Press Checks

Its useful to break down your checks into three areas: must haves, really like to have, and things to look for if you have the time (i.e., if you aren't experiencing major problems in either of the first two areas). The specific items that might fall into each of these categories may vary somewhat, depending on the needs of each job, but a typical breakdown might be as follows.

Must Have
- Page sequence is correct
- All material (words, pictures, logos, captions, subheadings, etc) is present and printing (compare to dummy)
- Folios (page numbers) are in place
- Dates are accurate
- Folds are correct
- Trims and bleeds are accurate
- Crossovers line up between signatures
- Plates and paper are clean
- Ink/water balance okay (check ink density and color bars)
- General color level is acceptable (check color targets and color bar for dot gain, trapping, slur)

Really Like to Have
- Accurate registration (under loupe, check registration marks and edges of photographs)
- Consistent type density (check densitometer)
- Crossover colors match
- Solid and screen colors match
- No press marks from transferring ink to live areas
- Color matched in critical areas

If you have time
- Strong contrast
- In-line conflicts resolved
- Color matched in all areas or compromises agreed upon

Note:
All items in the first two categories are skewed toward pressroom technique. Printers know if they don't get these first two categories right it is up to them to correct. For printers, items in the third category are all extras, or "icing on the cake". Designers, by contrast tend to focus only on items in the third category and assume that the printer has taken care of everything else.

What should I look for on a press check?

The most important key to success on press is communication. Make sure your printer understands what you expect – and you understand their capabilities. Here are things to look for when on press.

>   Check paper stock—are they running what you specified?
>   Turn some printed sheets over early in the run and check side to side print quality as well as opacity.
>   For solids, all inks should be laying down smoothly. Densities should be even across the sheet and match between forms. Is there any mottling?
>   Are images dark or plugged in? Examine the dot gain targets and dot shape. Look at the type for crisp edges.
>   Check position. Rule out a sheet with trims and scores. Have the sheet folded and trimmed to size. Is it backed up properly? Are the crossovers aligned?
>   Check registration and fit. Are two colors overlapping, causing a dark line, or not touching, causing the paper to show? Look at the targets, the edges of images and any knock out and screened type.
>   Color match and four-color process review. Compare the proof and ink swatches to the press sheet. Have the printer cut the sheet for flat, side-by-side comparison.
>   Check for flaws. Look for broken type, odd scratches, hickies, spots and ghosting.
>   Review for overall impact and legibility.