

What Makes a Good Printer?

Best Practice in Customer Service



Assessment Questionnaire
Contains full instructions and guidance notes
December 2005

dti
Department of Trade and Industry

VISION
IN PRINT

What makes a good printer?

**An assessment questionnaire for
printers and their customers**

Questionnaire

About this questionnaire

The following questions and feedback suggestions form part of the 'What makes a good printer' research project developed by Vision in Print's Customer Strategic Advisory Group. The aim is to help printers understand what print buyers are looking for from their printers - what makes them select a printer and what makes them continue working with that printer.

The project involved researching a group of 155 print buyers, covering the main market sectors and ranging from long term professional buyers heading up buying teams in major organisations, through specialists in design or other agencies to those individuals buying small amounts of print as just a part of their day to day work. The organisations included businesses, Government departments, education and other public sector areas.

The survey results were analysed to find out what was most important to buyers, and where there were differences in what buyers were looking for. Some of these differences are according to market sector, and some according to the size of the company the buyer works for. Others are simply individual. The findings of the research are published in the 'What makes a good printer?' report, available from Vision in Print.

Questionnaires and interviews were used to gather information and comments about what buyers consider makes a good, or not so good, printer, and this has been compiled in the feedback section and introducing each question section to help printers gain a better understanding of what buyers are looking for in a printer.

The questions were also developed from this information, with the aim of providing a way for printers or their customers to take an objective look at how a printer is working.

The questionnaire is written to be used as either a '360° assessment' – where customers are given the opportunity to comment – or as a self-assessment. You gain the most benefit by involving customers. They can often find it difficult to say when things are not working quite so well, and this offers you an opportunity to find out in time to avoid the risk of them being tempted away from you. If you also complete it yourself, and compare results, it helps you find out where you might not be seeing the whole picture.

As a first step, filling it in yourself will be very helpful. During the research and trials we found that it's not just the results that are most important in this case – it's the process. One of the printers who tried it for self-assessment said:

"We completed the questionnaire together as a management team. Because both sales and production were represented, you can imagine there was a great deal of lively debate around some of the issues. However, it must be said that on most issues, whether good or bad, both parts of the business agreed.

On the areas where we felt our performance was not acceptable, we ended up drawing up a departmental action plan. Because every department had been involved, we believe we will have buy in from everyone concerned."

How to use the questionnaire

For printers filling this in

This questionnaire will work best if you involve all your management team and think about the answers together. Different parts of the business see things differently, and may hear different things back from customers. Working on it together is likely to give the most accurate result, and it will help if you talk about the questions together before answering.

Each question should be answered as objectively as possible. To help you do this, each section has some comments made by print buyers during the Vision in Print survey, so you can use them to guide you. Against each question there is also a box asking how important this topic is. This is mainly for your customers to fill in, so that you know what's most important to them, but it might be useful for you to complete that section as well to see if what you think matches what your customers think. If you are using this for self-assessment, you can compare with the findings from our survey.

When you've finished, turn to the Score Analysis at the end to see how to add up the scores and either use your customers' responses or compare your results with the Vision in Print survey findings.

For print customers filling this in

Please answer each question by ticking the box that you feel most closely reflects this printer's performance. In the 'level of importance' section alongside each question, could you please tick which box best indicates how important this particular aspect of their service is to you. This will help your printer decide which areas to address first in their improvement plans.

It may help if you scan through all the sections first to decide in your mind which service areas are most important to you, reserving those for the 'high' scores.

Once you have completed the questionnaire, please return to your printer for them to analyse the results.

Question section

Please read each question and tick the box that you feel most accurately reflects the level of performance. The comments at the beginning of each section are to help give printers an idea of what print buyers expect, to help benchmark against their expectations.

Section 1: Product quality

A few buyers' comments to guide you:

Some examples given by print buyers that they considered excellent service are:

- *"Work which consistently matches proofs"*
- *"Attention to detail – sometimes pick up mistakes we've overlooked"*
- *"Quick to resolve any quality issues"*
- *"If there is a problem, they will find out what went wrong and take steps to make sure it doesn't happen again"*

Some common problems are:

- *"Lack of colour control ... some batches we receive are a totally different colour to stock being replenished"*
- *"...we have experienced a few minor errors, these have continued and I need to continually review finished work."*

Question 1a: Delivering the expected

How important do you consider this to be?

How would you rate the company on delivering exactly what the customer is expecting?

Excellent?	Very Good?	Good?	Fair?	High?	Medium?	Low?
<input type="radio"/>						

Question 1b: Resolving quality issues

How important do you consider this to be?

How would you rate the company on resolving quality issues?

Excellent?	Very Good?	Good?	Fair?	High?	Medium?	Low?
<input type="radio"/>						

Section 2: Delivering value

A few buyers' comments to guide you:

Some examples given by print buyers that they considered excellent service are:

- *"Looking at formats ... saying where a couple of millimetres difference could save us money"*
- *"Some printers will challenge a spec ... because they see a more competitive or faster, more effective solution. That's always an advantage."*

Some common problems:

- *"Printers don't always offer the best paper size. They often just go with what the estimating system throws up"*
- *"Printers are not pro-active about suggesting changes to a spec which would help meet our need for a lower price"*

Question 2a: Ensuring best price within a spec

How important do you consider this to be?

How would you rate the company on thinking about a print spec and quoting on the most competitive way of producing it?

Excellent?

Very Good?

Good?

Fair?

High?

Medium?

Low?

Question 2b: Offering alternatives

How important do you consider this to be?

How would you rate the company on thinking beyond what is asked and suggesting ways customers could save money or have added value?

Excellent?

Very Good?

Good?

Fair?

High?

Medium?

Low?

Section 3: Customer service

This section looks at the basic elements of customer service and what structures or processes are in place. Other areas are explored more fully in later sections of this questionnaire.

Some buyer's comments to guide you:

- *"You can end up having to talk to several people and waste lots of time – and then don't know for sure what's being done."*
- *"... need to be well trained, have the right skill sets and to be empowered to get the job done."*
- *"...and also contingency plans for any problems (presses breaking down etc). This can be reassuring, and shows they've thought seriously about the project."*
- *"Excellent attitude of staff, right through the company, who care and work hard to get the job right."*

Some common problems:

- *"When our main contact is absent, we become concerned about service levels."*
- *"They may have good people on their account, but they are not sufficiently supported ... they don't have enough clout within the factory."*

Question 3a: Structure and responsibilities

How important do you consider this to be?

How would you rate the company on ensuring that the customer knows who to contact and can be confident of that person taking responsibility?

Excellent?	Very Good?	Good?	Fair?	High?	Medium?	Low?
<input type="radio"/>						

Question 3b: Levels of authority

How important do you consider this to be?

How would you rate the company on giving customer service staff enough authority to be able to take decisions when necessary and to be confident of delivering on what they commit to?

Excellent?	Very Good?	Good?	Fair?	High?	Medium?	Low?
<input type="radio"/>						

Question 3c: Competence and training

How important do you consider this to be?

How would you rate the company on ensuring that the customer service staff have the training they need to deliver the service your customers expect?

Excellent?	Very Good?	Good?	Fair?	High?	Medium?	Low?
<input type="radio"/>						

Question 3d: Handovers

How important do you consider this to be?

How would you rate the structure or processes in place for ensuring smooth handovers in case of sickness or holiday?

Excellent?	Very Good?	Good?	Fair?	High?	Medium?	Low?
<input type="radio"/>						

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Question 3e: Contingency planning

How important do you consider this to be?

How effectively do you consider the company plans for coping if things go wrong - breakdowns or emergencies?

Excellent?

Very Good?

Good?

Fair?

High?

Medium?

Low?

Question 3f: Putting the customer first

How important do you consider this to be?

How good do you feel that staff are at making that extra effort to truly put the customer first?

Excellent?

Very Good?

Good?

Fair?

High?

Medium?

Low?

Section 4: Relationships

The research showed relationships to be very important to buyers: starting off on the right foot, building trust and making the relationship work well for both companies.

Some comments they made are:

- *“What helps with a first job is thorough discussion with everyone involved, reviewing possible pitfalls and putting plans in place to prevent them.”*
- *“The printer had all the staff involved in their brochure production, even the PA, over for the day, tracing a file from upload to finished job – helped a lot with understanding.”*
- *“What really irritates is printers making an approach who haven’t even done the most basic research. Sometimes their plan may be completely inappropriate – they couldn’t do the work anyway.”*
- *“In long term relationships, there is a risk of complacency.”*

Question 4a: The first approach

How important do you consider this to be?

What is your opinion of how well planned approaches are to prospective new customers?

Excellent?	Very Good?	Good?	Fair?	High?	Medium?	Low?
<input type="radio"/>						

Question 4b: The first job

How important do you consider this to be?

What do you think about the degree of planning that goes into the first job for a new customer?

Excellent?	Very Good?	Good?	Fair?	High?	Medium?	Low?
<input type="radio"/>						

Question 4c: Building trust

How important do you consider this to be?

What would you score the company on always doing what they say, when they say?

Excellent?	Very Good?	Good?	Fair?	High?	Medium?	Low?
<input type="radio"/>						

Question 4d: Building the relationship

How important do you consider this to be?

How good is the company at creating opportunities for the printer and customer' s people to get to know each other better?

