

A PRINTER'S GUIDE TO PRINT-READY FILES

Labels as good as *what's inside.*

For brewers & designers

A short read. Saves you a re-press.

v1.0 · 2026

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What's *in here.*

A quick run-through of the document, the layers, and the colour and image rules that keep your file press-ready. *Skim the checklist on page 14* if you're in a hurry.

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A NOTE These rules aren't picky for the sake of it. Every one of them came from a real job that nearly went sideways on press. Follow them and your run goes smoothly — skip them and we'll send you a friendly email asking for changes before we print.

01 BEFORE YOU START

A short read.

Saves you a re-press.

We wrote this so your file lands on our press exactly the way you drew it on screen — no surprises, no slow rounds of email, no awkward conversations about why the gold looks grey.

Everything in this guide is the result of years of running other brewers' artwork. Most files we receive are 90% there. The last 10% — the bleed, the colour mode, the embedded images, the outlined fonts — is what this document covers.

If you're a designer who does this every day, the **checklist on page 14** is for you. If this is your first run, read the whole thing. It's twelve pages of plain talk and one diagram per topic.

What you'll need

SOFTWARE	Adobe Illustrator (preferred), InDesign, or any vector tool that exports PDF/X-compatible files
OUTPUT	One PDF, all layers intact, all fonts outlined
COLOUR	CMYK or Pantone C — no RGB
TIME	20 minutes to read · 10 minutes to check your file

STUCK? Send the file anyway. We'll open it, see what's missing, and tell you. Most issues take five minutes to fix once you know what they are.

THE 30-SECOND VERSION

- 3 mm bleed, 1.5 mm safety
- One PDF, five named layers
- CMYK only · K100 (not rich black)
- Images embedded at 300 dpi
- Fonts outlined
- Min. type 8 pt · min. line 0.5 pt
- Export as PDF 1.4

TALK TO A HUMAN

If anything in here doesn't make sense, get in touch. We answer our own emails.

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02 TEMPLATES · BLEED · SAFETY

Start with the right *geometry*.

Every label artwork carries three boundaries — bleed, trim, safety. Get these right and the rest of the file falls into place.

The three boundaries

- BLEED** 3 mm beyond the cut line — fills the gap left by die-cut tolerance
- TRIM** The actual cut line of the label
- SAFETY** 1.5 mm inside the trim — keep all text and important graphics within this

Background art and colour fills should run all the way to the bleed edge. Anything you can't afford to lose — type, logos, barcodes — stays inside the safety line.

Why 3 mm? Die-cutting is mechanical. The blade and the print don't land on exactly the same fraction of a millimetre every time. The bleed absorbs that movement; without it you get a hairline of unprinted paper at the edge.

Building the template

Create your document at the final label size, then add the bleed in your document setup (Illustrator: File > Document Setup > Bleed). Draw the cutting line as a separate path on the **Diecut** layer — see the next page.

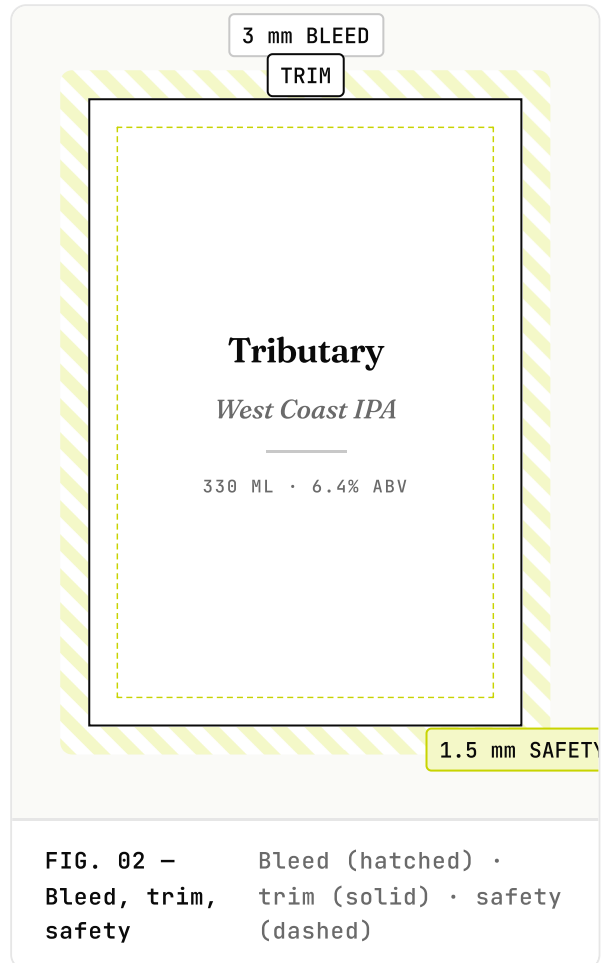


FIG. 02 — Bleed (hatched) · Bleed, trim, trim (solid) · safety safety (dashed)

HEADS UP Don't make the bleed wider than 3 mm. More isn't safer — it just means your design gets cropped further when we trim.

