Variable Data meets Large Format Printing

The challenge:

Educating traditional print buyers (designers and print brokers) about large format substrates and capabilities

My personal objectives:

1. To design a mail piece so cool that people not only would *not* throw it in the trash, but would pin up on their cubicle wall and show it off to their friends.
2. To push to the limit the complexity of what my team and equipment was capable of producing.

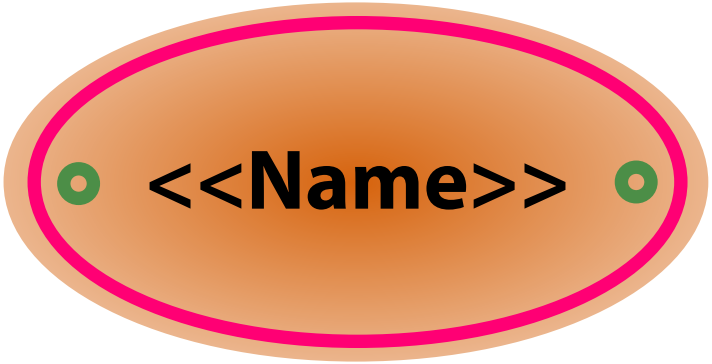
The project:

Customized MarketMail pieces (non-rectangular) on Sintra board, with variable data graphics, text... and **engraving**

Step 1:
Create a 1-up postcard template

Front:

- Graphic placeholder
- First name placeholder (for engraving)
- Cut Path
- Drill holes



Step 1:
Create a 1-up postcard template

Back:

- Graphic placeholder
- Address info
- Salesperson contact info

Step 2:
Arrange object on layers in ID

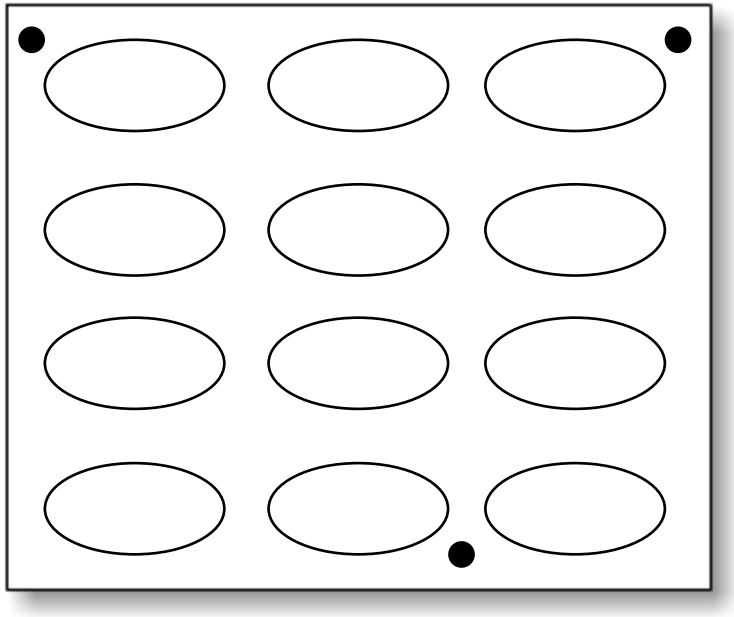
- **Print** layer: everything that is going to be printed
- **Cut** layer: everything that is going to be cut or engraved (Cut path, drill holes)
- **Engrave** layer: name for engraving

Step 3:
Data Merge

- Choose your data source and merge your data.
- Now, depending upon your version of ID, save the merged file for placing into the imposition, **OR**
- Export a PDF for imposition (including Acrobat layers).