Excellent?	Very Good?	Good?	Fair?	High?	Medium?	Low?
<input type="radio"/>						

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Question 4e: Monitoring relationships

How important do you consider this to be?

What score would you give the company on making sure it's working well?

Excellent? Very Good? Good? Fair? High? Medium? Low?

Section 5: Estimating, administration and invoicing

This section looks at day-to-day administration: paperwork, including invoicing, systems for keeping track of what's going on, and the way that quoting is handled. It may seem to be a minor part of the job, but if it doesn't receive the right amount of attention it can create hours of unnecessary work for both the printer and the customer.

Some buyers comments to guide you:

- "...what's important is that we must have the correct PO number and an **exact** match between price on the invoice and price on the purchase order."
- "Timely, and good quality, file copies are key – and definitely **not** copies taken from the make-readies!"

Some common problems buyers mentioned:

- "Deviations cause problems ... adding in an extra cost, even a minor one, without having given the buyers notice so we can get it incorporated into the PO."
- "The biggest problem area – inaccuracy with invoices and delivery notes. It costs us and the printers more man-hours than anything else."

Question 5a: Quoting to spec

How important do you consider this to be?

How would you rate the company on making sure that quotes are laid as requested and nothing left out?

Excellent? Very Good? Good? Fair? High? Medium? Low?

Question 5b: Getting the price right

How important do you consider this to be?

How would you rate the company on keeping customers informed of any changes to price - so there are no surprises on the invoice?

Excellent? Very Good? Good? Fair? High? Medium? Low?

Question 5c: Progress monitoring

How important do you consider this to be?

How would you rate the company on ensuring that information on progress is readily available?

Excellent? Very Good? Good? Fair? High? Medium? Low?

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Question 5d: Keeping track of detail

How important do you consider this to be?

How would you rate the company on attention to detail and ensuring that everything is remembered: file copies, proofs of delivery, anything else requested by customers?

Excellent?

Very Good?

Good?

Fair?

High?

Medium?

Low?

Question 5e: Document management

How important do you consider this to be?

How would you rate the company on ensuring that all documents (invoices, delivery notes, etc.) show the information required by customers, in the format they need?

Excellent?

Very Good?

Good?

Fair?

High?

Medium?

Low?

Section 6: Communication

This cuts across all areas of service, and many of the comments here crossed over with those on customer service, relationships and understanding customer needs – unsurprisingly. Good communication is what enables all this to happen.

Some buyer comments:

- *“If there’s just one point of contact, there’s less scope for misunderstanding.”*
- *“When a job’s in progress, let me know what’s happening, even just to say it’s on schedule.”*

And some common problems:

- *“Some printers ring up all the time – 2 to 3 times a week sometimes ... that’s annoying. If everybody did that we’d just be talking on the phone all the time.”*
- *“Not being responsive or calling back promptly – ignoring us!”*
- *“Problems **must** be flagged. Not all printers are at all good at this.”*

Question 6a: Pro-active communication

How important do you consider this to be?

How would you rate the company on keeping the customer informed about their work, without having to be asked?

Excellent?

Very Good?

Good?

Fair?

High?

Medium?

Low?

Question 6b: Feedback and reviews

How important do you consider this to be?

What kind of opportunities are provided for discussing past jobs and learning from any mistakes, and airing difficulties before they become serious problems?

Excellent?

Very Good?

Good?

Fair?

High?

Medium?

Low?

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Question 6c: Notifying problems

How important do you consider this to be?

How would you rate the company on keeping the customer informed if a problem arises on their work?

Excellent? Very Good? Good? Fair? High? Medium? Low?

Question 6d: Accessibility

How important do you consider this to be?

How accessible are people within the company when a customer needs to talk to someone?

Excellent? Very Good? Good? Fair? High? Medium? Low?

Section 7: Deliveries

A selection of comments from buyers:

- *“Printer X is very good at this. They have a computer tracking system and know exactly where their driver is ...”*
- *“Labelling, packing notes, way counting – it’s very frustrating when it’s wrong.”*
- *“Proofs of delivery are an issue – we often don’t get them, and when we do the signatures will be unreadable.”*
- *“People who are well organised all the way down the line – right down to the van drivers.”*

Question 7a: Timeliness

How important do you consider this to be?

How would you rate the company on timely deliveries?

Excellent? Very Good? Good? Fair? High? Medium? Low?

Question 7b: Keeping in contact

How important do you consider this to be?

How good is the company's ability to track the delivery drivers?

Excellent? Very Good? Good? Fair? High? Medium? Low?

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Question 7c: Documentation

How important do you consider this to be?

How would you rate the company on providing appropriate documentation with deliveries?

Excellent?

Very Good?

Good?

Fair?

High?

Medium?

Low?

Question 7d: Delivery instructions

How important do you consider this to be?

How would you rate the company on following delivery instructions accurately?

Excellent?

Very Good?

Good?

Fair?

High?

Medium?

Low?

Question 7e: The driver

How important do you consider this to be?

How would you rate the company's drivers on providing good customer service?

Excellent?

Very Good?

Good?

Fair?

High?

Medium?

Low?

Section 8: Knowing your customer

Knowing a customer's marketplace and how their business or organisation operates makes it easier to understand what will be important to them. Knowing about the individual buyer enables a printer to appreciate what type of service they need: if they are print-literate or need a degree of hand-holding, how much and what type of communication they like. All this adds up to better customer service and better opportunities to add value and offer appropriate products and services.

Many printers, it appears, do not keep easily accessible information on file about customers – it tends to be in the salesperson's head! Keeping it centrally helps with business planning: for example, knowing what proportion of customers are likely to be interested in particular product or service. Having information readily available to relevant staff also helps with unplanned handovers, in case of sickness perhaps. Knowing the customer's company structure and who to speak to about what, their preferred means of communication, documentation requirements and so forth, plus any service level agreements makes it much easier to step into the breach.

Question 8a: Knowing the customer's business

How important do you consider this to be?

How would you rate the company's knowledge of the types of business environment customers operate in?

Excellent?

Very Good?

Good?

Fair?

High?

Medium?

Low?

Question 8b: Knowing customer's needs

How important do you consider this to be?

How would you rate the company's understanding of customers' own businesses?

Excellent?

Very Good?

Good?

Fair?

High?

Medium?

Low?

Question 8c: Knowing customers' needs (2)

How important do you consider this to be?

How would you rate the company's understanding of how to add value and support customers' business objectives?

Excellent?

Very Good?

Good?

Fair?

High?

Medium?

Low?

Question 8d: Knowing customer's needs (3)

How important do you consider this to be?

How would you rate the company's understanding of customers' compliance requirements?

Excellent?

Very Good?

Good?

Fair?

High?

Medium?

Low?

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Question 8e: Knowing the individual buyer

How important do you consider this to be?

How would you rate the company's level of knowledge about the individuals it deals with?

Excellent?	Very Good?	Good?	Fair?	High?	Medium?	Low?
<input type="radio"/>						

Question 8f: Sharing information

How important do you consider this to be?

How would you rate the company on keeping relevant information about customers' business needs and sharing it internally as appropriate?

Excellent?	Very Good?	Good?	Fair?	High?	Medium?	Low?
<input type="radio"/>						

Section 9: Technical support

Technical support, as in having the technical ability to produce the work required and keeping up to date, was generally regarded a 'given' by buyers – it is expected of a printer as a matter of course. Performance in other areas made quite a difference to buyers' opinions of a printer.

Some comments about what buyers find helpful:

- *“Keeping up to date with technology – it's useful if a printer flags up anything that may be useful for us to know about.”*
- *“It's very important that ourselves, our pre-press house and our printers can work together on colour-managed workflows.”*
- *“Seeing round a printing plant and what's involved helps a lot with our internal customers – which is good for working relationships.”*

And a couple of common problems:

- *“Data handling varies a lot. Some printers are so clued in and some completely unaware and offer no added value.”*
- *“They could be a bit more pro-active on technical support, particularly with regard to file suitability.”*

Question 9a: Keeping up to date

How important do you consider this to be?

How would you rate the company on keeping up to date with new technology?

Excellent?	Very Good?	Good?	Fair?	High?	Medium?	Low?
<input type="radio"/>						

Question 9b: Keeping the customer up to date

How important do you consider this to be?

How would you rate the company on keeping customers informed about new technology relevant to their business needs?

Excellent?	Very Good?	Good?	Fair?	High?	Medium?	Low?
<input type="radio"/>						

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Question 9c: Colour management

How important do you consider this to be?

How would you rate the company on understanding and working towards customers' colour management requirements?

Excellent?	Very Good?	Good?	Fair?	High?	Medium?	Low?
<input type="radio"/>						

Question 9d: Checking files

How important do you consider this to be?

What is the company's performance level for prompt checking of files and data sent by customers or their agencies?

Excellent?	Very Good?	Good?	Fair?	High?	Medium?	Low?
<input type="radio"/>						

Question 9e: Facilitating file transfer

How important do you consider this to be?

How well does the company support customers with electronic file transfer (advising on formats, offering ftp facilities, etc.)?

Excellent?	Very Good?	Good?	Fair?	High?	Medium?	Low?
<input type="radio"/>						

Question 9f: Customer training

How important do you consider this to be?

What score would you give the company for customer education and training offered?

Excellent?	Very Good?	Good?	Fair?	High?	Medium?	Low?
<input type="radio"/>						

Question 9g: Troubleshooting

How important do you consider this to be?

