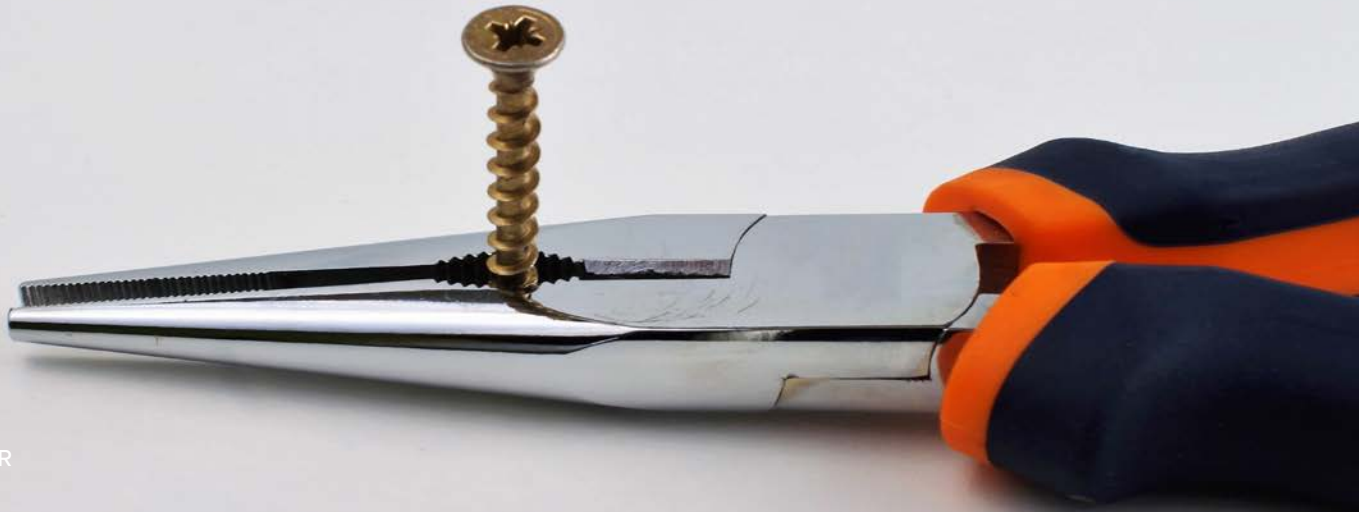


# File Formats: The Right Tool for the Right Job



A WHITEPAPER

As a graphic design professional, I want to use only the best tools. Change the words “graphic design” to any other trade or craft and add the word “professional” after it, and ask the same question. You will always get the same answer. Why? Because they are **designed** for the task. That word keeps popping up, doesn’t it?

Clients often ask—usually for the sake of **editability** (see my previous previous whitepaper on Editable PDFs)—for things that are just at odds with my commitment to quality. Sometimes, you just have to tell the client no, and then convince, or re-convince them that they are paying you for your **expertise**.

## **MICROSOFT MAKES OFFICE APPS, NOT DESIGN APPS**

**Client:** Can we have that as a Microsoft Word file?

**Designer:** No.

**Client:** Why not?

**Designer:** OK, here’s why...

Microsoft Word is a **typewriter**. That’s what it is designed to be. Granted, it has lots of powerful “editor”-like features, but its main reason for existence is to get words down on paper (or in a file). Microsoft has given it limited and inadequate design features. Couple that with most clients’ complete lack of design understanding, and you get 90% of what circulates within businesses as memos, fliers, or God-forbid, customer-facing marketing materials.

Think of Word like an original manuscript for a book, a play, or a movie. The finished, polished products will always look so much better, but they all started with the words.

If your document is to live in infamy as a professionally printed piece of collateral, Word is definitely the wrong tool. The print world’s standards are just too high, and their requirements rigid. Here is a list of things that Word cannot do, but print requires:

**Bleed:** Printing off the edge of a page. It can be faked with a page size of 8.75x11.25" (for US Letter), but you will still have issues, like colors, images, and fonts. Keep reading...

## File Formats: The Right Tool for the Right Job

**Colors:** Word cannot handle spot, or Pantone, colors for proper separations on a 4-color (or more) printing press. Word lives in an **RGB** world, whereas print lives in a **CMYK** (Cyan, Magenta, Yellow, Black) world. They can be converted by the printer, but they will never be true or optimal. In fact, if you look at many professional printers' websites, they specifically say "We do not accept Microsoft Word files."

**Images:** Yes, you can insert images into Word files. But Word does things to the guts of those files, often **degrading** the image quality. Even worse, the typical Word user often uses images "from the internet," which are almost always not good enough or don't have enough resolution for real print quality.

**Fonts:** Most people think the only fonts in the world are those that come with Microsoft Word. You know, Arial, Times New Roman, Calibri, Lucida, Verdana, and Wingdings. They also don't know that these are mostly knockoffs of more famous, better-quality fonts from respected foundries with hundreds of years of experience and expertise. The main issue with these fonts, besides the fact that they are ugly, is that their kerning is bad. Kerning is the space between letters. Look at the character pairs (two characters next to each other) AV, AW, AY, 10, 11 in particular. There are many others, but these best illustrate the point to the untrained eye.

**Inline:** Almost everything in a Word file is inline. That means that the file runs from the beginning of the first page to the end of the last page, including images. Sure, you can put something in an anchored frame, but that just adds complexity to the file. You had better hope you don't need to make changes down the road that will affect the placement of that anchored frame—it might be painful. And sectioning in a Word file is like a minefield.

### CAN WE HAVE THAT AS A POWERPOINT FILE?

Ahhh, PowerPoint... **the scourge of the graphic design community**, as I like to call it. I have a PPT surcharge when a client sends me a PPT file. It is, hands down, the worst "design" app ever made. PowerPoint was made to compete with/replace Harvard Graphics, which replaced overhead projectors from back in the Dark Ages.

PowerPoint uses the **Colorforms** method of layout construction. I am dating myself here—Colorforms was a popular children's toy when I was a youngster. By "Colorforms method," I mean you can basically put anything anywhere on the canvas, and nothing is connected to anything else. I also use that phrase to describe when "designers" use way too many text frames in InDesign that aren't connected to each other. It's basically "anything goes" design.



*The original Colorforms.*

PowerPoint also has an annoying feature—Autofit—that is generally turned on by default. Most users don't even know it is there. If you add more text than can fit in a text placeholder, PowerPoint resizes your text to a smaller font size so that all of it fits. A designer should be in total control of his design and layout. The application shouldn't be fighting against you. Copying/pasting to Adobe apps **never** works as advertised; in fact, it rarely works. PowerPoint also has all of the same shortcomings of Word.

Adobe InDesign can do anything PowerPoint can do, only better, faster, smaller, and, of course, with total design control. The only issue for clients is they lose the all-important **editability**. However, that's a hard sell to clients, especially new, uneducated ones.

## File Formats: The Right Tool for the Right Job

### WE'LL SEND YOU OUR MICROSOFT PUBLISHER FILE

Thanks, but please don't! 🙅 First, there is no Microsoft Publisher on the Mac. End of story.

Online conversion tools are only good to a point. The best approach is to ask the client for the hi-res images if they exist, a hi-res PDF of the Publisher file, and the PUB file. First, I will try to extract the assets of the Publisher file using a tool called File Juicer. If that doesn't work, I extract the assets from the PDF. In either case, the file has to be completely recreated in InDesign from scratch.

