

## Adding the Finishing Touches: Varnishes and Coatings

Like a beautifully wrapped present, offset printed pieces look more elegant and complete when coated. Varnishes and other coatings are one of the best (and simplest) ways to make your offset piece look professional. Like all techniques, coating for look must be used tastefully (you might not want to coat a flyer for a yard sale, for instance). But when added to the appropriate piece, coatings will make your designs stand out.

Coatings come in several varieties: varnishes, aqueous and ultraviolet. Coatings can have different finishes, such as gloss, dull or matte, and they can be applied to the whole page (flood) or to a particular area on the page (spot). Coatings improve the look and the durability of the page. You will need to take into account all four attributes of a coating (type, finish, spot or flood and goal) when you order it.

### Types of Coatings: Varnishes, Aqueous and Ultraviolet

The three basic kinds of coatings differ in price, drying time and environmental impact. The least expensive, varnish, is also the least environmentally friendly because it is petroleum-based and gives off volatile organic compounds (VOCs). Standard printing-press ink stations can apply varnishes in an

“inline” finishing process. When applied to coated papers, varnishes affect the sheen or look of the page. Because they are applied on press, it is relatively easy to create a spot varnish that only covers a particular image or area on the page.

Aqueous coatings are water-based and can also be applied on press. They are usually applied across the whole page as a flood coating. Because they are water-based, aqueous coatings can curl the edges of thin papers, so ask us before specifying an aqueous coating on a lightweight paper stock.

Ultraviolet, or UV, coatings are more expensive than varnishes, but they dry very fast and create less environmental harm. They dry and harden under ultraviolet light and provide the glossiest look of all coatings. Consider them for high-end marketing materials, such as brochures and annual reports.

### Preparing Flood and Spot Varnishes

Depending on the kind of coating you wish to use, you can do some of the prepress work up front yourself. For flood coatings, you need do nothing more than specify them — we will take care of the rest. For spot varnishes, it is okay if you want to prepare the spot areas yourself, but please contact our prepress department first for specific instructions. The basic technique is to

create a copy of your document and strip it of all page items except the images and text you want varnished. The varnish areas must be solid and in the same exact position on the page as the items you want varnished.

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### Finish Considerations

Flood coatings are often applied for the dual purpose of protecting the page and making it look better. Spot varnishes are usually used to draw the reader’s eye, not as protection. Gloss coatings on gloss paper will make high-impact visuals jump off the page, while matte finishes on coated stock both protect and give a high-quality “professional” look.

### The Ultimate Wrapping Paper

If you want your offset printed piece to stand up to frequent use, you will want to protect it with the ultimate wrapping paper — a spot or flood coating. If you have any questions about coatings, please call us and ask. 