

PRINT TECHNIQUES

Embossing: See and Feel the Third Dimension.

Embossing—and its sister, debossing—adds physical depth and dimension to the printed page for attention-getting impact.

Embossing has been used almost as long as there's been paper. In ancient Rome, a seal stamped by emperors or other dignitaries added legitimacy to official documents. Today the enhanced impact embossing brings to printed communications is equally legitimate.

Embossing literally adds a whole new dimension. The technique starts with a metal relief die, a matching counter die and an embossing press. The operator places paper between the die and the counter, the press applies heat and pressure, and the type or image is pressed into the stock.

When the image is raised above the surface of the paper, it's called embossing. When it's indented below the surface, it's called debossing. When the two are combined on one die, it's called amazing.

Blind embossing (or debossing) means that the embossed or debossed image appears by itself, as opposed to being registered (precisely positioned) under a printed image or area of ink or foil stamp.

AVAILABLE IN A VARIETY OF SHAPES AND DEPTHS

Embossing offers lots of room for creativity. The raised or recessed image may have flat, beveled, V-shaped or rounded sides. The latter, with rounded edges and gradated levels, is called a sculptured emboss.

The effect can be anything from “nice,” to “WOW.” Depending on the die and paper used, the overall depth of emboss can range from a subtle .004 inch to a dramatic .025 inch.

A DIE FOR EVERY NEED

Embossing dies are made from a variety of materials using techniques that include hand tooling, photo etching and computer-guided sculpting/cutting.

Brass dies, which typically are the most costly, are best for higher-volume or highest-quality projects because engravers can hand finish the material into complex designs and the same die can hold up during long runs—up to one million impressions—with little or no wear.

Copper dies are less expensive but also less durable, used for projects requiring 100,000 impressions or less. Copper dies are typically photo etched and are best for simpler, single-level designs. Softest and least expensive are magnesium dies, which can be either tooled or etched but are effective only for shorter runs, from 1,000 to a maximum 5,000 quantity.

Embossing creates an effect that literally stands out on the page, throwing a shadow and inviting the viewer's touch.

EXEMPLIFYING PRINT'S IMPACT AND HUMANITY

The power of this time-tested technique boils down to this: Embossing is one of the best examples of the unique impact and humanity of paper-based communication—impact and humanity that electronic media simply cannot match. It's literally three dimensional, throwing shadows and inviting touch, and it's limited only by the designer's creativity and the engraver's craft.



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