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HELPFUL TIPS TO
UNDERSTAND GRAPHIC FILES

ANSWERS & EXPLANATIONS TO COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT
FILES, COLORS & FORMATS

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NOTE: All graphic images fall into one of two categories: vector or raster. Here's the down and dirty difference and how to always look good on paper, and on screen, and on billboards, and everywhere...all the time, forever.

VECTOR   VS   RASTER

A vector image is created using something like an equation that tells every point to either be a curved or straight line. A vector graphic can be blown up to be put on the side of a building or shrunk down to a postage stamp and it will never degrade (or get fuzzy). Vectors have to be created using special software, which is why having a professional create your logo is so important.

Now, why would anyone use anything BUT a vector? Well, some formats (ie - websites, screens, etc) that demand a smaller file to load faster, can't use a vector to do so. Therefore, we have to still have raster files for use in certain areas.

A raster graphic is made up of tiny little squares called pixels. Raster graphics are subject to resolution quality. High resolution means lots of little square pixels are jammed into making up an image so that you get a clear picture (no fuzz). Low resolution is when there are fewer little square pixels filling that same space and therefore you start to see fuzz or distortion in the image. The professional term for "fuzzy" is actually called pixelated.

Raster graphics are much smaller file sizes, therefore they are great for use on the web or other areas where you need graphics to load quickly.

As a rule of thumb, all photographs are naturally raster graphics. A "high resolution" photo is very crisp and clear, a low resolution photo tends to be more fuzzy.

WHO CARES!?

All of this matters because if you use a logo file intended for the web, and try to blow it up on the side of your building, **it will be ugly...**like so ugly that no one will want to do business with you.

NOTE: At some point you're going to wonder why a file of your logo or graphics look different on your screen than when you print it. The most likely answer will be because of the color code of the file you are using.
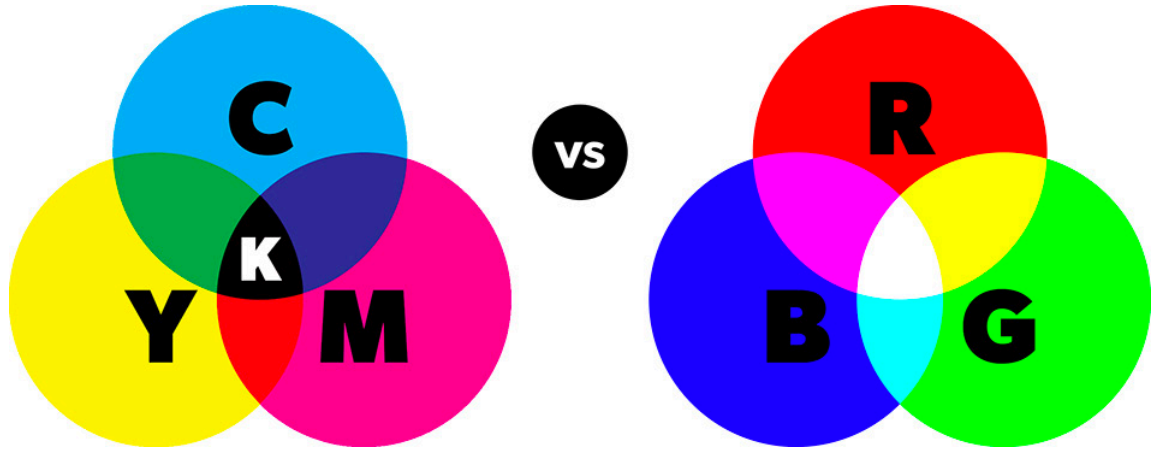
CMYK
4-color process

When a file is created, the designer can tell it to be coded with a CYMK or RGB color code. CMYK files are used specifically for printed materials on a professional press. The CMYK code tells the printer how each color, Cyan, (C) Magenta (M), Yellow (Y) and Black(K), is needed to create a specific shade or hue.

If you use a file coded for CMYK on a screen, it may look slightly different. It is never a good practice to assume colors will print as you see them on screen. Why? Because all screens are RGB color coded!

RGB
3-color process

RGB color mode is how colors are created on a screen. It is the amount of Red (R), Green (G), and Blue (B) pixels that are combined to create any hue on a screen.

While most RGB files will print fairly well, CYMK is preferred for color consistency. The opposite is not true. Most CMYK files will not reproduce well on screen and will have a tendency to look more neon or saturated.

RGB   ● ● ● ●   what you might see on screen

CMYK ● ● ● ●   how it might print

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BASIC FILE TYPES
"...so which file do I use and when?"

.JPG or .JPEG

- Raster image
- Default white background
- Best for web or smaller sizes in print
- Loses quality at larger sizes

.PNG

- Raster image
- Transparent background
  (no white box behind image)
- Good for web and print

.PDF

- Vector image in document format
- High quality for use in print
- Ideal for publications / professional use

.EPS

- Native vector format
- Professional software required
- Keep / use these as your native logo files
- Share with graphics professionals for use

ZIP   AVI   PNG   PSD   MOV   WAV

DOC   HTML   M   CSV   EXE

XLS   TXT   PHP   RAR   PPT