

PERSONALISED POSTCARD PRODUCTION

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CONCEPT

To produce postcards that can be personalised using the Smilers-type service.

CARD SUPPLIERS

The *major* suppliers of paper and card are limited to just a couple in the UK, the biggest being Arjo Wiggins. This supplier offers a sample service to bona-fide organisations and Dean will possibly already have an account with them. In any event they have a site at www.paperpoint.com, although it might be easier to chat to them at 01256 728900 in the first instance. I used them all the time when I was trying to source appropriate substrates.

Another route into a sample service would be through any of the print suppliers on your approved roster, such as Beacon Press – or even Walsall/DLR if the stamp portion is required to be printed by a security printer. (If Xerox was to specify the requirement, they would effectively be taking responsibility for its ability to function within their equipment, but on-site testing should not be overlooked, i.e. don't rely on them to get it right for you!)

CARD TYPE

The success of your printed job depends so much on your choice of card and it is vitally important that you make an informed decision. When I was specifying print for laser printers we found that uncoated papers were preferred as heat generated during the fusing stage built-up in the clay coating on the sheet and did not allow the toner to fuse properly to the surface. The world might have moved on now, though, of course.

An obvious, but often overlooked point, is that *both* sides of the material need to meet the specifications of your printing equipment. I mention this because true postcard stock is invariably different face/reverse, one being coated (or shiny) and the other often uncoated (or matt). Similarly, as Dulux has proved, there is more than shade of white – choose the “colour” carefully to ensure that the inks used are not affected.

MAIL CENTRE SYSTEM HANDLING

Paper “bulk” (thickness) is an important specification for the Royal Mail handling systems at Mail Centres more than actual weight. RM always used to prefer to receive postcards through the post which conformed to a minimum of 230/250 microns, also now specified as papers which are 200gsm and above. Therefore you may not need to issue cards that are 300gsm as such, but instead trial material that is a minimum of 230/250 microns. (I am assuming that the Mail Centre requirements have not altered in the past three years.)

CARD SEPARATION

This is the hardest part of the question in many respects! Options appear to be (a) guillotine into singles on-site, (b) guillotine into singles off-site, (c) print the cards in pre-rouletted (micro-perforated) sheets that the customer separates. As the base sheet would be A3 there would probably be the need to also pre-crease or roulette (as self-adhesive Smilers) centrally enabling folding down to A4 for mailing, or (d) micro-perf sheet and guillotine down into two A4 sheets after printing instead of folding.

One problem with supplying the cards as singles is matching the cards with the correct order at TH. This problem tends to go away if they are supplied uncut, but ready to separate. It depends on how confident you are about no mis-matches and whether the customer would expect individual cards. I have purchased micro-perforated uncut sheets of business cards without problem.

It is possible to micro-perforate card stock at A3 size as easily as paper, although I do not have personal experience of having done this. Fulton Paper, Unit 3 Guildprime Business Centre, Southend Road, Billericay CM11 2PZ (Tel: 01277 636243) <http://www.fultonpaper.co.uk/> seem to specialise in this, but they are not a company that I have experience of using. Still, they might be up to supplying you with some sample micro-perforated card at, say, 250 microns for testing the principle of card separation.

PRINTING THE BASE STOCK

Any commercial printer could do this one-sided lithographic printing for you and many could also perform the micro-perforating if that route was taken. However, be sure to ask whether they outsource their finishing to another company, as you may not want the cards to be sent to an unknown trade house for this part of the production.