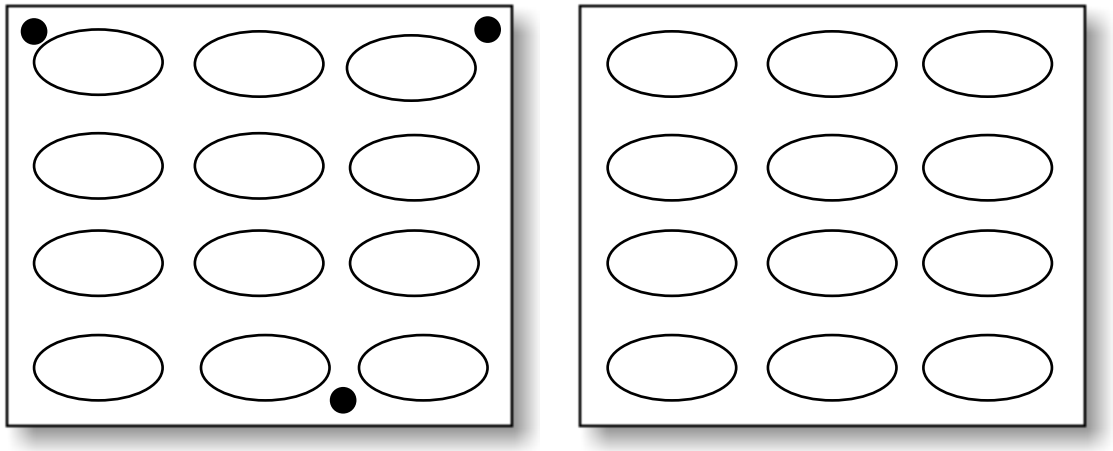
Step 4:
Prepare an imposition file, pg 1

- Prepare a template
- Make four layers: **Print**, **Cut**, **Engrave** and **Registration Marks**.
- Put placeholder frames on the **Print** layer
- Add registration marks in a triangular position



Step 5:
Prepare an imposition file, pg 2

- Duplicate the placeholder frames onto a second page
- Add registration marks on the first page

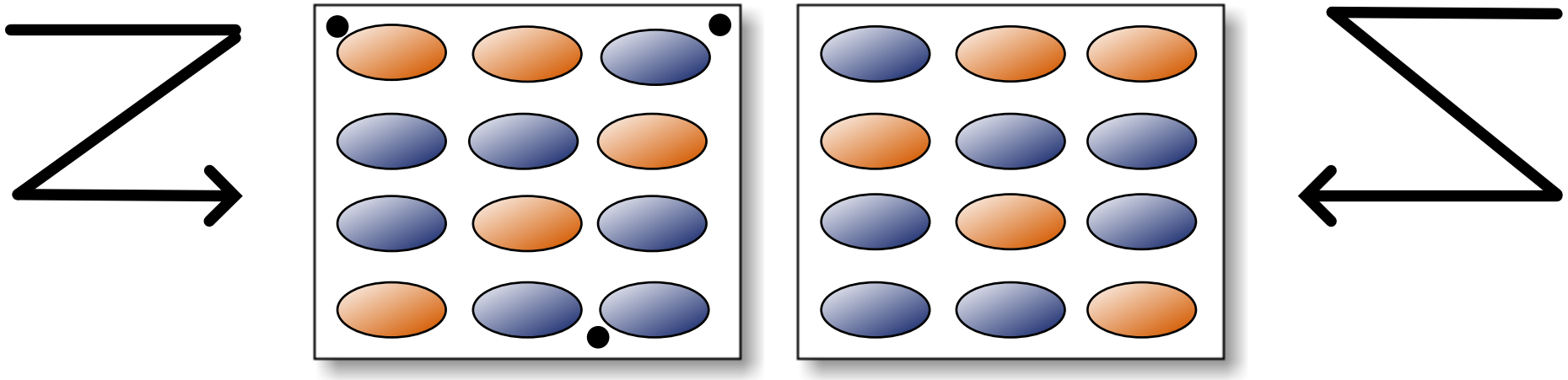


Step 6:
Prepare an imposition file

- Duplicate placeholder frames from **Print** layer onto the **Cut** and **Engrave** layers.

