

The Difference between Spot Colour and Process Colour

For most color print projects you will use either spot colors or process colors. Budget plays a large role in the decision as well as the printing method and the specific design elements used in the layout. In general a couple of spot colors cost less than 4-color or process color printing but when you use full-color photos, process colors may be your only option. There are also some situations that call for both process colors and spot colors in the same print job.

When to Use Spot Colors (such as PMS Colors)

- Publication has no full-color photographs and uses only one or two colors (including one spot color plus black).
- Publication needs a color that cannot be accurately reproduced with CMYK inks, such as precise color matching of a corporate or logo color.
- Printing a specific color over multiple pages that requires page to page color consistency.
- Printing over a large area, such as a poster (spot color inks may provide more even coverage).
- Need more vibrant colors than what CMYK inks produce.
- Project requires special effects such as metallic or fluorescent spot inks.

When to Use Process Colors (CMYK)

- Publication uses full-color photographs.
- Publication includes multi-color graphics that would require many colors of ink to reproduce with spot colors.
- Needs more than two spot colors (check with your printer; process color printing can be less expensive than using three, four, or more spot colors).

When to Use Process and Spot Colors Together

- Publication with full-color photographs must also incorporate specific spot colors that cannot be created with CMYK inks (such as logo color).

- Need to enhance or increase intensity of (bump up) a specific process color by adding a spot color ink to it (a 5th plate for the spot color used in this manner is called a bump plate).
- Portions of a full color publication is coated with a clear varnish (the varnish is specified as a spot color).