

Transparency is a feature found in newer versions of Adobe Illustrator and Adobe InDesign that allows a designer to create special effects. Some of these effects include allowing background objects to show through foreground objects, feathered edges, and drop shadows. Since the use of transparency is relatively new, brought on by the new applications that allow for its use, Primedia has adopted guidelines to ensure the integrity of ads using this feature.

Source Interlink's digital guidelines require a PDF file created under the PDF/X1-a specification. The PDF/X1-a specification is the standard for the printing and publishing industry and is designed to provide the most reliable printed results possible. Because of the variables involved in transparency, transparency is not included in this specification and therefore all transparency **must** be flattened **prior** to submitting your materials.

Transparency flattening is the process in which transparent objects are "flattened," thereby combining the various layers into a single layer, but preserving the transparency of the objects. During flattening, the objects that are affected by transparency are examined by the application's flattening engine and broken into separate elements. Some of these elements remain vectors and others are rasterized. Each file can be rendered differently, causing color shifts, rasterized type and artifacting (small white gaps between a vector and rastered object).

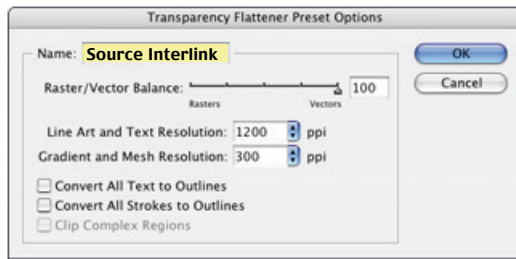
Given these variables, flattening is a subjective process and therefore it is important that advertisers or designers flatten all files prior to submitting ad materials to Source Interlink. Files received by Source Interlink with unflattened transparencies will be returned.

Below you will find a number of helpful tips and initial recommended settings for flattening your files for best output.

If you would like more information on transparency, you can see [A Designer's Guide to Transparency for Print Output](#) and [Getting Started with Transparency](#) both produced by Adobe, Inc. Please note that the specifications and recommendations on this site should be followed over the recommendations found in the Adobe documentation.

A Initial Settings

Each file can be flattened a number of ways and the results will vary each time with different settings. The Raster/Vector Balance and three check boxes are suggestions and can be adjusted to achieve the optimal result; if you lower the resolution settings you may produce undesirable results.



- **Raster/Vector Balance:** When flattening your file, the flattening engine may be required to rasterize some vector elements. You should start with the slider at 100% vector and reduce it only if you are not satisfied with the initial flattening.
- **Line Art and Text Resolution:** For vector objects and text that need to be rasterized during flattening, this is the resolution that will be rasterized at. Reducing this value can produce soft edges and fuzzy type.
- **Gradient and Mesh Resolution:** This is the resolution in which gradient object will be rasterized during flattening. You may see a color shift when only part of a gradient is rasterized while the remainder is left as vector.
- **Convert All Text to Outlines:** Checking this box will cause all text to be converted to outlines (objects rather than fonts). This has the potential to fatten your type. Before trying this option, move all type to the top layer of your document.
- **Convert All Strokes to Outline:** This checkbox will cause all strokes to be converted into separate objects. This may allow only the stroke to be rasterized rather than the entire vector object.
- **Clip Complex Regions:** Complex Regions are areas where multiple transparency effects overlap. These areas can be flattened into one single object rather than multiple clipped objects. Using multiple clipped objects may create more artifacts (minute white gaps) but will provide a higher quality output. Checking this box will reduce the complex regions but at a sacrifice of quality.

B Text Objects

For best results in printing, and to avoid unnecessary rasterization of text, any text objects that are not involved in transparency should be placed on the top-most layer of your document. When the flattening engine examines these objects, it will attempt to leave them as vector if possible while rasterizing only the transparent elements (such as a drop shadow).

C Spot Colors

When using any spot colors that will be printed as four-color matches, you should convert these spot colors to process prior to flattening your file. If you are not actually printing with a spot color, the final PDF should not contain any spot colors. If spot colors are not converted prior to flattening, significant color shifts may occur once they are converted to four-color process.

D Flatten Last

To improve software performance and minimize file size, you should only flatten your final PDF file. You can create transparent elements within Illustrator and use them unflattened in your InDesign document. Once you have completed your InDesign layout, you can export your file as a PDF/X1-a where all transparent objects will be flattened at once.

E Proof Final PDF

Once your file has been output as a PDF/X1-a, be sure to proof your document thoroughly for any incorrect flattening or artifacts that were created. Be sure to view your document with **Overprint Preview** enabled since the flattening process makes adjustments to overprinting objects. If your document did not flatten as expected, make adjustments to the *rasterize/vector slider* and reoutput until a satisfactory file is obtained.