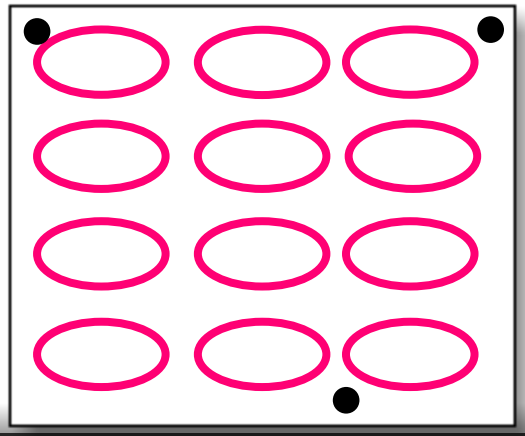
Step 7:
Impose 1-up, only Print layer

- Front: left to right, top to bottom
- Back: Right to left, top to bottom



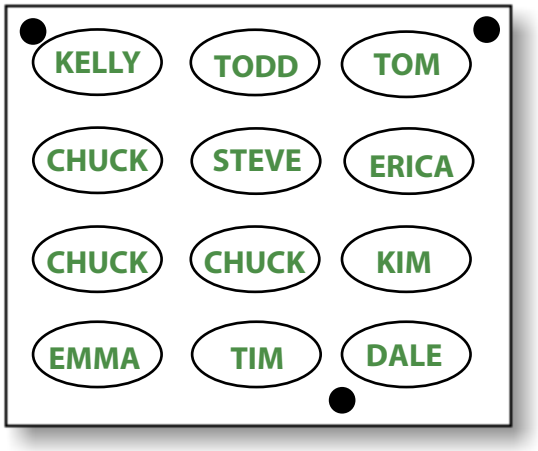
Step 8:
Prepare Cut Paths in Imposition

- Place a page (any page) of the 1-up file into the placeholder frames on the Cut Path layer.
- *Be sure to Show Options*: show ONLY the **Cut** layer.



Step 9:
Prepare Engrave Paths

- Do a multi-page import of the 1-up front file
- Be sure to show options: show ONLY the **Engrave** layer.

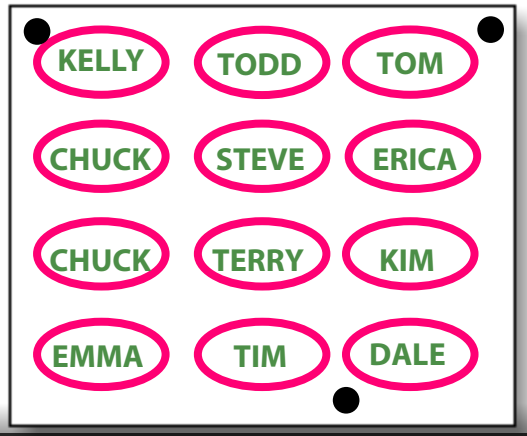


Step 10:
Export Print File

- Hide the **Cut** and **Engrave** layers.
- Showing only the **Print** and **Registration Marks** layers, export a PDF.
- Depending on your RIP, you may want to rasterize and save as a TIFF.

Step 11:
Export Cut/Engrave File

- Hide the **Print** layer.
- Showing only the **Cut, Engrave,** and **Registration Marks** layers, export a PDF.



Step 12:
Clean up Cut File In Illustrator

- Delete all empty paths.
- Outline Type (I used Arial Rounded)
- Create separate layers for each type of object: **Cut**, **Engrave**, and **Registration Marks**.
- Offset the stroke by 1/2 the diameter of the router bit you'll be using. (I like to use an effect for this, then expand the object. That way, there are no extraneous paths to delete.)

Step 13:
Go to production!

1. Print board - Side 1
2. If using a non-square substrate, square up the board on the flatbed cutter.
3. Print board Side 2
4. Engrave names
5. Drill holes
6. Cut out postcards

Tips:

- Have plenty of time on your hands.
- Don't have a project budget.
- Work directly with equipment operators: the guys who run the flatbed printer and table router).

The finished product: