



## Top five things to look for in a printer

When it comes to choosing a printer, most publishers agree that there are three top criteria: price, customer service and quality.

We agree that these would be “the big three,” and just for fun we’re going to add two more — turnaround time and the specialization of the printer. Let’s take a look at each of these areas in greater detail.

### 1. Price point

Given the tough economics faced by many publishers today, it’s no surprise that price is at the top of the list. We will not argue the point. We will play devil’s advocate, though, by saying that price should not be the sole factor in choosing a printer.

“It’s like a three-legged stool; you need all three legs,” said Duane Carrell, a sales representative with Johnson Press of America who has been in the industry for 20 years. “But I would argue that if you are wanting to produce a high quality product, customer service and quality should come before price.”

For Kim Guerra, who has been the publisher of *Houston Family Magazine* for 15 years, that was an easy decision. She was not at all happy with the service she received from two printers, and is now with a smaller, family-owned operation even though her monthly bill is about 25% higher than it used to be.

“The larger printers couldn’t have cared less about us because we were such a small customer,” Guerra said. “We weren’t receiving any kind of customer service at all. We had all these issues with our account because the left hand wouldn’t speak to the right hand.”

## 2. Customer service is essential

Customer service is a tricky criterion because there is no way to truly know how well a printer will perform until you are actually a customer.

“When they are after your business, they can promise you the sun, the moon and the stars,” Guerra says, “but that doesn’t mean the quality will be there, that they’ll meet your deadlines, and that they’ll bend over backwards to fix problems when they arise.”

Guerra says the best way to gauge the type of service you will receive is by talking to several of the printer’s current customers. “Get samples of their magazines and talk to those publishers about their experiences.”

## 3. Quality is key

It is safe to say that most of the printers in the United States offer top quality production. It’s a business that was born on craftsmanship, and the notion of pride in constructing a good product is still very strong within the industry in general and in particular with the employees who work in the plants.



That said, however, it is best to do your research in this area as well. Guerra shares a few difficulties she has had in the past. “It seems like we had problems every month,” she says. “Ads were smudged, the magazine would go out three days late, and our invoices weren’t accurate because they had over-charged us.”

## 4. Timing is everything

You also don’t want to be in a bind when it comes to getting your magazine out on

time. As a point of reference, Carrell said five to 10 working days is the industry standard for producing smaller niche magazines. Again, talking to existing customers will be your best way to get an accurate assessment of a printer’s performance in this area.

## 5. Go with the specialists

The issue of timing dovetails with the particular area of expertise a printer may have. “If you find a printer whose main business is producing magazines and not just printing in general, they will be much better set up to handle what you’re doing,” Carrell says. “Anyone can print a magazine, but are they efficient and do they know what’s going on at each step in the process?”

A printer who specializes in publications will have the appropriate printing and saddle stitching capacity (to accommodate 16-page signatures), and will be able to do perfect binding and mailing in-house, thereby saving time and money. One publisher actually saved \$70,000 a year switching from a 4-signature press to one that could handle 16 page signatures.

Another benefit to a magazine specialist is that scheduling is sacred. These printers are willing to go the extra mile to ensure their customers’ publications go out on time. Given that many readers will notice if their beloved magazines are a few days late, this is a very important trait to have.

It follows then, that quality printing leads to happy publishers and even happier readers. So when selecting a printer, choose wisely. A lot is riding in their hands.