03 LAYERS · LAYER ORDER

Five layers, in *this order*.

Every file we press uses the same layer structure. Same names, same order, every time. It tells our pre-press exactly what to print, cut, foil, and varnish.

The layer stack (top → bottom)

01	Diecut A single closed path — the cut line of the label. Nothing else lives here.	Required
02	Varnish Filled shapes marking where 3D spot varnish should land.	Optional
03	Foil Filled shapes marking elements for hot foil or 3D foil.	Optional
04	White The white plate — needed for transparent or metallic labels (see pages 06–08).	Conditional
05	Artwork All your design lives here — type, illustration, images, backgrounds.	Required

Naming matters

Spell the layer names exactly: **Diecut** · **Varnish** · **Foil** · **White** · **Artwork**. Our pre-press scripts pick them up by name. A layer called "cut line" or "die" gets missed.

Order matters

Diecut sits at the top so it's visible on every check. Artwork is at the bottom — it's the deepest layer of the print, the foundation everything else sits on.

IF YOU DON'T NEED IT, DELETE IT

Don't ship empty Varnish or Foil layers "just in case". An empty layer is a question we'll have to ask you. Only include the layers your label actually uses.

04 CREATING THE WHITE PLATE

A spot colour called *HPI-White*.

If your label is transparent, metallic, or sitting on anything other than plain white paper, we need a white plate. Create it as a spot colour, name it exactly, and we'll know what to do with it.

Set it up

In your swatches panel, create a new colour swatch and use these settings:

NAME	HPI-White
TYPE	Spot colour
VALUES	C30 · M0 · Y0 · K0
MODE	CMYK

Spelling counts. HPI-White — capital H, capital P, capital I, hyphen, capital W. The dash is real. Our pre-press scripts look for that exact string.

Why a cyan tint?

The C30 colour you draw with isn't what prints — we replace it with white ink on press. The 30% cyan is just a visible placeholder so you can see your white plate while you're working. Pick anything you like for the on-screen colour as long as it's labelled HPI-White; we'll handle the rest.

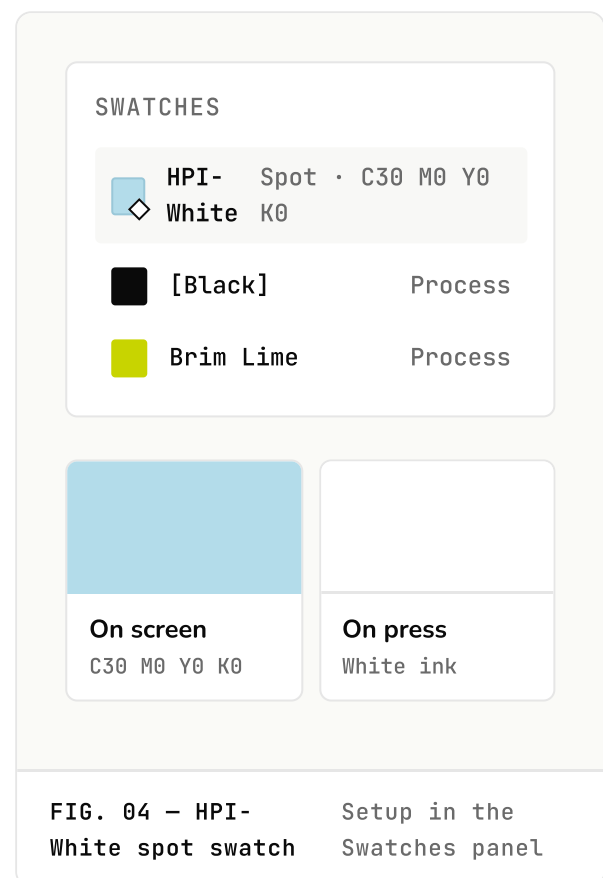


FIG. 04 – HPI-White spot swatch Setup in the Swatches panel

ONCE IS ENOUGH Create the swatch once, then reuse it everywhere on your White layer. Don't make a new swatch per element — you'll end up with twenty near-identical entries and we'll have to ask which one is the real one.

05 TRANSPARENT ELEMENTS

Only what you want to see *gets a white plate.*

On a clear label, the substrate is see-through. Anything you want to read clearly — type, barcode, logo — needs an opaque white layer printed underneath it. Anything you leave off the white plate stays transparent.

