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Adobe Illustrator vs. Flexi Complete



The Two Faces of Design.

Should I use Adobe Illustrator or Flexi Complete?

The differences & when to use each one.

Mar Rugen

SA International & Adendo

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Illustrator

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Adobe Illustrator versus Flexi Complete

This seems like such a harsh title for this white paper! It's not really "versus" but more "compared to" or "when to choose", but that's the English language!

The real purpose of this white paper is to see some of the reasons you might want to choose one program or the other when designing and producing prints or signage. We will try to show you some examples of how to choose and when to use each of these great programs.

What is Adobe Illustrator?



Adobe Illustrator is a vector graphics editor and design software developed and marketed by [Adobe](#). Originally designed for the [Apple Macintosh](#), development of Adobe Illustrator began in 1985. Along with [Creative Cloud](#) (Adobe's shift to a monthly or annual subscription service delivered over the Internet), Illustrator CC was released. The latest [version](#), Illustrator 2025, was released on October 14, 2024, and is the 29th generation in the product line.

What is Flexi Complete?



SAi [Flexi Complete](#) is the only all-in-one design, print and cut software for sign and print providers. Flexi is the industry standard for sign-specific design tools, RIP software, print-and-cut software, direct-to-film, direct-to-garment, and direct vinyl cutting. Flexi is developed by [SA International](#). SAi is the leading company in Design, Print, and Cut software for professional Print and Sign Shops. Flexi is a recognized standard in the industry and is available through a subscription service.

So then, Which One Should I Use?

Well, as you can see each program has "some" similarities, but each has its purpose as well. That's why we are writing this white paper. We will show in the next few pages, when you might consider one program over the other and how they partner on many types of projects.

On a personal note, after teaching literally thousands of end users in the wide format print and signage market, it is my belief that you will be able to do most of your work in Flexi Complete and use Illustrator as a support tool. But I also have come to know that the choice is many times what a person is familiar with or trained on. There are far more Adobe trained designers than Flexi designers, but most Adobe users find that Flexi can do numerous things that take many steps in

Illustrator. So, keep an open mind. So, let's take the journey through a few example projects to show you some of moments when one or the other might be the right choice.

Example Projects & Choosing Your Design & Production Software

Keep in mind that we are in the business of design AND production. Our shops manufacture projects for our customers. These projects range from t-shirts, to decals, to yard signs, banners and vehicle wraps. Our shops must run wide format printers, vinyl cutters, engravers and CNC routers. With only a few exceptions, I would estimate that 75% of our work is in production rather than design, but some projects such as vehicle wraps could lean toward a 50/50 split regarding design and production.

Typical Shop Workflows

The basis behind the workflow of many shops is:

- **Project request – The request from a customer.**
 - Could be verbal request, a file to use, or something that needs to be converted.
- **Project pricing**
 - The shop estimates the cost and retail price for the job.
- **Project concept – The shop decides the best design or way to get the job done.**
 - Ideas are tossed around on how to best produce the job, including medias etc.
- **Project Extras**
 - Consider a few inexpensive extras to bring the customer back to your shop, like decals to give away.
- **Project design – The shop decides on a design for the requested project.**
 - Either reproduce the customer artwork or design from scratch.
- **Project editing – The shop gets a job approval and perhaps edits the design.**
 - After review by the customer, edits are made to the project artwork.
- **Project output – The shop decides how to produce the project.**
 - (Print, Cut, Print & Cut, Engrave, Router)
- **Project install – The shop decides how to install the project if necessary.**
 - Banners, Decals, Vehicle Wraps, Window Graphics etc.
- **Project Archiving**
 - The job is stored for possible repeat business or future use.

Each of the above steps is also part of the ultimate choice of design and production software. The design and production software choices are part of the overall business workflow and could affect profits. The right choice can move projects forward faster or cause a bottleneck.

The Banner Project Example

Banners have long been a staple project for many shops. These are fairly simple projects to design and produce but also have some manual labor such as adding grommets and folding and sewing or taping the edges.



In the above banner we have the following:

- An image, photo of the dinner table.
- Two custom shapes with gradients.
- Dark brown banner with orangish and white letters.
- Three grommets on top and bottom
- Folded edges.

Let's apply the shop workflow to the project and show why Flexi Complete is the right choice for this type of project.

Banner Request

Customer: "I want a 6ft x 3 ft banner with this information. It doesn't have to have the same picture but should include my restaurant name "Ole Oyster House". "Freshest Seafood in Town" 555-1212 50% off Lunch Only."

Banner Pricing

Always a challenge, but here is a pretty good summary that could help:

<https://costhack.com/large-format-printing-cost/>

Based in part of this article let's say the average price per square foot for full color printing is about \$8/sq.ft. so \$8/ sq.ft. times 18 sq.ft. is \$144 including grommets and rope to hanging. Repeat customer so no setup charges.

Banner Concepts

Use stock photo on a table with dishes and maybe glass like the picture. Make sure the information is legible and readable from the street.

Banner Extras

Let's create some small decals, 50 of them to give to the customer so they can give them to their customers. Maybe we can get more in a new order.

Banner Design

10 Oz Banner. Bleed the images edges so the 1 ½ inch fold does not show white on edge. Use banner tape and ½ in grommet holes, three on top and 3 on bottom 1 inch from edge.

Banner Editing

Send an approval design to the customer for comments and possible edits limited to one edit without charge.

Banner Output

Print on HP latex printer, 10 oz Banner media.

Banner Install

Customer will install. We might need to give the customer some suggestions.