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF GRAPHIC DESIGN

Back when I started my career as a typesetter for A&P Supermarkets in the 1980s, the advertising department had trained professionals in all disciplines. There was an art director who conceived layouts. There were type "specers" who specified all aspects of typography including font, size, leading, measure (column width) tracking (letter spacing), etc. Next, typesetters executed the specifications and output galleys of type on phototypesetting paper, which had to be developed like a black and white photo in a darkroom or an automated processor. Once dry, the galleys would go to the paste-up artists, who pasted them to boards using glue or wax to make mechanicals. Illustrators drew anything that didn't come out of the Dynamic Graphics Clipper books. Yes, Virginia, clip art used to come in giant books as a mail subscription. Once the mechanicals were checked by a proofreader they were sent to the darkroom and photographed on a giant process camera, capable of jobs measuring 1 inch square to 30 inches square or larger. **Each person had his or her own job and we all worked as a team.**



*Dynamic Graphics Clipper books from the 1980s.*

In earlier times these mechanicals would have been photographed on litho (high contrast) film and developed by hand to make negatives. These negatives would be contact printed to make plates—positive images on flexible aluminum sheets, which were affixed to a printing press roller where the positive areas would pick up ink and deposit it on the paper that was fed through the press. As typesetting technology progressed, full-size positive proofs (in some cases) were images on photo-mechanical transfer paper. These would be distributed to printers that were not local for them to make their own plates. How did they get to the printer? Via couriers—someone drove them there (Philadelphia, Connecticut, Baltimore, Detroit from New Jersey) or drove them to the airport. It was cheaper than FedEx. Today, the plates are imaged directly from digital files... no more film. And files can be electronically sent to distant printers instantly.

All in all, there were easily more than 30 people in the shop at one time. Now, multiply all these people by three shifts. Yes, our shop ran from 7 AM to midnight, and often longer. My first position was on the night shift, 4 PM to midnight, with frequent overtime. We often greeted the morning shift on our way out! **And all for less than you would get paid to mess up an order at a national burger chain today.**

Fast forward to today; all these jobs can be (and often are) handled by one person—the modern-day graphic design professional.

## File Formats: The Right Tool for the Right Job

### ADOBE MISCONCEPTIONS

Adobe Creative Cloud is the de facto industry standard for graphic design software. Photoshop, Illustrator, and InDesign have a proven track record of doing everything right, consistently. But there will always be people who will use these tools the wrong way or for the wrong purposes.

**We need 24-page brochure as a layered Photoshop file.**

**We need the original Adobe Illustrator file for our 80-page catalog.**

Yes, I have heard both of these. Both times I explained why this is the absolute wrong way to go. Why? They're the wrong tools. Sure, they can do the job, but it will take magnitudes of order longer, the files will not be easy to edit (client changes), and your files will be humongous. And, neither app can do tables. Game over.

**Photoshop** is an image-editing application, not a layout application. It is made for editing photographs. Period. Yes, it has other capabilities, but for print designers, that's all you need to know. You cannot have more than one page in a Photoshop file. And everything has to be on its own layer. Talk about convoluted... that's what happens when you use the wrong tool.

**Illustrator** is a vector-drawing application made for drawing logos, diagrams, and other line/clip art. Originally, an Illustrator file consisted of only one page; today, it can have many. A multi-page Illustrator file can be useful—for example, by having all flavors of a logo (4-color, Pantone, black, white) in one file—but it opens the door for amateurs to create actual pages. The typographical tools in Illustrator are inferior to InDesign, so that's a deal breaker for me.

**InDesign** is a layout application. This is where you bring all the stuff from Photoshop, Illustrator, and Word together and put it on a page. InDesign is intuitive, more so than Photoshop or Illustrator. The typographic tools are vastly superior. InDesign is also made for multi-page documents—it is almost like Word on steroids. And your files will be easy to edit (except for page moves, which always suck), and the resulting PDFs will have a very manageable size. And tables... just perfect.

### TIME=MONEY (NOT DONUTS OR CHICKEN)



*Coffee + Donuts = Chicken Squared, Los Angeles, CA, photograph by Richard M. Coda ©2018. Also photographed in black & white. Photographed on 4x5" film. B&W printed in a traditional darkroom. Prints available up to 40x50". Visit [www.richardcoda.com/work.html](http://www.richardcoda.com/work.html) for more information.*

The truth is, bad design costs just as much as good design. If you use Photoshop or Illustrator for a job that InDesign is ideal for, you will waste both your time and your client's money.

I imagine that creating a 24-page brochure in Photoshop would require 48 to 60 hours just to get a first proof—and that's for a Photoshop pro. The 80-page catalog in Illustrator might take 80 hours for a pro, more for an amateur. Tables in either application blow those hours out the door. Using InDesign, a pro could bang the brochure out in 6 hours and the catalog in about 20 hours. And that's just for the first proof. Edits in InDesign are easier. Try moving content from one "page" to another in Photoshop, and you'll see what I mean. Making extensive client changes to the Photoshop file might require even more time than was needed to create the initial file. Illustrator isn't as bad as Photoshop, but it would still take a large investment in time. If you work hourly (versus project fee based) and your client doesn't care about the bottom line, you can make a good living, but you'll have no time to enjoy the bounty. I'd much rather work at lightning speed, get a fair rate, and have time to enjoy life, family, and hobbies.

## File Formats: The Right Tool for the Right Job

### CONCLUSION

You wouldn't take your expensive automobile to a cut-rate mechanic who uses cheap tools and bass-ackwards techniques. Why skimp on graphic design? Making a good first impression and not paying for inferior service providers makes your business more successful.

### ABOUT RICHARD CODA DESIGN

I have always been interested in design. As a child I was always drawing something. Growing up with a father who was a professional printer I used to love going to "help my dad" at the shop on Saturdays. I became interested in how the process worked... concept... setting type... layout... camera-ready... the printing press.

After college my first job was as a Quadex 5000 typesetter for The Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Co. in Paterson, NJ (better known as A&P Supermarkets). Here I built on the knowledge and skills that my father had instilled on me as a youngster. Years, and jobs, later, I entered the digital age. Where once before, and not that long ago, there was a whole team of highly talented specialists working together in an agency or department, there was now one person doing the jobs of all those people. Graphic designers had to learn new skills and forget old ones. The pace increased exponentially to the point where what used to take weeks to do could now be accomplished in just a few hours.

Always wanting to be my own boss I started my own design firm, PC Type, in the late 1980s. Moonlighting at first, I was soon able to go full-time in 1995. I provide design and production services for all types of printed projects, as well as support for digital projects. My clients range from small businesses to global leaders in their fields, many of them for over a decade. In 2017, we became Richard Coda Design, LLC.

Call us at **480.751.8684**, or email us at [rich@richardcodadesign.com](mailto:rich@richardcodadesign.com) to learn more. Download my lookbook at <https://tinyurl.com/y3xsgkz4>

### ABOUT RICHARD CODA PHOTOGRAPHY

I have been photographing since I was a teenager. In college I fell in love with images made with large format cameras. Starting with a 4x5" view camera, I soon moved up to an 8x10" camera and, most recently, have begun working with an 11x14" camera.

While I photographed landscapes early in my career, recently my work has focused on that which has been overlooked, forgotten, or looked at, but not seen. I find compositions where others see the ordinary, or nothing at all. While concentrating on black and white for most of my career, I have found a new love for color, using color as the subject, while still retaining my classical aesthetic for form, line and tone.

After moving to Scottsdale, AZ in 2005, I rededicated myself to photography. I began taking classes with Rod Klukas (Oliver Gagliani's former assistant) and Randy Efros (Brett Weston's former assistant). I consider myself extremely fortunate to live in such a beautiful area and to have such talented mentors.

My work has been widely exhibited and well received. It is currently held in both public and private collections.

Visit [www.richardcoda.com/work.html](http://www.richardcoda.com/work.html) to see more.