Only relevant if your label stock is clear. If you're printing on standard white paper or film, skip this page.

How to build it

1. Select every element on your **Artwork** layer that you want to be opaque.
2. Copy it (⌘C) and paste in place onto the **White** layer (⌘⇧V).
3. Select all the pasted shapes and change their fill to HPI-White.
4. Need extra opacity behind a barcode? Draw a rectangle on the White layer and fill it with HPI-White.



FIG. 05 — Building a transparent label

Artwork + matching white plate = readable design on a clear substrate

CUT, DON'T COPY For text or fine graphics, paste in place and *keep* the original on the Artwork layer. The two layers together give you opaque colour over a solid white — that's what makes the design legible.

06 METALLIC ELEMENTS

A silver base, controlled *by white*.

Metallic labels start life as solid silver. Wherever you *don't* want silver showing through, you cover it with the white plate. Less white = more shine.

Only applies to metallic label stocks. If your job is on white or clear paper, skip ahead to colours on page 10.

The process

Decide which parts of your design should keep that metallic glow. For everything else:

1. Select those elements on the **Artwork** layer.
2. Cut them (not copy — ⌘X).
3. Paste in place on the **White** layer (⌘⇧V).
4. Keep their existing colour. The white plate underneath does the work.

That's it. The base silver shows through wherever the white plate isn't.

How the maths works

Light colours on the White layer let only a little silver through — you get a soft sheen. Darker colours block more, so the metallic effect fades. Pure black on the White layer = no shine at all.



06.1 THREE TIPS BEFORE YOU PRESS

Working with *metallics*.

A few rules of thumb we've picked up from running thousands of metallic jobs.

TIP 01

LIGHTER = SHINIER

The lighter your white-layer colour, the more silver shows through. Pure white reveals the most metal.

TIP 02

silver**FOR SILVER, USE WHITE**

White elements on the White layer let the substrate's silver come through cleanly — that's a silver-foil look without the foil.

TIP 03

gold**FOR GOLD, TRY C0 M20 Y60 K0**

That mix is our house gold. Other yellows work too — it comes down to taste and what's around it.

Black is special

If you want an area with *no* metallic effect at all — say, a chunk of solid black type or a dense background — set its White-layer copy to 100% K. That blocks the silver completely and gives you a flat, matte black on the final print.

For everything in between, experiment: a 40% K patch produces a moody, slightly metallic charcoal; a 15% K patch retains a clear shimmer. There's no exact recipe — proof a sample if you're not sure.

PROOF IT

Metallics are the one finish where on-screen previews lie the most. If the job matters, ask us for a printed proof on the actual metallic stock before we run the full quantity. It's the cheapest insurance you can buy.

07 COLOURS

CMYK only. *No RGB.*

Our press prints CMYK. That means every colour in your file — fills, strokes, swatches, image profiles — needs to live in CMYK before you export. RGB files get converted automatically and the shift is rarely flattering.

Set the document mode

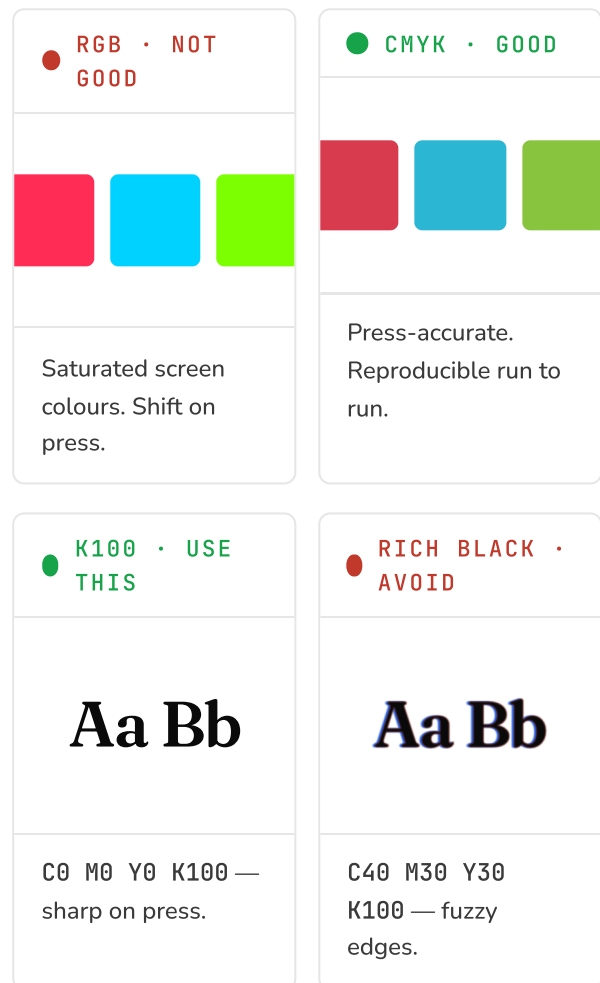
In Illustrator: File > Document Color Mode > CMYK Color. Do this *before* you start designing if you can — converting at the end can shift saturated colours noticeably.

About Pantone

We accept Pantone swatches — but only from the **Pantone Solid Coated (C)** book. Anything else gets converted automatically using the C palette. If consistency between runs matters to you, convert your Pantones to CMYK yourself so you know what to expect.

100% black is not rich black

Submit solid black as **K100** only — C0 M0 Y0 K100. Don't build "rich black" (a mix of C/M/Y under the K) for text and fine elements. It registers poorly, looks fuzzy, and slows drying. Save rich black for large solid areas if you genuinely need extra depth — and ask us first.



QUICK CHECK

Open the Swatches panel and look at the colour space icon next to each swatch. Anything not marked CMYK or Spot needs converting before export.

08 IMAGES

300 dpi. Embedded. *CMYK*.

Any pixel-based image in your file — a photo, a scanned hop illustration, a watercolour wash — needs to land on press at 300 dots per inch. Lower than that and you'll see it. Higher than that and you're just inflating the file.

Resolution

OK	300 dpi at final print size
OK	600 dpi for line art (1-bit B&W)
NO	Anything under 250 dpi
POINTLESS	Over 400 dpi (no benefit, big file)

Remember "at final print size". A 300 dpi photo scaled up 200% on the label is effectively 150 dpi. Check resolution *after* you've placed and scaled the image.

Always embed

Linked images outside the file get lost in transit and we can't print what we don't have. Embed every image before exporting — Illustrator's Links panel shows a chain icon when a file is linked, a square inside a square when it's embedded.

The Links panel also flags missing or modified files. If you see a yellow triangle, fix it before you send.

Convert images to CMYK

Same rule as the rest of the file — images need to be CMYK, not RGB. Convert in Photoshop (Image > Mode > CMYK Color) before placing.



BITMAP TEST Zoom to 400% on your placed image. If you can see the pixels at that zoom, the press will see them too.

Big enough to read. Heavy enough to *see*.

Labels are small, and the press has its limits. Two minimums keep type readable and lines visible from the first print to the last.

Minimum type

8

absolute floor for readable type
on press

pt

Minimum line weight

0.5

0.18 mm — thinner strokes
drop out

pt

Anything thinner than 0.5 pt risks dropping out on press or going inconsistent across the run. Reversed-out type (white on dark) needs even more — bump it up to 1 pt strokes and 9 pt type to be safe.

EYE-TEST

Print your label at 100% on plain office paper before sending. If you can't read the ingredients list at arm's length, neither can your customer.

Outline every font

Even with the right font installed at our end, font substitution glitches happen. Outlining converts type into vector paths — what you see is exactly what we get.

1. Select all your text (⌘A, on the Artwork layer)
2. Type > Create Outlines (⌘⇧O)
3. Save

Save a copy first. Once outlined, text is no longer editable. Keep a working version with live type so you can fix typos without redrawing from scratch.

A note on small caps & condensed

Both push readability lower. If you're using either, give yourself a bit more headroom — 9 pt minimum instead of 8.

Test it before *you send it.*

An unscannable barcode is a label that fails at the checkout. Run your phone's camera over it before you send the file — if your phone can read it, the supermarket scanner can.

Three rules

- CONTRAST** Black on white reads best. Other colours work but reduce contrast — test first.
- FORMAT** Vector is ideal — scales without losing edge crispness. 300 dpi PNG/TIF works if you can't go vector.
- SIZE** Don't scale EAN barcodes below 80% of the official size, or above 200%.

