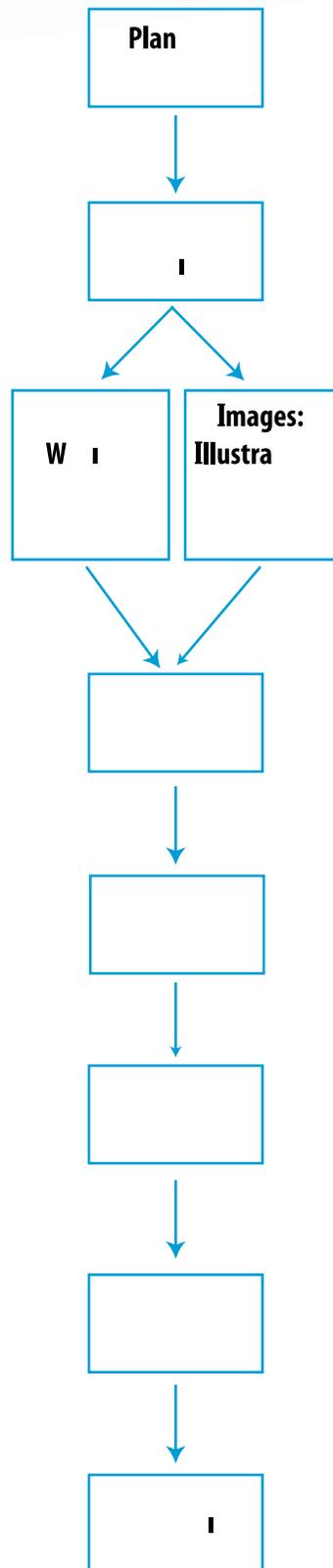


folding, size restrictions, the weight of the paper to use, proper positioning, postal cost, and exact wording of postal information on the mailer you're designing. Is it going first class or bulk mail? Will your piece need to be designed to fit into an envelope?

9 *What is your schedule?* Determine a realistic timetable for all phases of your project: planning, conceptualization, writing, editing, designing, proofreading, printing, binding, labeling, distribution.

10 *What is the cost for each step in the process in your budget?* Create a budget, then take time to shop around for the best prices within your budget.

By answering these questions, you'll be better prepared for the following five steps in the production process – the natural workflow for your project.



Step 1 Organize, Plan, Budget

First, set the budget and deadline for your project. See question #8 for a list of all processes to take into consideration.

To determine various production deadlines, start with the date you want customers to receive your piece, and work backwards. Set deadlines for completing each of these processes.

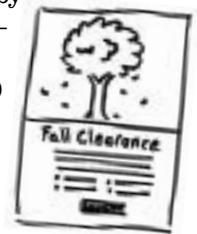
Outline a “design brief” that clarifies your concepts, goals, and budget for the project. This will help you (or your designer) tailor the design, typography, graphics, and color to your targeted audience. Thinking through these elements early will also help you stay within your budget.

Step 2 Brainstorm Your Concept and Write Content

Draw some black-and-white “thumbnail” sketches by hand (these are small – about 2" x 2" drawings – see example at right) of your ideas on paper.

Prepare your text in a word processing program, or hire a copywriter or editor to compose text and headlines to fit the space you need. It's best to collaborate closely with the writer at this “brainstorming” stage, to develop a theme and determine the right amount of text and graphics needed. If you write the copy yourself, I highly recommend hiring an editor to perfect the language and ensure that it's easy to understand.

Use professional drawing programs such as Corel Draw, Adobe Illustrator, or Macromedia Freehand to do your graphics. Then, use photo-editing software such as Adobe Elements or Adobe Photoshop to touch up and crop your scans and photos. Determine which file formats and resolution your graphics and scans should be to produce this project. Don't hesitate to consult with a designer or printer to get this right!



Step 3 Design and Page Layout

Once you select a general direction for your project, use a professional page layout program such as Adobe InDesign or Quark Xpress to design your color comps. This is a layout that folds the text and graphics into one document.



Once you sign off on the color proof, you may want to do a press check. This takes place at your printer's facility while your project runs on the press.

You'll be able to examine one of the printed sheets to verify that the colors and other details are correct...

I recommend using non-printing “grids or guide lines” in your software program to help with the positioning and alignment of text and graphics. Then print your comps on a desktop printer.

If you have a multiple-page project such as a newsletter, you should create tags or style sheets for reoccurring type treatments. This will help you automatically format your text, subheads, and headlines consistently. Using style sheets saves a lot of time throughout the production process. You can have a professional designer set them up for you.

Step 4 Editing and Proofing

Proofread, proofread, proofread! Hire a proofreader to make sure that all written mistakes on the piece get caught and fixed. Be sure to dial all the phone and fax numbers printed on your layout to make sure they're correct, and do the same for all the websites, too.

Step 5 Pre-Press, Approvals, and Printing

Perform a pre-flight checklist and convert your file to the proper PDF format to make sure that all graphics and fonts are included in the file sent to the printer. Beware: skipping this step can lead to costly delays and printing errors when the job is at the shop. Some print shops require a completed “file prep form” to ensure that files are submitted properly.

Most print shops output high-resolution digital color proofs so you can see a close color reproduction of your piece. Alternatively, some shops offer

online “soft” proofs (PDF files sent to you from their pre-press department). Soft proofs are less expensive and have a faster turnaround, but may not be as accurate, since you'll be reviewing the colors on your monitor and not on a printed sheet of paper. Not all monitors display printed colors accurately.

This is your last chance to review your piece before it gets printed. Remember, any changes or corrections made after this point may be very costly. Once you sign off on the color proof, you may want to do a press check. This takes place at your printer's facility while your project runs on the press. You'll be able to examine one of the printed sheets to verify that the colors and other details are correct before the entire job is printed.

Once your job is printed, follow through with binding, labeling, and distribution. Some printers conveniently provide all these services. Be sure to track your results, to make improvements for your next marketing piece. **N**

Karen Saunders is the owner of MacGraphics Services, a unique design firm for today's entrepreneur. Whether you outsource your promotional pieces or are a do-it-yourselfer, Karen takes the mystery out of marketing. Learn the Top 5 Mistakes that can cost you money by signing up for her FREE e-course, available for a limited time. To take advantage of this e-course and find out how easy it can be to attract more clients, <http://macgraphics.net/FreeStuff.php> or email her at Karen@macgraphics.net.