What level of troubleshooting problems and reporting does the company offer?

Excellent?	Very Good?	Good?	Fair?	High?	Medium?	Low?
<input type="radio"/>						

Working out the score

This summary is to help you analyse the results from the questionnaire. You can just look at the individual results for the questions, but it might be helpful to add up the scores and work out your overall result for each section. This can give you an idea where you may get the most benefit from concentrating effort on improvement. As a guide, the summary boxes each show what the total would be if excellent for every question, very good for every question and so forth.

Below each score sheet, there is a box to show how much impact this area has on customer satisfaction, from analysing responses from satisfied customers in the survey carried out to develop this questionnaire. In the research, six areas showed measurable impacts, with customer service highest.

At the end of this document, there are some of the comments received from print buyers during the research project, to give you an idea of what they look for from a printer.

If you are asking your customers to complete the survey as well, there are further instructions below.

Self-assessment

1. Work out the scores for each section, using the following numbering:
 Excellent = 4
 Very good= 3
 Good = 2
 Fair = 1
2. Fill in the scores on the score sheet for that section, and add them in the total box, as in the example below.

Section 2: Delivering value			
Question Number	Score		Importance
Question 2a	1		
Question 2b	3		
Totals	4		
Benchmark scores for section (for comparison)			
Highest score: 8	Very good: 6	Good: 4	Fair: 2
Highest importance: 6	Medium importance: 4	Low importance: 2	

3. Work out the importance scores, using the following numbering:
 High = 3
 Medium = 2
 Low = 1

Section 2: Delivering value			
Question Number	Score		Importance
Question 2a	1		3
Question 2b	3		2
Totals	4		5
Benchmark scores for section (for comparison)			
Highest score: 8	Very good: 6	Good: 4	Fair: 2
Highest importance: 6	Medium importance: 4	Low importance: 2	

4. Add these as well.

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When you've added up the score for that Section, you can use the benchmark scores to give you an idea of how you've rated your performance overall for that section. If you're using the scoring system for importance, you can also compare to see the overall importance you've assigned to that area, as in the example below:

Section 2: Delivering value		
Question Number	Score	Importance
Question 2a	1	3
Question 2b	3	2
Totals	4	5
Benchmark scores for section (for comparison)		
Highest score: 8	Very good: 6	Good: 4
Fair: 2		
Highest importance: 6	Medium importance: 4	Low importance: 2

Research rating for product quality and value for money

10% impact on customer satisfaction. This area does not have a high impact in itself, but if customers are satisfied with all other service areas, is the key factor that decides how much work you will be offered.

This score chart shows that overall, the company is good on delivering value, and considers it to be very important.

The impact box below the score sheet shows how important the research found this service area to be for customer satisfaction.

Where you have the lowest scores, those are the areas where you may want to work on some improvements. Where the score is low and the research rating high, those are the most important to address – the areas which will give you the best results.

360° Assessment

This form of assessment involves gaining your customers' views, by asking them to fill in the questionnaire, and then comparing what they say with your own scores. This allows a gap analysis – seeing where you and your staff have perceived performance differently than your customers – and also allows you to see which service areas are most important to customers.

To do this, first work out your own score, following the instructions for self-assessment, and then compare with the customer scores.

You may just want to look at how each customer has responded to the individual questions. But if you want an idea of their overall opinion for each section, you can analyse these scores as well, as follows:

1. Work out your customer scores using the same system as for self-assessment, marking them as follows:
 - Excellent = 4
 - Very good = 3
 - Good = 2
 - Fair = 1
2. Fill in each section box in the summary as for the self-assessment, adding the scores as before.
3. Work out the importance scores, using the following numbering:
 - High = 3
 - Medium = 2
 - Low = 1
4. Add these as well.

This will show you how each customer perceives your company's performance in each area, and how important that area of service is to them.

If you would like to analyse the results still further, and have an overview of all your customers' scores put together, use the 'All Customers Summary' form. A filled-out example is shown below.

Section 1: Product quality			
Question Number		All scores for this question added together	All importance scores for this question added together
Question 1a		25	25
Question 1b		26	23
Totals		51	48
Benchmark scores for section (for comparison)			
Highest score (8 x number of completed questionnaires):	Very good (6 x number of completed questionnaires):	Good (4 x number of completed questionnaires):	Fair (2 x number of completed questionnaires):
Total: 80	Total: 60	Total: 40	Total: 20
Highest importance: (6 x number of completed questionnaires):	Medium importance: (4 x number of completed questionnaires):	Low importance: (2 x number of completed questionnaires):	
Total: 60	Total: 40	Total: 20	

In this example, the printer asked 10 customers to complete the surveys. The benchmark scores are therefore multiplied by 10. From this he can see that 51 - the overall score for this section – is pretty good, falling between the 'very good' score and the 'good' score. He can also see that his customers think this area is very important, since the total importance score is 48.

Score sheets

Section 1: Product quality			
Question Number		Score	Importance
Question 1a			
Question 1b			
Totals			
Benchmark scores for section (for comparison)			
Highest score: 8	Very good: 6	Good: 4	Fair: 2
Highest importance: 6	Medium importance: 4	Low importance: 2	

Section 2: Delivering value			
Question Number		Score	Importance
Question 2a			
Question 2b			
Totals			
Benchmark scores for section (for comparison)			
Highest score: 8	Very good: 6	Good: 4	Fair: 2
Highest importance: 6	Medium importance: 4	Low importance: 2	

Research rating for product quality and value for money

This area does not have a high impact on customer satisfaction in itself, but if customers are happy with all other service areas, is a key factor that decides how much work you will be offered.

Section 3: Customer service			
Question Number		Score	Importance
Question 3a			
Question 3b			
Question 3c			
Question 3d			
Question 3e			
Question 3f			
Totals			
Benchmark scores for section (for comparison)			
Highest score: 24	Very good: 18	Good: 12	Fair: 6
Highest importance: 18	Medium importance: 12	Low importance: 6	

Research rating for customer service

This was the service area with the highest impact of all on customer satisfaction. It is definitely one to concentrate on for keeping existing customers and gaining repeat business.

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Section 4: Relationships			
Question Number	Score		Importance
Question 4a			
Question 4b			
Question 4c			
Question 4d			
Question 4e			
Totals			
Benchmark scores for section (for comparison)			
Highest score: 20	Very good: 15	Good: 10	Fair: 5
Highest importance: 15	Medium importance: 10	Low importance: 5	

Research rating for relationships

This was the service area with the second highest impact on customer satisfaction: it reflects the need for a customer to feel confident that you can be trusted to look after their work.

Section 5: Estimating, administration and invoicing			
Question Number	Score		Importance
Question 5a			
Question 5b			
Question 5c			
Question 5d			
Question 5e			
Totals			
Benchmark scores for section (for comparison)			
Highest score: 20	Very good: 15	Good: 10	Fair: 5
Highest importance: 15	Medium importance: 10	Low importance: 5	

Research rating for administration and quoting

This area is surprisingly important to customer satisfaction, with efficiency of quoting coming 3rd and administration coming joint 4th in the impact rating.

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Section 6: Communication			
Question Number	Score		Importance
Question 6a			
Question 6b			
Question 6c			
Question 6d			
Totals			
Benchmark scores for section (for comparison)			
Highest score: 16	Very good: 12	Good: 8	Fair: 4
Highest importance: 12	Medium importance: 8	Low importance: 4	

Research rating for communication

Good communication is essential to effective customer service and building relationships, and came equal 4th in the impact rating.

Section 7: Deliveries			
Question Number	Score		Importance
Question 7a			
Question 7b			
Question 7c			
Question 7d			
Question 7e			
Totals			
Benchmark scores for section (for comparison)			
Highest score: 20	Very good: 15	Good: 10	Fair: 5
Highest importance: 15	Medium importance: 10	Low importance: 5	

Research rating for deliveries

Timely deliveries are a given: if they are not the norm a buyer will not work with a printer. Getting the documentation and service elements right is however also important.

What makes a good printer?

Section 8: Knowing your customer			
Question Number	Score		Importance
Question 8a			
Question 8b			
Question 8c			
Question 8d			
Question 8e			
Question 8f			
Totals			
Benchmark scores for section (for comparison)			
Highest score: 24	Very good: 18	Good: 12	Fair: 6
Highest importance: 18	Medium importance: 12	Low importance: 6	

Research rating for knowing your customer

This aspect is not measurable – it is what tells you how best to deliver the other service elements. If you don't know the customer you risk failing to offer what they want, and wasting effort offering what they don't want.

Section 9: Technical support			
Question Number	Score		Importance
Question 9a			
Question 9b			
Question 9c			
Question 9d			
Question 9e			
Question 9f			
Question 9g			
Totals			
Benchmark scores for section (for comparison)			
Highest score: 28	Very good: 21	Good: 14	Fair: 7
Highest importance: 21	Medium importance: 14	Low importance: 7	

Research rating for technical support

This again is a given: buyers expect it as part of the service. The amount and type of support is linked to customer service and also to building relationships, which were the highest contributors to satisfaction.

All customers summary

If you've asked your customers to complete questionnaires for you, in addition to seeing how each individual customer rates the different service areas it may help to get an overview, or general score. Use this summary sheet to do this.