Banner Archiving

Save all info on D: drive. Be sure to fill out job info.

Banner Extras

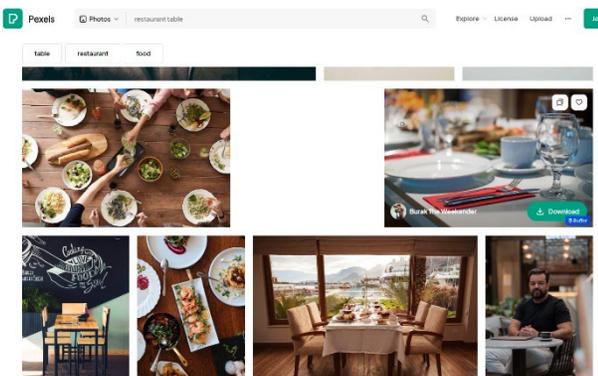
Create a few decals for the customer to give to the public.

Banner project: Illustrator or Flexi?

Both can create the design, but Flexi will have all the manufacturing features, like grommet placement, artwork approval tool, printer output, easy decal making with print and cut, RIP software and archiving. Let me show you and judge for yourself if you are an Illustrator user.

Search For an Image

There are some really good images on www.pexels.com that are free to use in any job without need for purchase or worry over rights. Here is a few and I like the one in the upper right so I'll try that one.



Design the Banner in Flexi



Here is our customer design. What did we do? (Note: I am not a designer and have no training in design, so this is just an example from someone with little design talent. I'm sure others would do an even better job of designing for sure! LOL)

1. We searched www.pexels.com for a table settings image and google for the oysters on the plate.
2. We opened Flexi and defined a document (artboard) size of 6ft by 3 ft.
3. We imported the customer image and resized it to about the document size in order to position the design element approximately in the same location.
4. We drew the triangle, inclined and painted it using some of the colors from the customer image.
5. We drew the leaning orangish bar and painted it.
6. We drew a customer vector over the table picture and masked it.
7. We selected the table picture and used some blending modes and bitmap filters to adjust the color shading to a more orangish color.
8. We added the text over a brownish background.
9. We added ½ grommet location across the top and bottom.
10. We added a fold line with a bleed.

Send Banner Design for Customer Approval

Use the Flexi Artwork approval tool to send the design to the customer for approval.



Add critical information such as a comment to the Customer and the artwork description.

Approval Job Information	
*Approval job name:	Banner Example
*Customer name:	Mark Rugen
*Customer email:	mrugen@mail.com
**Confirm customer email:	mrugen@mail.com
Comments:	Here is your banner design for you approval. let us know if you need changes, if not we can print and have this banner ready by this afternoon.
Artwork description:	3 foot x 6 foot full color printed banner on 13 oz banner media, hemmed with gromets.
Artwork width:	6 ft
Artwork height:	3 ft
Order number:	1234
Project code:	Banner 2024-103
<input type="button" value="Submit"/> <input type="button" value="Cancel"/>	

Your customer will receive an email with a link to this page allowing them to review the project. By soft proofing the image as it will print, the colors will be close to how the printer will output the file so as not to lead the customer into thinking colors will print brighter than the media and ink will allow.

Mark Rugen

Artwork for Approval

Job Info

Approval Job Name
Banner Example

Customer Name
Mark Rugen

Customer Email
mrugen@mail.com

Order Number
1234

Comments
Here is your banner design for you approval. let us know if you need changes, if not we can print and have this banner ready by this afternoon.

Artwork Description
3 foot x 6 foot full color printed banner on 13 oz banner media, hemmed with gromets.

Artwork Width
72.000in

Artwork Height
36.000in

Project Code
Banner 2024-103

Review your artwork. Click and select on the artwork to add a comment. Click Send Comments. If you do not have any changes, signify your approval by clicking Approve.




REV-1

06 Nov 14:50

Comments (0)

Note: Colors shown do not always accurately depict actual printed color
This artwork is submitted for your proposed project. It is not to be used, reproduced, copied or exhibited without written consent.

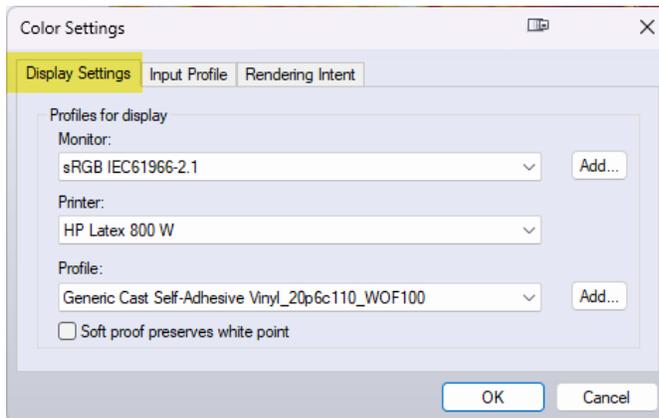
The customer can now review the project, add comments or approve and you will receive notice of approval along with a link to download the image if needed.

Prepare the Banner for Output

In the previous portion, I mentioned soft proofing of the image. This is a process in Flexi that allows you, the designer, to “preview” output from the printer and make any final adjustments if needed. It is quick and easy to set up and use in Flexi Complete.