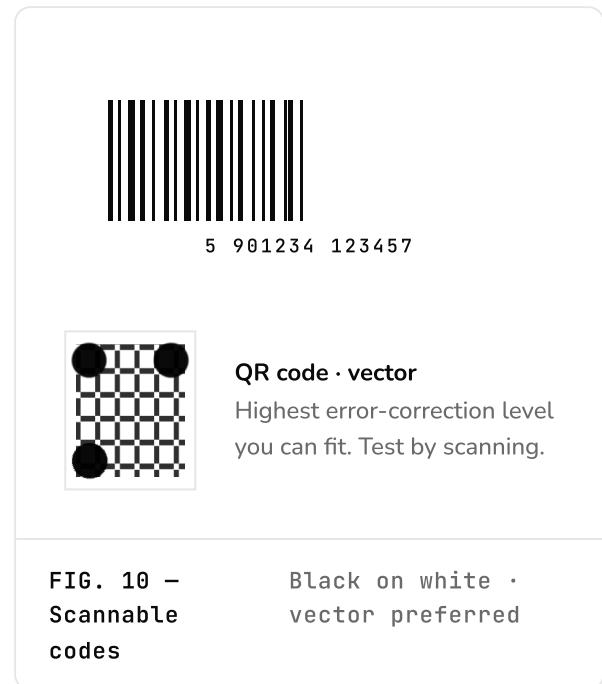
Quiet zone

Every barcode needs a small clear margin around it — typically 2 mm on the left and right of an EAN code. Don't crop into it. Don't run art into it.

Transparent labels: always put a white background under the barcode (see page 07). Scanners need contrast against a known background — see-through doesn't count.

QR codes

Same rules apply. Use the highest error-correction level you can afford to fit in the space — H-level survives a coffee ring; L-level gives up at a smudge.



11 FINAL CHECKLIST

One last look

before you export.

Ten minutes with this list saves you a round of email and gets your job onto the press the same day. Tick them in order.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dimensions — artwork matches the size we quoted | <input type="checkbox"/> Colour mode — CMYK (or Pantone C) only; no RGB |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bleed — 3 mm on every edge | <input type="checkbox"/> Black — solid black is K100, not rich black |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Safety zone — nothing important within 1.5 mm of the cut | <input type="checkbox"/> HPI-White — set as Spot, C30 M0 Y0 K0 (if used) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Layers — named exactly: Diecut, Varnish, Foil, White, Artwork | <input type="checkbox"/> Images — 300 dpi at final size, CMYK, embedded |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Layer order — Diecut top, Artwork bottom | <input type="checkbox"/> Fonts — outlined (working copy saved separately) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Diecut — single closed path, on its own layer | <input type="checkbox"/> Type & lines — ≥ 8 pt · ≥ 0.5 pt strokes |

EXPORT

Adobe PDF Preset: Illustrator Default — modify compatibility to **Acrobat 5 (PDF 1.4)**. See the next page for the full setting.

SEND IT THROUGH Upload via the portal at brimlabel.com/orders or reply to your quote email with the file attached. Anything under 25 MB sends fine; for bigger files we'll send a WeTransfer link.

12 EXPORTING THE PDF

One PDF. *PDF 1.4.*

When the file's ready, save out a single PDF using the settings below. PDF 1.4 (Acrobat 5) keeps layers intact and stays compatible with every press in our shop.

Save dialog

File > Save As > Format Adobe PDF

PDF preset

PRESET	Illustrator Default
COMPATIBILITY	Acrobat 5 (PDF 1.4)
PRESERVE	Illustrator Editing Capabilities — off
EMBED THUMBNAILS	On
OPTIMIZE FOR WEB	Off

Compression tab

Switch to the Compression tab and use these:

COLOR BITMAP	Do Not Downsample · ZIP 8-bit
GRAYSCALE BITMAP	Do Not Downsample · ZIP 8-bit
MONOCHROME BITMAP	Do Not Downsample · CCITT Group 4
COMPRESS TEXT & LINE ART	On

No downsampling means the resolution of your placed images survives the export — what's at 300 dpi stays at 300 dpi.

```
// Quick reference — paste-and-go
Preset:      Illustrator Default
Compatibility: Acrobat 5 (PDF 1.4)

// Compression
Color:       Do Not Downsample ·
             ZIP 8
Grayscale:   Do Not Downsample ·
             ZIP 8
Monochrome:  Do Not Downsample ·
             CCITT G4
Compress Text: On

// Marks & bleeds — leave off
Trim marks:  Off
Registration: Off
Color bars:  Off
Page info:   Off
Bleeds:      Use Document Bleed
```

NO CROP MARKS We pull bleed info straight from the PDF, so you don't need to add trim marks, registration marks, or colour bars. They get in the way of our impositioning.

One file per job. One PDF, all layers, all variants on separate artboards if you have a range. Don't zip up a folder of files — it slows everyone down.

END TALK TO A HUMAN

That's it. *Press time.*

Send your file through and we'll be in touch within the working day. Once you approve the proof, we get it on the press — typically the same afternoon.

UPLOAD ARTWORK

brimlabel.com / orders

Sign in, drop the PDF, approve the proof, ship.

QUESTIONS

hello@brimlabel.com

We answer our own emails. Usually within an hour.

A REMINDER

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