



csw inc

packaging made better

How do you measure success?

Optimized ink coverage can reduce package printing costs and maximize shelf impact – meeting the goals of both procurement and brand teams.

As a brand owner, your objective is to enhance packaging graphics in order to attract new and repeat purchases. As a procurement manager, your aim is to maximize profits from those sales by controlling costs. Understanding cost drivers in package printing can help both parties make better decisions.

All About Ink

Ink is not the largest cost driver in packaging—that honor typically belongs to the paper or plastic used to carry the graphics and form the container. But ink has an enormous influence on packaging appearance, and it usually accounts for 2% to 5% of the cost of printing. For procurement, it's important to understand how optimizing ink coverage impacts the bottom line. At the same time, brand needs to understand how reducing ink coverage impacts shelf appeal.

The cost of ink is estimated by calculating the amount of ink used, per ink color, across the entire package. This

ink coverage amount is expressed as a percentage of the total area of the package. Printers then convert this data into pounds of ink required for the print job.

Some inks are more expensive than others. The differences can be attributed to the varying cost of pigments used in certain inks, or to the thickness of ink laydown needed to achieve perceived opacity—just a few microns can make all the difference. For instance, spot inks such as Pantone or special match colors cost more than process (CMYK) inks. White ink is quite expensive because the pigment used sourced from only a few manufacturers. In addition, white ink on clear or metallized film often requires more than one pass to appear opaque, which boosts ink usage. Metallics and fluorescents employ expensive, concentrated pigments. In short, it's important for the printer to receive an accurate ink coverage report for each individual color so their clients receive realistic pricing.

Maximizing Impact and Profits

Procurement and brand teams can also benefit from understanding these cost drivers, since what can be measured can be managed. We've observed that working strategically with a prepress supplier can help brands reduce ink consumption by 10–20%.

One tactic to reduce total ink coverage is minimizing the overall graphic coverage on the package. This is not ideal, however, as it can compromise

brand messaging. A better approach is to adjust the graphics from within the separation itself. This often has the added benefit of producing cleaner separations that are more easily reproduced on press.

Using an alternate color palette, such as extended gamut (EG), can reduce ink costs by removing the need for expensive spot color inks. EG printing opens up a broader spectrum of reproducible colors, while maintaining accuracy for 80–90% of the Pantone library.

Another prepress option for reducing ink coverage lies in the use of plate technology that improves ink transfer. This may mean employing a different plate material and/or screening technique to reduce dot gain and improve perceived opacity - both of which also improve graphic impact of the package.

Making Informed Decisions

CSW offers not only accurate ink analysis and reporting, but also works with both brand and procurement teams on strategies to reduce ink consumption and maximize brand presence on shelf. Once we determine a course of action, our services result in more informed pricing conversations with print suppliers and improved brand packaging.

To learn more about strategies to reduce ink consumption with Ink-Spect™ ink coverage analysis, Xcolor™ EG separations, HD-Gen2™ plates, and WhiteFX™ ink transfer technology, contact us at info@cswgraphics.com.

