

using a page layout program (InDesign or Quark). Ask which software (and version) they support.

Deliver the finished file on a CD. They take it from there, making adjustments and setting the file up in a way compatible with the particular press, paper and binding choices you have made.

Can you afford a plastic laminated cover? This provides more protection than varnish.

Will there be any die-cutting needed..rounded corners, etc. If your project has a box..start by finding the box premade if possible, and design your book/cards to fit the box. Who will do the collating (if needed) and place the object in the boxes? Money can be saved if you do this yourself.

Do you want the individual units shrink wrapped? Can that be done in house?

Finally: What is their policy and attitude towards press checks? Will you be allowed to sign off your approval of each press sheet? Will they let you be present during the printing process? This is where it is important to establish trust and rapport. The more you know about the limitations and potential of the process, the better the results.