Section 1: Product quality				
Question Number		All scores for this question added together	All importance scores for this question added together	
Question 1a				
Question 1b				
Totals				
Benchmark scores for section (for comparison)				
Highest score (8 x number of completed questionnaires):	Very good (6 x number of completed questionnaires):	Good (4 x number of completed questionnaires):	Fair (2 x number of completed questionnaires):	
Total:	Total:	Total:	Total:	
Highest importance: (6 x number of completed questionnaires):		Medium importance: (4 x number of completed questionnaires):	Low importance: (2 x number of completed questionnaires):	
Total:		Total:	Total:	

Section 2: Delivering value				
Question Number		All scores for this question added together	All importance scores for this question added together	
Question 2a				
Question 2b				
Totals				
Benchmark scores for section (for comparison)				
Highest score (8 x number of completed questionnaires):	Very good (6 x number of completed questionnaires):	Good (4 x number of completed questionnaires):	Fair (2 x number of completed questionnaires):	
Total:	Total:	Total:	Total:	
Highest importance: (6 x number of completed questionnaires):		Medium importance: (4 x number of completed questionnaires):	Low importance: (2 x number of completed questionnaires):	
Total:		Total:	Total:	

Section 3: Customer service			
Question Number	All scores for this question added together		All importance scores for this question added together
Question 3a			
Question 3b			
Question 3c			
Question 3d			
Question 3e			
Question 3f			
Totals			
Benchmark scores for section (for comparison)			
Highest score (24 x number of completed questionnaires):	Very good (18 x number of completed questionnaires):	Good (12 x number of completed questionnaires):	Fair (6 x number of completed questionnaires):
Total:	Total:	Total:	Total:
Highest importance: (18 x number of completed questionnaires):	Medium importance: (12 x number of completed questionnaires):	Low importance: (6 x number of completed questionnaires):	
Total:	Total:	Total:	

Section 4: Relationships			
Question Number	All scores for this question added together		All importance scores for this question added together
Question 4a			
Question 4b			
Question 4c			
Question 4d			
Question 4e			
Totals			
Benchmark scores for section (for comparison)			
Highest score (20 x number of completed questionnaires):	Very good (15 x number of completed questionnaires):	Good (10 x number of completed questionnaires):	Fair (5 x number of completed questionnaires):
Total:	Total:	Total:	Total:
Highest importance: (15 x number of completed questionnaires):	Medium importance: (10 x number of completed questionnaires):	Low importance: (5 x number of completed questionnaires):	
Total:	Total:	Total:	

Section 5: Estimating, administration and invoicing			
Question Number		All scores for this question added together	All importance scores for this question added together
Question 5a			
Question 5b			
Question 5c			
Question 5d			
Question 5e			
Totals			
Benchmark scores for section (for comparison)			
Highest score (20 x number of completed questionnaires):	Very good (15 x number of completed questionnaires):	Good (10 x number of completed questionnaires):	Fair (5 x number of completed questionnaires):
Total:	Total:	Total:	Total:
Highest importance: (15 x number of completed questionnaires):	Medium importance: (10 x number of completed questionnaires):	Low importance: (5 x number of completed questionnaires):	
Total:	Total:	Total:	

Section 6: Communication			
Question Number		All scores for this question added together	All importance scores for this question added together
Question 6a			
Question 6b			
Question 6c			
Question 6d			
Totals			
Benchmark scores for section (for comparison)			
Highest score (16 x number of completed questionnaires):	Very good (12 x number of completed questionnaires):	Good (8 x number of completed questionnaires):	Fair (4 x number of completed questionnaires):
Total:	Total:	Total:	Total:
Highest importance: (12 x number of completed questionnaires):	Medium importance: (8 x number of completed questionnaires):	Low importance: (4 x number of completed questionnaires):	
Total:	Total:	Total:	

Section 7: Deliveries			
Question Number		All scores for this question added together	All importance scores for this question added together
Question 7a			
Question 7b			
Question 7c			
Question 7d			
Question 7e			
Totals			
Benchmark scores for section (for comparison)			
Highest score (20 x number of completed questionnaires):	Very good (15 x number of completed questionnaires):	Good (10 x number of completed questionnaires):	Fair (5 x number of completed questionnaires):
Total:	Total:	Total:	Total:
Highest importance: (15 x number of completed questionnaires):	Medium importance: (10 x number of completed questionnaires):	Low importance: (5 x number of completed questionnaires):	
Total:	Total:	Total:	

Section 8: Knowing your customer			
Question Number		All scores for this question added together	All importance scores for this question added together
Question 8a			
Question 8b			
Question 8c			
Question 8d			
Question 8e			
Question 8f			
Totals			
Benchmark scores for section (for comparison)			
Highest score (24 x number of completed questionnaires):	Very good (18 x number of completed questionnaires):	Good (12 x number of completed questionnaires):	Fair (6 x number of completed questionnaires):
Total:	Total:	Total:	Total:
Highest importance: (18 x number of completed questionnaires):	Medium importance: (12 x number of completed questionnaires):	Low importance: (6 x number of completed questionnaires):	
Total:	Total:	Total:	

What makes a good printer?

Section 9: Technical support			
Question Number	All scores for this question added together		All importance scores for this question added together
Question 9a			
Question 9b			
Question 9c			
Question 9d			
Question 4e			
Question 9f			
Question 9g			
Totals			
Benchmark scores for section (for comparison)			
Highest score (28 x number of completed questionnaires):	Very good (21 x number of completed questionnaires):	Good (14 x number of completed questionnaires):	Fair (7 x number of completed questionnaires):
Total:	Total:	Total:	Total:
Highest importance: (21 x number of completed questionnaires):	Medium importance: (14 x number of completed questionnaires):	Low importance: (7 x number of completed questionnaires):	
Total:	Total:	Total:	

What next?

To give some ideas of what print buyers are looking for, the following pages contain a compilation of comments made on the Vision in Print ‘*What makes a good printer?*’ survey forms and during the research interviews. The research report for this project can be downloaded from Vision in Print’s website (www.visioninprint.co.uk).

Further guidance can also be found in “*Competitive advantage through customer service excellence*”, a research report by Tim Wilkinson of TWA Business Consultants Ltd. available from Print Yorkshire (www.printyorkshire.com) and Vision in Print, and in the BPIF/BSI Publicly Available Specification PAS 75 available from the British Standards Institution (www.bsi-global.com).

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Product quality and value

Delivering quality

- Using colour management & spectrophotometry to monitor and quantify results.
- Keeping overall consistency within product quality.
- Using process automation to cut lead times and improve quality.

Delivering value

- Being able to add something extra to the job – a specialist finish or service.
- Thinking about the specification and going beyond it. Answering questions the customer hasn't asked and offering alternatives to either deliver a better piece of work or a better price.
- The specification in the enquiry may not be the most efficient way of producing the product or the most efficient format for your press. This may be because it has to be that way, or it may be that the buyer is unaware of this. So price it as they asked, but also offer an alternative.
- Being able to save time within the schedule
- Think about paper sizes. Is paper available in non-standard sizes that are more economic
- Are you able to offer a paper similar to the one the customer has asked for at a better price, as an additional option?
- Think about the finishing – especially for complex direct mail items where there is pattern perforating, complicated folding, sealed or glued areas. Are there more efficient ways of producing the desired product, or ways of producing a more effective product?
- Are you able to offer support with packing or distributing, perhaps by consolidating with deliveries of other work you do to offer better prices than the customer can get on their own?
- Check with the customer if the specification seems unusual for them – occasionally it can be because they've made a mistake.
- Are there any ancillary costs that can be reduced, perhaps by combining with other projects?

Common problems mentioned

- Not matching specified ink densities.
- Quality problems with out-sourced processes, such as finishing.
- Lack of attention to detail, allowing minor errors to slip through.
- Inconsistency: reprints not matching existing stock, corporate colours not matching across a range of item

The most demanding:

The most demanding types of work or customers are likely to be:

For quality:

- Report and Accounts work
- Corporate brochures
- Automotive and premium products
- Corporate design agencies
- The quality end of publishing

For consistency and predictability:

- Large organisations with house colours that need to match across all materials
- Project work where multiple items carry the same images
- Magazines
- Other types of work which repeats on a regular basis and needs to match from batch to batch

Customer service

Most of the buyers interviewed wanted to have a structured customer services department that acted as the 'command centre' for their work. This selection of their comments explains some of the reasons why, and how they find, from their own experiences, it works best.

Structure and responsibilities

- I want just one point of contact within the company. I don't have time to be chasing around after people and information.
- Strong account management teams are important – we don't need sales staff in our printers. We need servicing, not being sold to. Account management should be there, at the printer, all the time – not on the road – and led by someone especially responsible for our account.
- One point of contact (or one team) is very important ... one account handler responsible for the work. That contact then gets to know our business better.
- Customer service, consistent points of contact. If there is a problem, they will find out what went wrong and take steps to make sure it doesn't happen again.
- Where there is a good MIS system, it helps customer service staff give speedy responses

Levels of authority, competence and training

- When discussing [a prospective printer's] customer service people we ask about the level of experience and expertise they have (relevant to the people who would be contacting us on a daily basis) and how much power/influence they have on the shop floor (to ensure our jobs get priority and attention!).
- What's important in account management: responsiveness, their ability to elicit from the customer the right sort of information they need to do their job properly. They need to be well trained and have the right skill sets and to be empowered to get the job done. Need to understand their customer, to challenge when necessary, to act and deliver on promises and to say when a demand is unreasonable – which requires good communication and people skills.
- ... better training for the internal staff. Some of the customer service staff seem to lack sufficient technical knowledge – so making sure they spend some quality time on the shop floor, learning about the process.

Handovers:

Dealing with just one contact obviously gives rise to the problem of what happens when that person is ill or on holiday. Several buyers said this was a problem area, and customer service levels dropped at such times. Where handovers worked well, buyers offered suggestions of what printers had put in place:

- Clear and transparent systems with structured working practices – so that anyone could step into the breach knowing where the relevant information could be found. Good MIS systems do help with this, but are not the only way of doing it;

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- 'Buddy systems' or 'shadowing': where one other person is kept generally in touch with the work by the main contact – told what jobs are going through, who's involved, where to find any information they need;
- Documenting all communications. Then if someone is unexpectedly absent, it's all in writing to be picked up and carried on with. Although email does help with this, for it to be effective there needs to be a means of whoever takes over getting access to the main contact's email;
- Careful planning for holidays. Informing the customer in advance, telling them who will take over and ensuring they have contact details, and briefing their temporary replacement very thoroughly and carefully.
- ... having a very efficient MIS system, or having a system of regular update meetings to keep all the customer service staff informed, and very good paperwork. Having a 'shadow' for each person can also help.
- Handovers – these tend to work better where there are two people working on the account. Where there is only one there tend to be problems. Some printers handle this better than others. Having a sort of matrix set up, where all account handlers know a little about all customers helps, as whoever takes it over is not coming to it completely cold.
- MIS systems can help with handovers – where anyone at the printer can see the history and status etc of the project
- Handover processes are the biggest single failing – when someone is sick or on holiday, the transfer of the job falls down. There is no excuse for this – jobs need to run smoothly from start to finish, and if both company's processes are well defined that should not be a problem. A suggestion to help with this is shadowing wherever possible, to ensure hand-over failings do not happen.

When things go wrong

Life is such that plans have to be made for when things go wrong – from a structured back-up system for files, companies that work can be farmed out to in case of breakdown and a review process to learn from experiences and be better prepared for next time. Here are some buyers' thoughts:

- Also – having contingencies in place to deal with things if they go wrong. And how they respond in a crisis (which are inevitable, as they are humans dealing with humans).
- If there have been major problems on a job a debrief is invaluable for learning from. Not apportioning blame! Major disasters are never usually caused by one thing, it's several together and finding out what they were is important.
- My philosophy is that everyone is going to screw up at some point – what's important is how they un-screw up.

Gold standards

A few comments from buyers about what has made them really value a particular printer:

- ... when there is a scheduling problem, the printer who pulls out all the stops
- Being consistently available, responding to enquiries, being helpful – always being there. If they don't know the answer, putting you through to someone who does. Letting you feel that your job is being taken care of.
- Depth of knowledge combined with a 'can do-will do' approach.
- A really good printer takes the time to take an interest in what their customer's businesses need to achieve and how they work. Then they adapt to add value to our particular projects and consider themselves part of our project team, taking ownership of its overall success.
- Approachable, friendly, willing to give technical advice even when they are not commercially involved. Can liaise with my clients directly and exude a professional reliability.
- The quality of a printer is not just down to the quality of product that exits the door. It is the level of service, understanding and assistance prior that makes some printers stand

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out above others. Understanding of a customer's needs and willingness to offer technical advice and help are vital.

- One printer, when we started working with them, they dedicated 2 people to the account and actually put people on site to help out. We both benefited from that – we had the help and the printer learned about us and so were able to offer better service and thus secure more work.
- Totally dedicating themselves to servicing a buyer, and perhaps setting themselves a project to understand how to deliver that service. Targeting (not just random attempts)
- We had one printer with whom we were having problems. The printer sent a member of staff to work with us in production for a month, which made a big difference. The printer could then see how problems arose, and could also see where our working practices didn't help – so we could both make changes and work together to improve things, which was very effective.
- The printer placed a staff member on our premises 3 or 4 days a week, with the remaining time back at the printer, on a permanent basis. This allowed the printer to learn just what is important to us, and what is less so, so that we could work much better together.

Where buyers find problems arise...

- A lot of printers are quite poor at customer service. All are cutting themselves to the bone on staffing, but this is one area that they absolutely must not cut. It is where print jobs rise or fall, and the area where most jobs are likely to go wrong. It must be properly staffed.
- Sometimes, as we are a big customer, too many people are thrown at us. This can be a bit of problem – managing multiple relationships is inconvenient. Having a single point of contact works better – although we do maintain an escalation chain, on both sides. With a single contact, they get to know our business better and so can work better with us.
- There's often a problem when there's not one main point of contact and you want to talk to someone – a minor change, or perhaps change the delivery time – and you can't find who is dealing with the job and who to talk to. You can end up having to talk to several people and waste lots of time – and then don't know for sure what's being done. If there is a point of contact and they are not there – because they are the rep and are on the road, or in a meeting – there is often not an internal alternative. And if they are out, they can't go down the corridor and talk to someone and get things done. So there needs to be one customer service person who's there all the time and who can get things done.
- Some printers do not put enough resource into it. They may have good people on their account but they are not sufficiently supported – either they are over-stretched, or they don't have sufficient clout within the factory, and so can't fight the client's corner properly for them – nobody takes any notice of them.
- Avoid having account execs or production people that do not have the authority to make a decision. If they have to go and ask a superior all the time, it wastes time
- ...suppliers who don't come clean on problems at the right time – perhaps because they're hoping they can solve it. But if they don't, time has been lost when we could have been doing something about it. We will always try and help a supplier as well – and so need to know sooner rather than later. Buyers have a responsibility to make suppliers aware of this and to create a climate where they feel they can, and to be confident that they will help – it's a joint problem, not just the suppliers'.
- They often don't check the artwork until they are ready to actually start the work – they may have had it a couple of days by then. They should **always** check it **as soon as** they have it – to pick up any problems while there is time to resolve them without messing up the schedule. If they wait, they cause timing problems.

Relationships

This selection of comments reflects buyers' views on what makes them more likely to consider a printer they don't yet know, how to get beyond that first job and what they are looking for in the relationships with printers. There are a few comments about areas that several buyers mentioned as creating problems and, finally, a few observations that have come out of the research showing where there were differences in sectors.

Getting off to a good start

- Researching the company beforehand helps – showing that they can offer something that fits in with the company's objectives rather than just selling – linking their approach with our needs.
- What helps get in the door: putting in some solid groundwork. Showing the potential customer a manufacturing plan – how you would tackle the work.
- Up-front references, supplied un-prompted – credentials, perhaps – can make a difference.
- Good management – we look for professionalism. Are they well run? Does their workflow through the factory look sensible and efficient? Is it clean and tidy? If they can't even keep their factory clean, how can they project-manage your work? No girly posters – these can be offensive. Do they appear interested in our business (as opposed to just wanting print), and do they appear to understand it. Does their business structure make sense, giving the comfort they can cope well with the work? Appearances can make a big difference to first impressions – even things like the printers having matching overalls.
- We can know a printer for years before first placing a job with them – but a relationship is being built during this time.
- It can help gain trust if the contact at the printer has worked on the buying side, and so understands where the buyers are coming from.
- Think about what the prospective customer may want, rather than what you would want to sell.

Building trust

- Trust is vital. What gains it is track record, over a number of jobs. It doesn't have to be big things – it can be the little things. But consistently doing what they say they will do. If they say they'll do something on Tuesday, doing so etc.
- Trust is important ... to develop trust, a printer needs to have a good track record, and to have honesty and relative transparency in their dealings with us. How they react to problems – are they defensive, and looking for someone else to blame always, perhaps the client? Do they have a 'let's see how we can fix this and then look at the cause later' approach? Or is it 'well, we can sort things out for you, but it'll cost you...'
- If you know they are always telling the truth and not fobbing you off.
- Building the relationship – open communication is vital to building trust. The printer needs to feel safe to be open, so the client needs to create that atmosphere.

What buyers are looking for in a relationship

- Regular meetings to discuss new industry ideas or look at our next set of projects and allow printer to be part of that early process to best help us with advice on materials, lead times, costs etc. Learning from mistakes.
- Partnerships are important, working together to achieve results and resolve shared problems.
- Customers get it wrong quite often, and rely on the printer to help them out. This should be on a give and take basis, offering the same level of support back, helping if a printer

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needs to recover a cost somewhere. The need for give and take and support received should be acknowledged.

- Relationships ... where we are learning from each other – not just one-way.
- Having the courage to risk saying when the customer is wrong (in a constructive way, that helps both parties)
- Printers should 'work with and not against other suppliers in the chain' – teamwork is important.
- Knowing that you can ask questions.
- Printers should be part of the team. They should not be afraid to make suggestions, tell us when what we are saying is daft, not the best thing or unfair! We need to hear their views.
- A good rep should ideally be someone I can have a good relationship with and who has technical knowledge, but trust is the most important – trust that he will look after the work. And the back up of a company with the ability to deliver what he needs.
- As any relationship is a two way process, good suppliers need to be open and willing to communicate freely. The object is to get the job through all the processes as smoothly as possible. Printers should demand accuracy from customers and help them improve and in turn support where necessary. The phrase 'what do you want and need' rather than 'this is what we have, this is what you will get' is an important culture on which to build relationships.

Managing relationships

- Things that help build relationships – offering training workshops, or having employees working within the client company
- To improve relationship: Flagging potential problems as soon as they arise. Flagging technical issues likewise.
- Ensure that you maintain a high standard of account management who keeps in close contact and remains aware of our medium term – long-term strategy and contributes to its development. The interface with our senior decision makers is critical with this value of contract spend.
- We deal on several levels – I will deal with the manager of the customer services people, and the MDs. We hold monthly operational meetings and quarterly quality reviews, which are multi-level. We also hold bi-monthly management meetings which keep printers informed of the general status of the market place to help with forward planning and to discuss quality and general issues.
- Printers need to work with us to build relationships: if they feed back problems with my buying team, I will sort things out – tactfully. It may be a process problem, or a training problem.

Some problem areas

- Trying to 'buy' their way in, by offering corporate hospitality etc. Hospitality's OK for long-established printers, but not as an attempt to get in.
- Over-selling – just annoys a buyer, people don't like being heavily sold to.
- What loses trust: finding out that they have lied. If things go wrong, if they tell you there is the chance to try and work around it. If they don't, it's a major problem.
- There seems to be no mutual respect in the relationship – especially if you're a woman. They are the wonderful techies and you are just someone they send the print to.
- As cost has become more important printers are relying more on improving technology than nurturing client relationships.
- Not finding out about the organisation – who they are and what they do – before phoning, not doing their background research. The printer should have done their homework and know the basics about the organisation **before** they make that first call – it's easy enough.
- Calling first thing Monday morning or last thing Friday evening – **bad** times

Some differences

- Large organisations, placing high volumes of work, and those for whom the printed product is a critical part of their business – publishers for example – are more likely to have a stringent vetting process and to be much more concerned with assuring continuity of supply than those placing smaller volumes of work or work that is less business-critical.
- In sectors where the type of work allows a buyer to try new printers with smaller, less critical jobs, this provides a printer with the opportunity to build that critical ‘track record’ – so ensure all staff are aware of this, and don’t see such jobs as too small to be worth treating as important.
- Buyers in sectors where the printer can provide the ideas and prototypes for formats, such as direct mail, packaging and point of sale, particularly value a pro-active relationship where the printer sees themselves as a partner, helping to drive innovation

Estimating, administration and invoicing

This was an area that generated a lot of comments! It seems to be an area that causes a lot of irritation to print buyers. Many of the comments in this section were repeated, so just a selection is shown here to avoid having too many pages saying the same thing.

The most common themes were about having the right information on invoices and the importance of being kept up to date with progress of a job, whether by human or electronic means. This area connects strongly with the communications section, and only comments related to electronic systems are included here.

Quotes that count

- Estimates – must be presented in the way we have asked for them (and ideally have some other ideas and suggestions as well)
- More structured working (i.e. quotes emailed in writing, rather than just over the phone)
- Speed is very important. Our biggest criticism is slowness on quotes (a degree of accuracy is assumed).
- Some printers have websites where you key in the specs and then it goes into their system – this does seem to help.
- If a printer needs certain information in a certain way, rather than the time wasted phoning back and forth, supplying a template would help –it could be electronic for emailing. The customer would fill it in to ensure they had all the information they needed and so speed things up.
- Those using MIS systems and ‘instant pricing’ systems for fast/instant prices have an advantage. Prices are needed much faster nowadays by the buyers. Often the first back may get the job. **BUT** sometimes the one who takes longer may also win out by taking the time to achieve a more competitive price. It depends on the sector and the type of project. **So think about what you are quoting on and what the expectations are of the customer – is it the type of project for which a fast price is more likely to be wanted, or a more considered price.**
- Getting quotes back in the requested time, or declining them promptly, is important.
- The most important is attention to detail. The quote should match the spec – I do not enjoy ‘spot the difference’ competitions on estimates that come in. Estimates should carry the full spec, not just say ‘as specification’ or whatever, so I can check everything is included. I do not want to have to phone and check ‘have you included the lamination?’ or whatever.

Being easy to pay

- What's important is that invoices must have the correct purchase order number and an **exact** match between price on the invoice and price on the purchase order. This is more of importance to the printer, to get paid on time, than to the buyer.
- Make sure the invoice says what was agreed. Chasing purchase order numbers or credit notes is a waste of time and money, delays payment and impacts on the printer's cash flow.
- Very, very important that invoicing and despatch/delivery details are prompt and are accurate – exactly as requested. Our systems use auto-matching, and if the delivery notes and invoices aren't exactly the right way and don't match it creates an enormous amount of extra work for us – it's a **huge** issue.
- Invoices need to be presented as requested, with relevant reference numbers or narrative – and **no** surprises. The price should be as expected. If details are missing or incorrect, it can't go through the system and payment is delayed.

(There were very many comments on the lines of those above – so it's very much something that a large number of buyers find a problem.)

- Prompt invoices are important, so that the job can be closed
- We use electronic purchase-to-pay systems, so it is important printers can fit in with that, and supply electronic invoices. It's important for printers to research a customer's technology and ensure they can adapt their systems to the customers' needs.

Keeping track of progress

What printers are doing that buyers find helpful:

- Schedule reporting and uploading/downloading into systems (the printer's own and the publishers)
- Automatic feeds of info – so the information is always there, efficiently
- Advanced technology/huge investment in the customer interface area of their business. Info on our account easily accessed and referred to. Efficient on-line ordering and reporting systems provided

What buyers said they would like:

- Being able to track jobs through our printer's MIS system directly, instead of having to ask about status, or wait for progress reports
- Being able to go into the internet and find where our job is – other manufacturing industries do it, have invested a lot of money in it.
- JDF-compliant MIS systems that will link with ours are interesting to us long-term.
- Regular campaign reports back from the printer on how things went, and budget reports
- On-line job-tracking ... constant visibility of what's scheduled on press at any time is very important to us because of the needs for reactive changes to content and the constant throughput of print

Completing the last details

- The most important elements for us are:
 - Labelling exactly as specified for delivery into the warehouse
 - Proofs of Delivery – we need to have access within hours, not the next day. So online systems or those with wireless technology have a big advantage.
- Timely, and good quality, file copies are key – and definitely not copies taken from the make-readies!
- Forgetting to send in the file copies is a cardinal sin, and it does still happen sometimes, despite constant reminders.
- Quick return of proofs of delivery
- As standard, without asking, to receive proofs of delivery and file copies

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- When files come in of the jobs, we need to have the purchase order quoted so we know what job it is, and to have the proof of delivery so we know it has been delivered and we can close the job down. This often doesn't happen and we have to chase around.

Some common problems highlighted by buyers

- Printers seem to have some kind of mental block about using a customer's job number – or perhaps a lack in internal communications and passing it down the line.
- Printers tend to focus on production and don't pay enough attention to administration.
- Not confirming receipt of elements: the pre-press guys would like confirmation that files have been received. I would like signed delivery notes when paper has been delivered in.
- Take better care with admin. File copies, delivery notes, invoicing are always late and have to be chased. This is a real let-down when all other processes, prices and product quality are good.
- The biggest problem area – inaccuracy with invoices and delivery notes. It costs us and the printers more man-hours than everything else. We have an electronic matching system – if the invoice matches the PO, they are paid automatically. If not: chaos. If there is not a proper delivery notification, the flag does not go onto the PO and a mismatch is created. Our people and the printers should be focussing on ink on paper, not chasing around trying to trace invoices
- Even in smaller companies, without electronic systems:** Invoicing – they do **not** give sufficient descriptions or job references or purchase order number – they just put something like 'brochure for so-and-so'. You might have done six for that client – so how are you supposed to tie the jobs up? It wastes a lot of time, matching invoices to jobs.
- One company uses a paper-based system for estimating, and the Sales Director has to sign off first, before anything can go into us. As he is often on the road, this holds everything up and they are usually the last with their quotes.
- They do not read the specs! That would make a **huge** difference. Then they wouldn't miss things off the quote, or get them wrong.
- We need to have estimates broken down into the fixed costs and the running costs. One of our printers **never** does this: each time we have to go back and ask for it – which is very annoying and time-wasting.

Some areas of difference

There were very definite differences in this area between sizes of company: the larger buyers were much more likely to have problems when invoices or other items of paperwork did not conform to requirements.

Communication

Many of the comments made by buyers about communication overlap with other categories as well, so this section summarises the points they made. They do bear repeating in the context solely of communication.

Points of contact

By far the majority of buyers who commented or were interviewed wanted to have a single point of contact for day to day. The reasons given are:

- Dealing with just one person ensures clear lines of responsibility. There is no risk of misunderstanding or thinking that someone else is looking after something;
- If only one person is receiving instructions, they can be sure that whatever they've been told is the latest version – particularly important on occasions where there are frequent changes;

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- When there is a single point of contact, they get to know and understand the customer's business much better, and are more likely to spot anything that may be a mistake

The preference is very definitely for the point of contact to be an inside person, who is always available and not out on the road seeing customers. Large customers are likely to expect someone dedicated to them, or in the case of very high work volumes, a team.

Exceptions:

Naturally there were some exceptions, where buyers liked to speak with 'the person doing the job' at each stage – but these were very few.

But many wanted support behind their main contact, such as:

- Having occasional discussions or meetings with their day-to-day contact's manager, for planning, reviews and as back up in case of emergency – ensuring that there is someone else in the company familiar with their needs
- Where it is a large company print purchaser, with a team of buyers, contact is likely to be on several levels, with the buyers having contact(s) at one level, the Heads of Department at the next and occasional contact at top level for strategic meetings.

Keeping the customer informed

Many buyers felt they were not kept as well informed as they would like – they had to phone the printer to check on progress of the work. They also felt they were often left in the dark about what the printer was doing generally – several commented that they only knew that someone they considered an important supplier had invested in new equipment when they read about it in the trade press! A few things that buyers said would help are:

- Confirmation that files or paper have arrived as expected
- A quick email or phone call just to let them know the job is on schedule and all is OK
- Progress updates if there are several stages to a job or project – again just a quick call or email to say 'we've done this and are ready to start that';
- Mini-status reports, particularly for the larger buyers with several projects in hand. Examples given were a Monday morning update by email giving schedules for the week, daily status reports for large magazine publishers and links into the printer's MIS system for on-line tracking
- Monthly or quarterly meetings with everyone in the buyer's department and relevant people at the printer to talk general about future plans, the buyer's and the printer's, industry developments that might be useful and anything else relevant to their work.

Facing up to problems

One area that buyers had very strong feelings about what being told when there was a problem. They wanted to know straight away, for various reasons:

- They might be able to help resolve it. For example, if it's a paper problem, a large buyer may have stocks elsewhere that can be used rather than the printer wasting time trying to buy some at short notice;
- There may be other projects or events linked into the work, that the buyer can delay if given enough notice;
- They can manage the expectations of their own customers.

Not being warned in advance of delays or problems was considered a serious crime. Even if the printer can manage to gain extra time on their own, by arranging a late delivery with a mailing house or warehouse for example, the buyers wanted to be told. That way they don't get put into a difficult situation when someone asks about it – which frequently happens.

Feedback and reviews

Many buyers commented on how useful they find having reviews and feedback, in both directions. Analysing a project and learning from anything that went wrong, in a 'no blame' atmosphere, helps prevent repeat problems. There may be issues where a buyer in the customer's company lacks knowledge and so gives insufficient briefs to the printer, or similarly with a customer service person. There may be personality clashes. Allowing for frank

and open communication means such issues can be addressed before a serious problem occurs: but they are difficult to raise unless opportunities are specifically created.

Other points

- Accessibility: ensure customers aren't made to feel they are the wrong side of a voicemail barricade. Return messages promptly – even if just to let them know you've received it and will be back with an answer later.
- Avoid having access through switchboards only, and shutting the switchboard down in the evening – have direct dial access.
- If someone's on holiday, away or has gone home, their voicemail message should **always** say so.
- Ensure internal communications work well so that everyone has all the information needed for their part of the job – right the way down the line to the delivery driver and the person who prepares the invoice. Also that it works the other way – so if anyone spots anything they think might not be right, it can be checked.

Some common problems

There were a few areas highlighted by a number of buyers either causing problems or simply aggravation:

- Too much contact: frequent phone calls 'just to keep in touch' or see how they've done on a quote or, worse still, salesmen dropping in 'because they were passing'. The majority of buyers just don't have time for this, so it just creates an extra pressure. Judging how much contact will obviously vary from buyer to buyer, so is part of learning about your customer.
- Unreturned phone calls – leaving the buyer not knowing whether or not their message has been received.

And finally:

- **Never, ever cover up or fob them off – if they find out, and they usually do, trust is destroyed forever.**

Deliveries

Delivery on time definitely appears to be a given – if a printer can't manage that they won't get the work. The comments about the importance of delivering on time have not been included here, as it only needs saying once. However, delays on the way are occasionally inevitable and how those are handled makes a big difference.

Keeping in touch

- Printers must give advance warning if there is going to be a problem with delivery – but they don't always. This can cause serious problems. They know this, but still don't always do it.
- Being able to track a van when a job is late is important, rather than having to rely on phoning the driver. We had one job that was needed for a very important launch ... that didn't arrive in time and so caused us serious problems. It was because of snow, and the printer not allowing enough time for the journey in the snow. But we were given no warning that it would be late.
- I would prefer to see more printers using their own vans rather than trusting 3rd party couriers. They have more control that way, and a better knowledge of where the van is rather than having to say 'oh, I'll just phone XYZ and check' or whatever.

Getting the paperwork right

- 🌍 [We need] labelling to be exactly as specified for delivery into the warehouse
- 🌍 We need to have access to proofs of delivery within hours, not the next day. So online systems or those with wireless technology have a big advantage.
- 🌍 Quick return of proofs of delivery is very important.

Keeping to the instructions

- 🌍 Take note of the instructions! We have a storage and fulfilment company where most of our work is delivered. Deliveries to them must be booked in – a phone call to book the delivery slot, euro pallets must be used - not other kind - and boxes must be labelled in a particular way.
- 🌍 Use reputable couriers if they don't have their own transport. In the past we have had problems with part-deliveries, where they are transferred at a hub and not all has been transferred, damaged deliveries – when through third party couriers. No matter how much time and care the printer has put into creating a perfect job, if it arrives wrongly, or damaged, or late – that's what gets remembered.
- 🌍 Deliveries – accuracy is key. Printers seem to have a problem of not being able to measure or to count as accurately as they would like. They tend to over- or under-produce. They should be able to meet the requirements of the actual order.
- 🌍 Attention to detail is important here as everywhere else – think the whole thing through – how long is it going to be on the lorry, what will be the effect on the things at the bottom of the load, and so forth.
- 🌍 ... ensuring that the way things are packed and/or palletted and the type of truck used for unloading are as instructions.

Nice people to do business with?

- 🌍 Printer X's drivers are a good example of their attention to detail – the drivers are always well dressed, on-time, polite –they don't even swear at traffic wardens – and very helpful. They will carry things up in the goods lift to where they are wanted instead of leaving them downstairs.
- 🌍 People who are well organised **all** the way down the line – right down to the van drivers.
- 🌍 Friendly couriers who don't complain about being asked to carry boxes up to our address.

Some common problems

- 🌍 Not understanding what we need; for example pre-notification to the warehouse to be assigned a delivery slot, and then sticking to it. Some printers just turn up, and then the delivery can't be accepted.
- 🌍 The main problems with deliveries seem to be when delivery is sub-contracted, to someone like the mainstream courier companies. The sub-contractor often causes problems through not having the correct delivery instructions – this could be a communication issue with the printer. So work goes to the wrong floor. Or they've had them try to deliver the work on pallets when it should have been in boxes.
- 🌍 Specifications for palletising are often not kept to, nor the correct paperwork to accompany the delivery or proper job identification.
- 🌍 Not reading the requirement of the recipient – for example, packing in 250s when they were asked for in 200s. For some places, such as the Post Office, if it's delivered wrongly packed it goes into quarantine and causes endless problems
- 🌍 It's a real shame if someone prints a lovely product and then it's badly packed and gets damaged.

Some differences in type of company

- 🌍 When work is to be delivered into warehouses or other places that receive lots of deliveries, requirements for booking time-slots, labelling and accompanying

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documentation are likely to be the most stringent. Not following them can prevent successful delivery.

- When delivering to anyone other than the customer, good proofs of delivery, promptly available, are likely to be more important.
- Small companies are more likely to come into contact with your driver – remember the driver is representing your company and you are likely to be judged by their behaviour.
- Larger companies are more likely to need specific paperwork for deliveries, with correct job numbers or other forms of identification.

Knowing your customer

The comments below relate why buyers feel it is important that a printer knows and understands their market, business or individual buyers. These are followed, in each case, by some of the methods they suggest for achieving this. In some cases it is the customers who are making the effort to help the printers get to know them better – but their ideas can easily be adapted or even suggested to your own customers.

Knowing their market

- Knowing our business will help the printer understand about changes to pagination and also put them in a better position to anticipate such changes.
- It helps if a printer understands our market to an extent – knowing when the peak periods are, understanding the development of the market –for example the increase in internet bookings and the effect it may have of lower brochure production.
- Knowing the challenges and working out how to help us address them – an example is a newspaper printer who offered distribution of our newspaper to get it to sale outlets quicker.

How to:

- Ways to get to know our market better – one company always reads our annual results and asks us about strategic issues – takes the time to keep up to date with any available information in the public domain.

Knowing their organisation

- Understanding the business of a client makes the biggest difference – so what makes a good printer is willingness to take the time to understand, to ask if they don't. Not asking can cause a lot of work if it then means they get things wrong.
- Understanding our business is important, as it helps the printer know what's important to us as a customer. What may appear something quite small could be extremely important – those half dozen file copies being sent somewhere could be going to a potential major new advertiser and very important for getting their advertising.
- Very important. Helps to build relationships – the supplier is very much an extension of our business. They are familiar enough with the work to pick up mistakes we make – which does happen. It is very valuable when a supplier is not afraid to say 'I don't think this is right' and we will always give full credit for it, even if it turned out to be OK.
- We have so many agendas to meet and our unique ways of working that understanding us is important.
- What's important is ... really getting to understand how the site operates and what they need. About really taking the time to sit down and understand the level of support that offers best benefit – what aspects of service are more important to that particular client.
- Look at your customers. Make sure that what you are offering is appropriate to their business needs. Have a clear vision of where you want to go and want to do, and understand that customer base – and then plan and structure accordingly.

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- It is important that the printer understands our processes, so they know who signs off what, how the approvals processes work – this avoids delays. There may be several different workflows, depending on the type of work – the printer has to be aware of this.
- Project management, anticipating customer needs & tailoring bespoke solutions to suit. Thinking beyond simply printing their publication - what happens before and after. Getting inside their company & truly knowing why they choose certain processes when putting together publications for print.

How to:

- To get to know us better, a good start is to read our web site, our report and accounts and any other literature available
- We expect a deep understanding of our business by our printers, and realise that it's up to us to help them achieve this. We offer training days to customer service staff – a minimum of one day in our office, to help them understand the production controller's role and the running of our organisation. If we are having problems with a customer service person, we will invite them back again for a day, which often resolves things – it fills gaps in understanding and also helps communication, giving them and the production controller the chance to talk.
- Even MDs of printers are expected to go through an induction day with us
- What can be really useful are short (one or two week) job swaps between production controllers and customer service staff.
- To get to know us – we publish information on our corporate responsibilities etc. that printers can read, have regular meetings and spend days on site with our suppliers. We have held some seminars on suppliers' sites, where people from our department are presenting to our senior management – this helps improve the suppliers' knowledge and understanding as well.
- Ask the customer to talk about their business. Talk to others in the same market to get a general picture. Talk upstream – if they are a publisher, talk to the advertising agencies for example – to find out what they want from publishers. Understand how to help publishers provide it.
- Getting to know the satellites around the core customer is useful but it does take time and resources
- Respond to feedback (and listen to it in the first place) – find out what truly adds value for them (and what doesn't).

Knowing the individual

- Different people may use the same terms to mean different things, and this helps prevent misunderstandings from that.
- A good buyer will know about what technology is available and what it can do for his business. Sadly there are an increasing number who are not buyers, they are just number crunchers, and they wouldn't know this. They would benefit from more customer awareness from a printer, who could then advise them on what would help their company. Again, it's the rep's role here to know their customer and the degree of pro-activity and education that is needed in this respect.
- It is the printer's responsibility to work out the level of knowledge a buyer has and to treat them accordingly – hand-holding where necessary. I will also guide printers about my buyers and how to treat them – for example, if a new buyer comes in who knows litho but may have limited experience on direct mail, so needs more support on that, or where there are cultural differences between countries.

How to:

- Continually talking – and listening! Regular dialogue – it all helps.
- Also just ask – 'can you take me through how a project is handled by you – from when you are first asked to look at it all the way through' so they can get to understand what is driving us. They are welcome to come and spend some time with us to learn about how we work and to get a feel for the place.

When this has helped:

- We don't know much about print here – we need someone who is supportive and helpful, and will explain things to us. Printer X are very good at this. Very helpful and very fast at turning work around. I say what we need to achieve, and Printer X will tell me how to do it. If I've got a design for one item, they will take bits of it and lay them out to make other things for us – they've even done really big display panels ... They did everything, and told me how thick they needed to be and everything. If I don't understand, they show me examples. ... it saves me a lot of time – nothing is too much trouble for them and they give lots of technical support. All their staff are very helpful.

When not knowing has created a problem

- Printers are not always aware of our position. They can get complacent and view something as just another job, when it's a real priority issue for us. For example a high profile launch with a highly placed person. It was merely treated as just another job, and not given the priority treatment it should have been as a very important job.

And a warning:

- Avoid paying too much attention to what individual companies say! When thinking about investments don't just listen to one and invest in plant or machinery to achieve a new shape or format perhaps – it may be a passing trend. Review the whole market.

Some differences:

These differences are general trends, but there were exceptions to them all – which underlines the importance of knowing your customer.

Product and service range:

Book and magazine publishers generally like a printer to have everything in house for regular work. The reasons for this are:

- reduced project management time,
- cost benefits on consolidating across titles.

They will outsource for 'specials', or may ask the printer to do so.

Larger direct mail buyers tend to buy all the various elements of a mailing separately, but will look for a one-stop shop on occasion if:

- stretched for project management,
- it's a small or time-critical project.

Smaller buyers, with fewer people to handle the work, tend to want one-stop shops, ideally who can do everything in house, but they will accept a printer outsourcing. The advantage to them is reduced project management time.

Distribution – several sectors would appreciate ways to reduce costs on this by consolidating deliveries or routes with other work the printer may be doing.

Point of sale: here a one-stop can provide for better colour consistency across a campaign. Bringing other elements in-house can be an advantage if it reduces time to market.

Compliance requirements:

Security: compliance with security procedures and audit trails was not just required for the obvious 'security print' market but also certain areas of Government and for the pharmaceutical industry, where it is important to ensure out of date information is not accidentally published. If you are handling or storing sensitive information, you may need the relevant ISO standard: ISO 17799 Information Security Management.

Environmental: The sectors where compliance to environmental standards was important were Public Sector, publishing (both books and magazines), and certain individual

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companies. These were most commonly large corporate companies and design agencies or print management companies working with them. Requirements included:

- certification to ISO 14001
- use of recycled paper
- use of FSC certified paper (and chain-of –custody for this is becoming of greater importance). This was not just for literature - the packaging market is also looking in this direction.
- Compliance with the DMA Producer Responsibility Agreement.

Environment was an area that many buyers felt would become much more important in the very near future.

Quality: surprisingly few buyers mentioned a requirement for the ISO 9001 quality standard, but it was anticipated that it is likely to become more important, especially to larger buyers.

Health & Safety: Specific requirements for compliance to health and safety standards was most commonly required by the large corporate organisations, including larger publishers and their satellites (agencies and so forth) and Public Sector.

Social and ethical standards: The requirement for these were again most commonly from large corporate companies and their satellites, and Public Sector. Companies with overseas supply chains also usually required compliance as standard for all their suppliers. Areas covered included:

- equal opportunities employment
- child labour rules
- working conditions
- human rights
- full compliance with SA8000

This was another area buyers considered likely to become more important in the future.

Colour management: creating standardised printing conditions, use of ICC profiles and compliance with ISO 12647 were more commonly regarded as important by companies with a need for printed materials to match across a wide range, or across several countries. But not exclusively so – many buyers are looking in this direction as the route to better quality control, consistency and predictability in their printed work, and thus better value for money.

Data protection: Requirements for systems for data protection are mainly a need of direct mail buyers, but there were others on an individual basis, because of the nature of their business. Data protection and confidentiality agreements will be necessary in certain circumstances. The Direct Marketing Association publish the DM Code of Practice that reflects the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998 as well as other legislation and ethical considerations.

Other specialist compliance requirements: Food packaging printers need to know about and be compliant with legislation relevant to the industry. Requirements include:

- British Retail Consortium Institute of Packaging hygiene accreditation,
- due diligence,
- traceability of materials,
- factory standards,
- hygiene standards.

Technical support

Some buyers expected compliance with standards they laid down on colour management, as mentioned in the previous section. Others had less formal requirements, but still see it as a growing need: their comments are reflected here along with those on other aspects of technical support.

Colour management

- We would like to see the whole proofing area developed, as we are currently still reliant on hard proofs. We want fully colour-managed workflows, calibrated remote output devices in our office – this would save an awful lot of money.
- Colour management is something we would expect to be a joint effort – the printer to help out.
- We expect the printer to be able to accept any files we send over, and to be able to press pass brochures for us. Since we have stopped sending anyone to press pass them, we have more of a requirement for colour management from our printers to keep things consistent. The [European head office] company has worked very closely with their printers developing ICC profiles – so this is likely to come in UK.

Keeping buyers informed

- We expect to be kept informed of new things the printer can do – tell us ‘we have a new such-and-such piece of kit, that can do this for you’.
- Offering additional technical advice - e.g. new stocks, print techniques, paper samples, samples of previous design jobs. This would be useful on an ongoing basis as well as more specifically for a particular job.

File handling/data handling

- We expect our printers to check files within 12 hours of receipt and to notify us of any problems.
- They often don't read the laser brief – they find it easier to pick up the phone, which wastes our time. Reading the laser brief should be their first stop.
- We have set up our own site and printers have done a lot to help and support us in this and in online data transfer and proofing. This benefits everyone. We've had good workshops on it at the printers.
- Files may have been sent direct from an agency. If there is a problem, we expect the printer not just to phone and say there is a problem, but what the problem is.

Training/site visits

- Site visits we've had to Printer X have been very useful, enabling us to see the size of the operation, and to meet people and put names to faces.
- We've done joint seminars, with the printers, educating our internal people. One printer even supplied a CD with a 'virtual tour' of a print factory that they were able to show in their conference room to a group who they couldn't get out to a printer.
- We look for suppliers to help train buyers about the technology – Printer X, for example, do regular customer training days which are excellent. They do a lot there. They also show a passion and enthusiasm for what they do and enjoy new challenges.

Troubleshooting

- We expect technical reports on paper – if it's a trial, a report on how it runs. If there's a paper problem [they supply the paper] a technical report on the printability

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- If things don't work as expected, or if there are problems, we expect a technical report on that as well. Same for binding problems. Reports should be quality, in-depth analyses, not with lots of jargon, and if possible turned around in a week. They should enable us to understand what caused the problem and thus allow prevention of future, similar problems. It may be needed to for a client of ours, or an internal person.