

Why Can't Print Shops Use My Screenshot?

Screenshots are incredibly convenient. Whether it's a logo, a photo, or a design you found online, capturing it with a quick screenshot seems like the easiest way to send something to print.

But when a print shop asks for the original file instead, there's a good reason for it.

Q: Why isn't a screenshot good enough for printing?

Screenshots are typically low resolution, meaning they don't contain enough visual information for high-quality printing.

Most screens display images at about 72–96 pixels per inch (PPI). Printing, however, usually requires 300 pixels per inch to produce sharp results. When a low-resolution screenshot is enlarged for print, the image can appear blurry or pixelated.

See Article: DPI VS PPI: Tips, Tricks, & Tools Page -> Debugging the Jargon

Q: What happens when a screenshot is printed?

Because the image contains fewer pixels than needed, the printer has to stretch the image to fill the space.

This can cause:

- ⊖ Blurry edges
- ⊖ Jagged text
- ⊖ Visible pixels
- ⊖ Loss of fine details

What looks perfectly clear on a phone or computer screen can look noticeably softer once printed.

Q: Why does it look fine on my screen?

Screens are very forgiving. A phone or monitor displays images using light, and the size is usually much smaller than what is printed. This makes lower-resolution images appear sharper than they actually are. Printing reveals the true detail level of the image.

See ArticleS: RGB VS CMYK & DPI VS PPI: Tips, Tricks, & Tools Page -> Debugging the Jargon

Q: What kind of file should I send instead?

Whenever possible, provide the original file rather than a screenshot.

Better options include:

- ★ The original photo from a camera or phone
- ★ A design file (PDF, AI*, PSD, etc.)
- ★ A high-resolution image (JPEG or PNG)
- ★ Vector files for logos (SVG, EPS, AI*)

These files contain far more information and produce much better print results.

*AI= Adobe Illustrator

Q: What if I only have a screenshot?

Sometimes a screenshot is the only option available.

In those cases, a print shop may be able to rebuild the design, locate a higher-quality version of the image, or suggest adjustments that will improve the final result. However, the quality of the printed piece will still depend on the quality of the original image.

Q: What's the easiest way to avoid this problem?

If you plan to print something later, try to keep the original file whenever possible.

Original files retain the highest resolution and allow printers to produce the best possible results. If you really, really can't have that original file- it may be time to speak with a Designer to get a solid idea of what it will take to reproduce it (Logo's, etc.). Then you can make an informed decision as to the exact value that screenshot represents for you.

Never hesitate to ask for a Quote first! Any Designer/Print Shop that balks at the request isn't worried about your final product- they're worried about their bottom line.