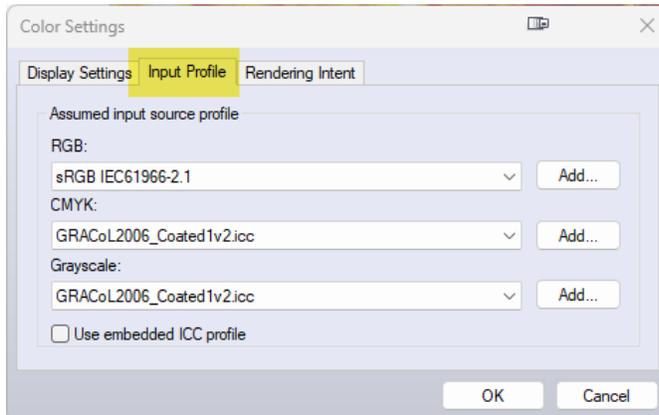
Setting Up Soft Proofing

Simple go to the Edit menu of Flexi and choose Color Settings. Set the Monitor profile, printer and ICC profile. No other changes are typically needed, but you can also affect color output by altering the input profiles and rendering intents.



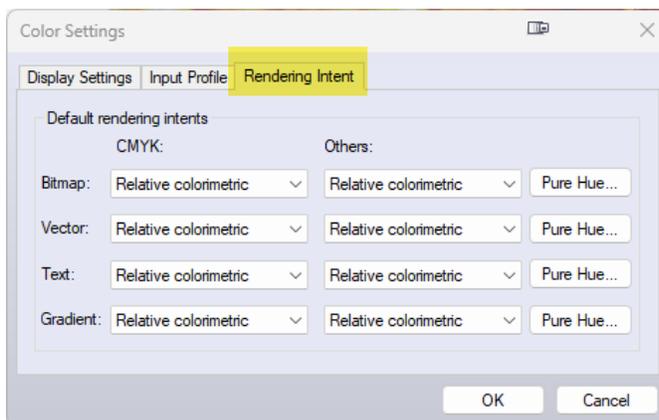
Display Settings

Set the Monitor Profile to sRGB or use a customer monitor profile if you have one.



Input Profile

Leave set to sRGB, but if you wish to change it, using something like Adobe1998 would saturate colors.



Rendering Intent

Relative is used to more accurately render colors, but Perceptual may allow for a little wider range of color.



Original Image without soft proof



Soft Proof On showing printer preview. Colors may be slightly muted.

In our case the print colors are fairly stable for the color settings chosen.

If we simply change the input profile to WIDE GAMUT, we will get the following result in printing:



If you examine the image closely, you can see a bit more color saturation and color vibrance.

The choices are for you to make.

Banner Job Extras

Print & Cut Decal

As a way to create loyalty and perhaps some future business, we will create a small set of decals that this customer can give away. If the customer likes them, perhaps they will order more!

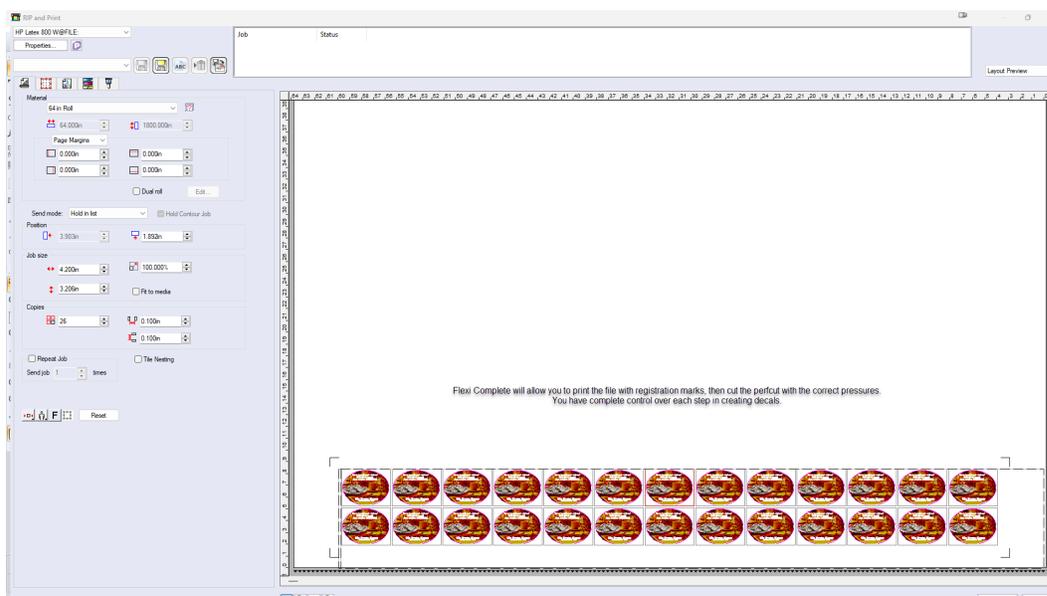


We will use some of the elements of the banner, mask it in an oval, add some test and then a PerfCut. Easy in Flexi.

In this design, I simply used the table and oyster images, masked them in an oval, added the test and then added the perfcut line all in about 5 minutes.

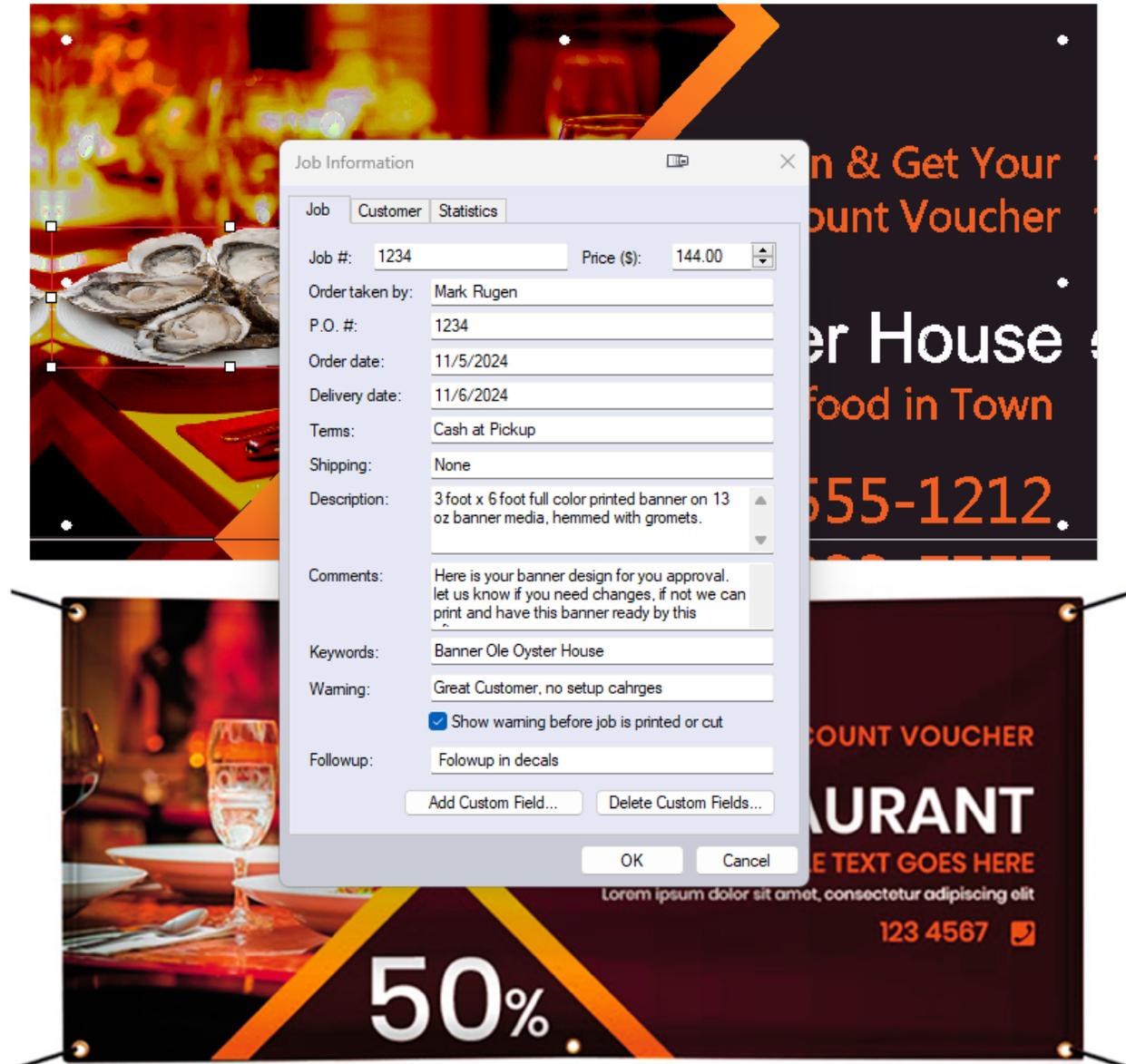
This is ready to print and cut and flexi allows for an easy way to set up the 25 copies.

You will have complete control of printing, registration marks and cutting pressure right from Flexi Complete.



Banner Job Archive

Now, once the job is done, let's add some customer info, save the job in the Flexi Complete format as well as export as a PDF for future use.



Saving job info will allow you to find the job in the future by searching by customer name, day, keywords and more. In addition, statistics will show things like the overall print area etc.

Video: Flexi Complete Banner Project and Print & Cut Decal

Play the video below to see the entire design process in Flexi Complete.



The Two Faces of Design.

Should I use Adobe Illustrator, or Flexi Complete?

The differences & when to use each one.

Need More Training or Want to Find Out More About Flexi Complete?

If you already have Flexi Complete but would like to see if training could help your workflow, it's time to try out our learning services at www.Adendo.com.



Adobe Illustrator – Creating the Same Banner

Let's create the same banner project but use Adobe Illustrator instead. I caution everyone, I am not a consistent user of Illustrator and those that may have shortcuts for what I am about to do, but it will at least give you some idea of how a casual user might create the banner just made in Flexi.

