



Artwork and Lasering

One of the greatest benefits to working with a laser engraver is the high degree of detail you can incorporate into your designs. With a little practice and know-how, you'll be lasering photos and finely detailed logos and graphics in no time. Here are a few tips to help you get started lasering graphic files:

File Types

It's a literal "alphabet soup" when dealing with file types: .jpeg, .bmp, .tiff, .eps, .wmf...it can all be a little overwhelming. However, each of these file types can be broken down into two categories: raster or vector.

Raster images are created using tiny dots (pixels) that combine to create the image. All digital photos are raster images. These images can be slightly altered in a software package such as Corel® Photo-Paint, but for the most part are not "changeable." You cannot break the image apart for editing. Raster images include .jpeg, .tiff., and .bmp files.

Vector images are created using lines and fill colors. They can usually be broken apart and edited with much greater flexibility. File types ending in .wmf are vector images, as well as most .eps files.

If an image starts as a raster image, it cannot be changed to a vector image. For example, you can save a .jpeg image as a .wmf, but the image will still retain the raster properties of the original .jpeg file (you won't be able to break it apart).

With all that being said, both file types can be laser engraved. For more details on raster and vector images, see Rowmark's Laser Guide online at http://www.rowmark.com/MARK/laser_guide/start.asp.

Clip Art

Most software design packages come with some clip art files. These files are great for those who know what kind of image they want for a project but don't have the time to create an image from scratch.

Most clip art images come in either .jpeg or .tiff format and are not changeable. However, if you can find the images in a .wmf file, you will be able to break them apart and recolor them with ease. Microsoft's Clip Art section of their website offers .wmf files, as does Clipart.com (subscription needed).

Scanning

With the proliferation of digital cameras, the need to scan images isn't the same as it was 5 years ago. But we still need a way to get those old photo prints into digital format, and a scanner is the perfect tool for the job.

When scanning an image for lasering, it's best to scan the image at 600dpi or greater and save the file as a .tiff. This will give you a sharper image at the start of your project. Remember, the scanned image will be a raster image and will be lasered using pulses that produce dots on your substrate. The more dots per inch, the better the quality.

Photographs

Whether imported from a digital camera, downloaded from the Internet, or scanned in, engraving photos one of the best benefits of owning a laser.

Regardless of the source, odds are you are going to want to adjust the brightness and contrast of your photo. Use a software package such as Corel® Photo-Paint or Adobe® Photoshop to brighten the light colors and darken the dark colors. You can also use these packages to sharpen the image and adjust the halftones.

Beyond the Basics

Rowmark offers a comprehensive section on laser engraving in our Laser Guide. This can be found, free of charge, on our website at http://www.rowmark.com/MARK/laser_guide/start.asp. There you will find detailed laser engraving help for a number of Rowmark products.