

Designing with transparent effects

Transparency is a “hot” design trend. Objects, type, or photographs that are partially transparent, revealing other page elements underneath, is a great way to add dimension and depth to a printed page.

Recent versions of Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign, FreeHand, and CorelDraw all have the ability to make objects or photos transparent. Keep the following points in mind as you use transparent effects.

- Creating collages with semi-transparent overlapping photos is easy in photo-editing applications like Photoshop. The resulting bitmap file can generally be output without problems. However, using transparent effects in “vector” based tools like InDesign, Illustrator, FreeHand, and CorelDraw results in

much more complex files that can be difficult to output.

- In most cases, transparent objects must be “flattened” before they are printed. This is handled automatically by your software, and normally works remarkably well. But this complex operation can result in files that will not print, files that print very slowly, jagged edges, inconsistent line weights, and other problems. If you use lots of transparent effects, be sure to work with a printer that is willing to help you troubleshoot difficult files.

- When possible, avoid using spot color objects with transparent effects. In many programs, spot colors are automatically converted to process colors when objects are made transparent.
- Proofing is always important, but even more so with files containing transparent effects. Insist on a contract proof before proceeding with any print job.

Keith Gilbert provides training & support services to help graphic designers and communicators convey print and Web messages effectively. Gilbert Consulting, 651 633-7148 www.gilbertconsulting.com