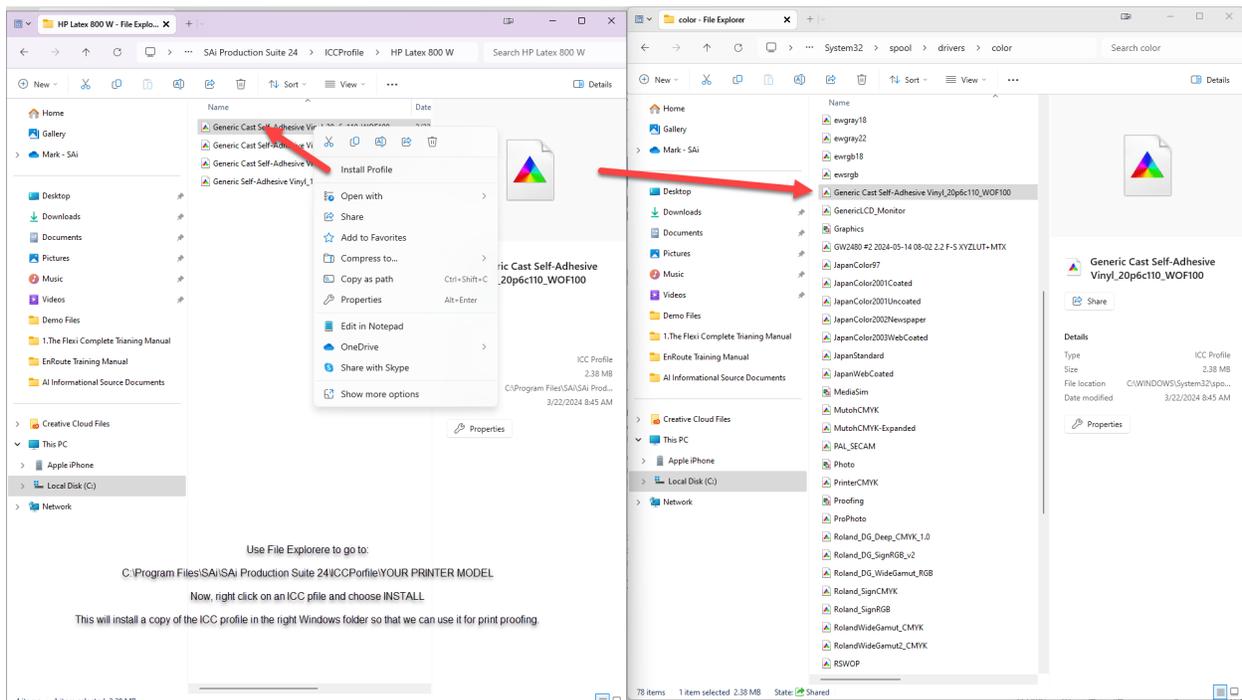
In addition, there is no Artwork Approval Tool in Illustrator, there is no gromet or finisher tool and of course not RIP output so, we will show how to design the file, BUT we will also CONNECT Adobe Illustrator to the Flexi Production Manager for additional preparation for printing.

Preparing Illustrator for Wide Format Printing & Design

The first step in using Illustrator for design and production to a wide format printer is to place a few printer/media ICC profiles in the appropriate Windows folder. Doing so will give Illustrator the ability to soft proof how the design will print on the printer.

Move ICC Profiles to the Windows ICC Folder

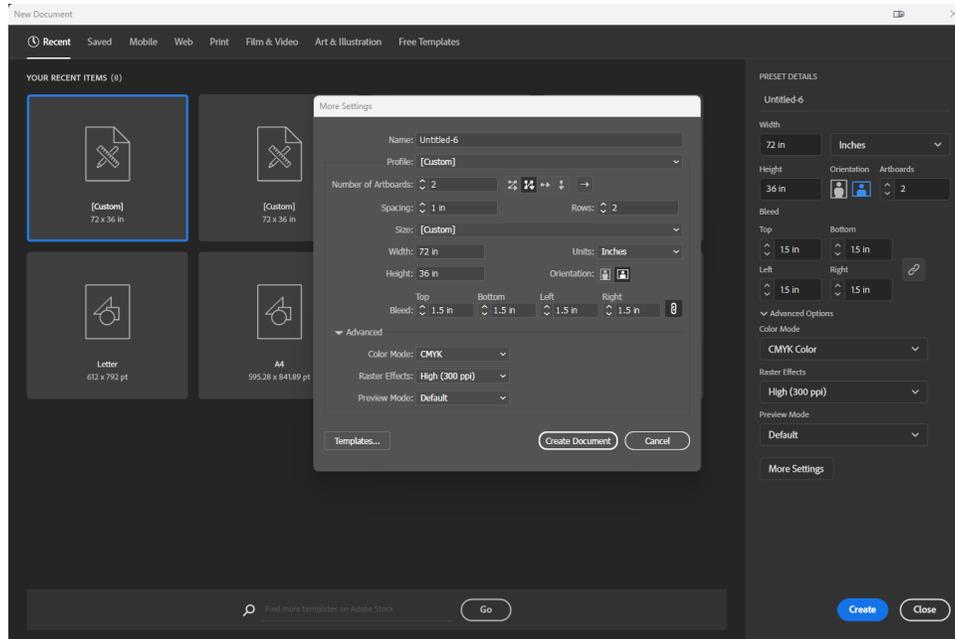
Go to the SAI Flexi folder that has all the printers and ICC Profiles. Right click on whatever ICC profiles you might use for printing and choose install. This action will install a copy of the ICC in the right Windows folder and give access to Illustrator for soft proofing purposes.



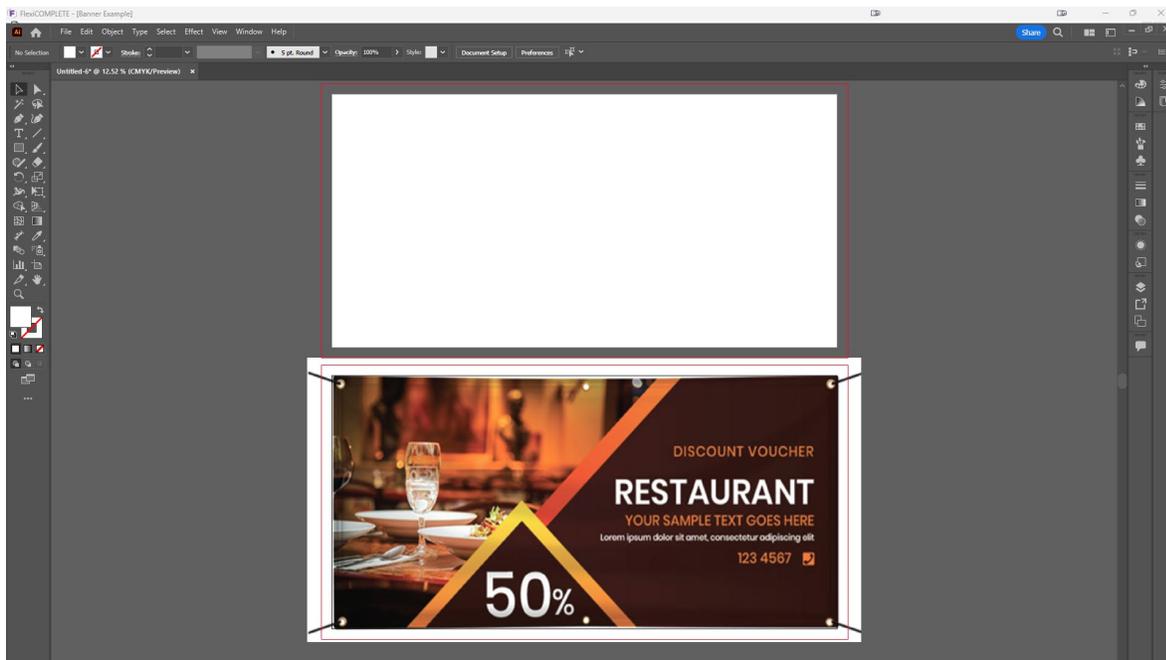
We will show you how to use these profiles to preview printing colors later in our workflow.

Set up the Artboard in Illustrator

We need to define the artboard or boards to the size of our design or some scale of the final design. So in our case we want TWO artboards 3ft by 6 ft. I recommend spacing the artboard at least 1 inch apart.

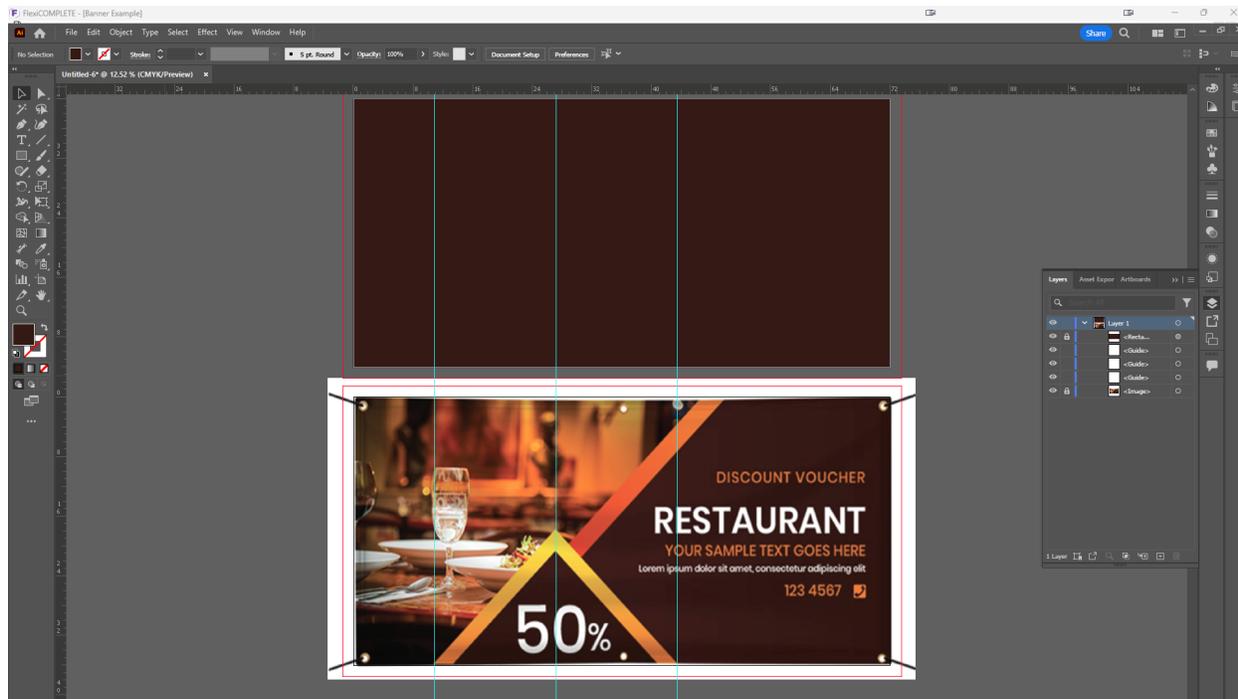


Place the customer file in the bottom artboard and align it to fit the artboard.



