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Finishing Options Can Help Create Eye-Catching Printed Materials

Marketing specialists are not short on tips for boosting direct mail response rates. A quick online search turns up ideas such as effective copywriting, targeted or one-to-one marketing, data mining, list management, and so on. While these are valuable ideas, marketers tend to give short shrift to the physical aspects of the printed piece itself. One especially underutilized technique is the creative use of postpress or finishing options to add decorative enhancements to a printed piece. Think of finishing as the icing on the cake.

There are many finishing options available, depending on the desired decorative effect and the budget.

At the most basic level are *varnishes* or *coatings*, which printers apply either during or after printing for protection or to add gloss and sheen and make a printed piece “pop.” Printers apply a *spot varnish* or coating to certain portions of a printed piece, such as a particular image or bit of text, accenting those areas and providing contrast with other areas. *Aqueous coatings* are water-based and thus more environmentally friendly than other varnishes and coatings, but they can be more expensive. *UV coatings* are cured by ultraviolet light and can add greater levels of sheen and protection than varnishes or aqueous coatings. Varnishes and coatings are also available in a range of gloss levels.

More elaborate finishing techniques can make your printed piece even more eye-catching. *Embossing* uses dies to create raised (or “relief”) areas that make images or text literally pop, while *debossing* creates depressed portions of a printed piece. Foils and specialty inks can be added to embossed regions to produce even more special effects. Speaking of which, *foil stamping* applies metallic foils like gold or silver to the substrate, also going a long way toward highlighting text and images.

Regardless of the finishing technique used, it should be appropriate to—and work in concert with—the content or message of the piece itself so that the style and substance are not working at cross-purposes.

Just as you would rarely make a cake without considering icing and other decorative touches, so too you shouldn’t think of creating a printed product without considering finishing processes. Your printer can help you decide on the best options for your specific job.

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