

Printing: Litho vs. Digital

What is litho printing?

In short, it is the most professional, traditional form of printing which will give you the highest quality output for your job. It uses wet ink and printing plates (one plate per colour). Inks are transferred to aluminium plates to make an impression on the chosen surface. There is a cost associated with litho print, having said that it is cost effective for high volume printing.

What is digital printing?

Digital printing removes many of the mechanical steps used in conventional printing, including making plates. It uses toners much like your office printer would use, but the digital print presses used by professional printers are much more sophisticated than your office printer! It is cost effective on small print runs, however, the quality isn't quite as good as litho print. The lead time to print digitally is far reduced in comparison to litho printing.

PROS AND CONS

Litho Pros:

- Better print quality
- Much better for large areas of solid print
- Unit cost decreases as the quantity increases
- Copes with long print runs with no loss of quality
- Printing isn't restricted to 4 colour process (CMYK), you can print with pantone colours including metallic inks
- Have greater options for special treatments, such as spot UV, foil blocking etc
- Can print on a larger variety of stocks & heavier paper weights

Digital Pros:

- Quick set up time resulting in a fast turn around time
- Cheaper option for low print volumes
- Option to print with multiple versions with variable data

Litho Cons:

- Expensive set up costs on short print runs
- Longer turn around time (plates need to be made, the ink needs time to dry etc)
- No variable data option

Digital Cons:

- Expensive on longer print runs
- Reduced print quality & inconsistent quality
- Less colour control
- Fewer finish options, such as spot UV, foil blocking etc
- Can be difficult to match pantone colours (generally presses only use 4 colour set up – CMYK)
- Limited choices of stock to print on

Making your decision

In order to make the best decision how to print your material, you need to weigh up all the factors listed above. If quality is key, want to print on a specific stock, or you want to add a special treatment to your job, such as spot UV on certain elements of your job or use pantone colours, litho is the way to go. If you are looking for a short print run of something more generic, with good quality or you have time constraints, then digital would be a great option for you.

If you are unsure about which way to go, do get in touch and I can help you make your decision & also advise on paper stocks.