Set Up the Design Artboard

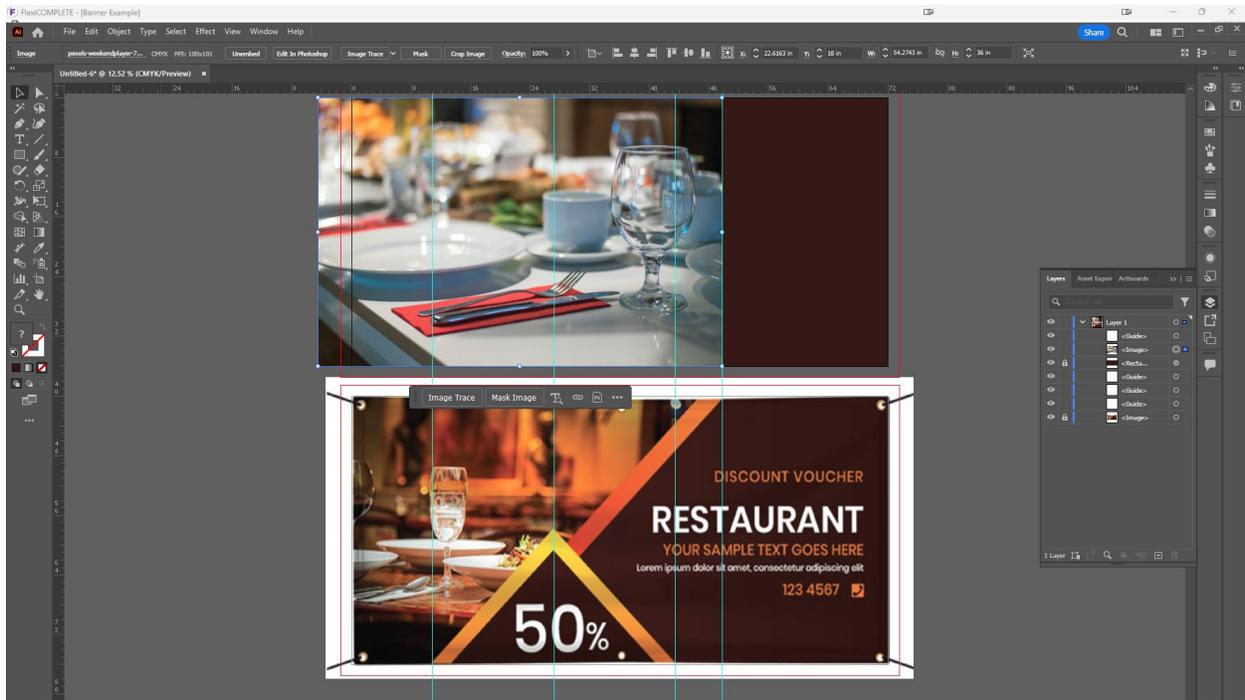
Now, we begin our design. Add a rectangle to the size of the artboard, use the color picker to sample the color from the customer file and paint the rectangle. You should then LOCK the rectangle layer and begin adding guidelines.



In this example, I added guidelines as seen to allow me to draw a similar path the same general size as the customer file. These steps will vary from project to project.

Add the Bitmap of the Table

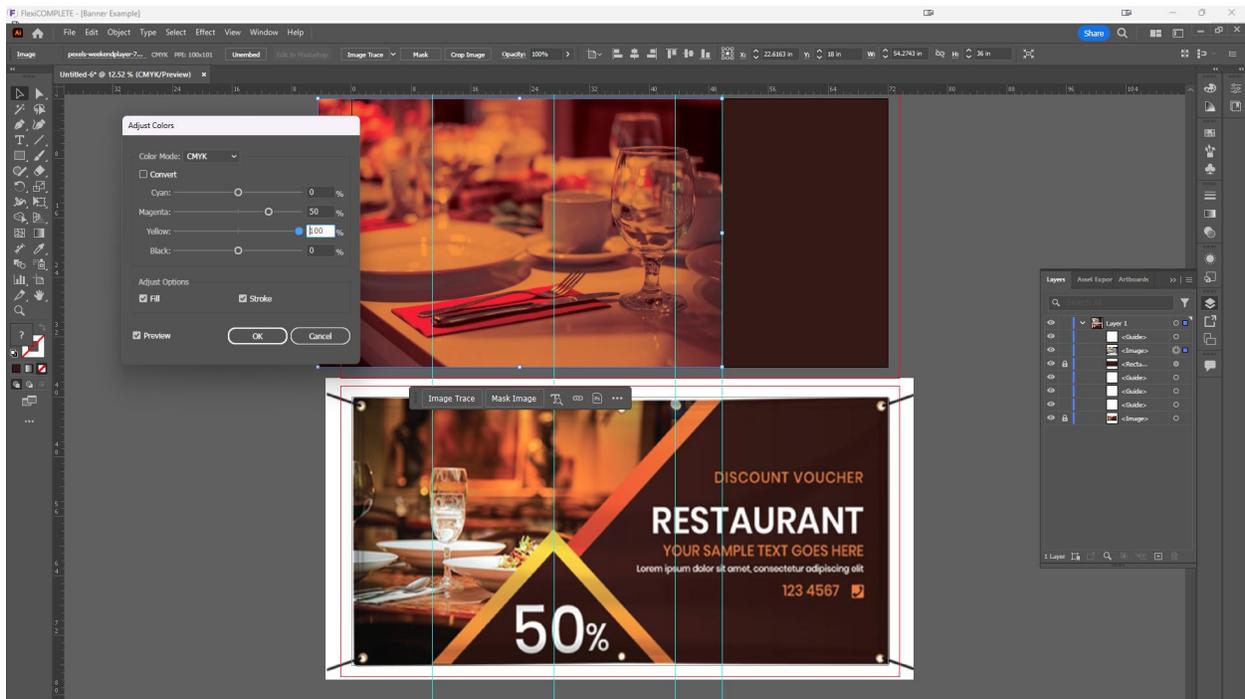
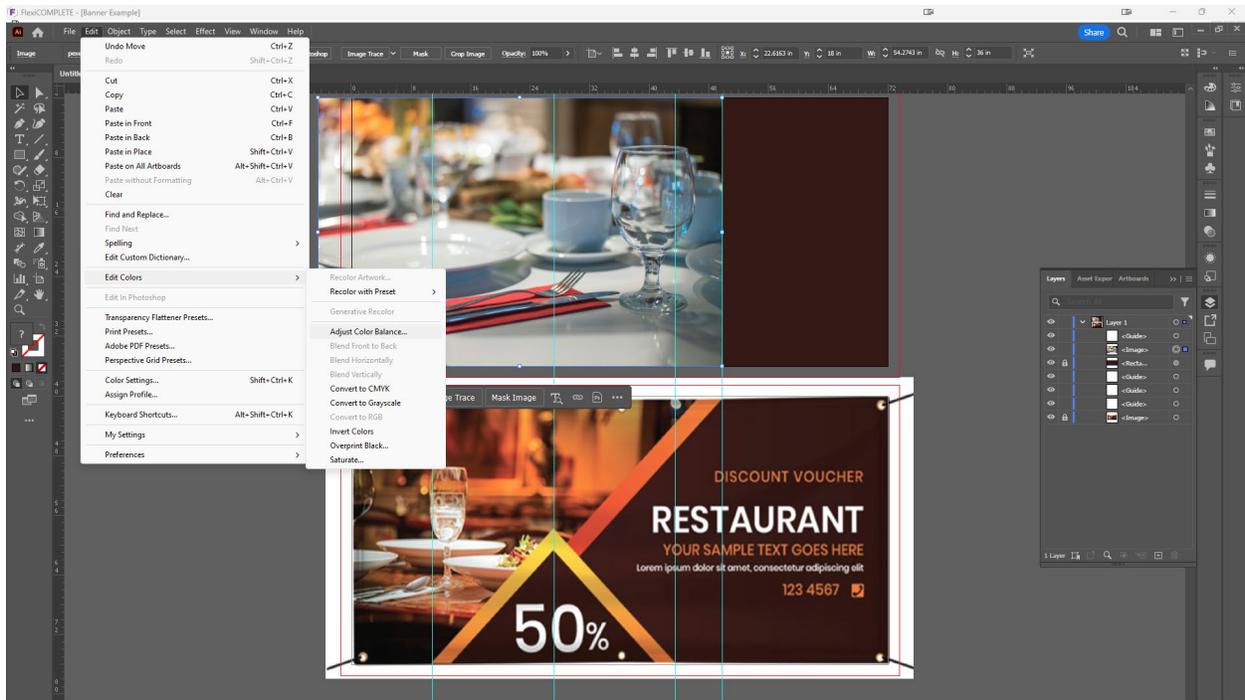
Now we can add the bitmap of the restaurant table to the design board and some additional guidelines for placemet.



The guidelines are used to mark off strategic places where I may need to snap vector paths to.

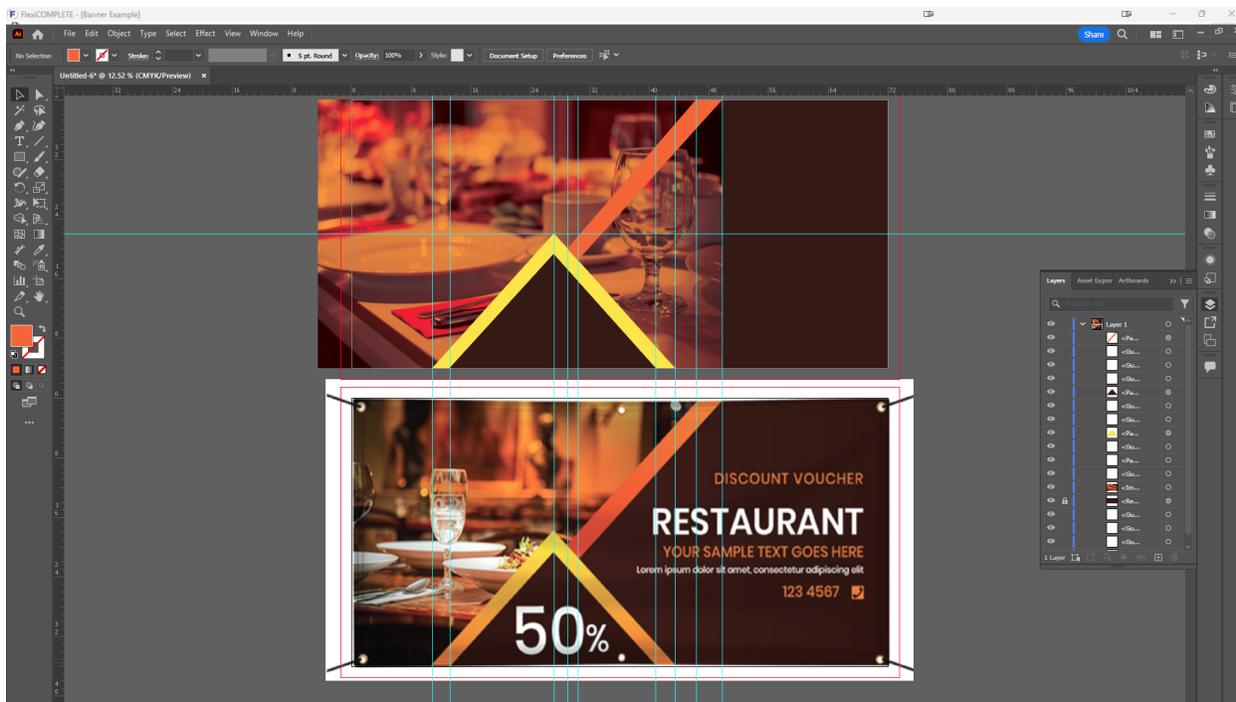
Adjust the Bitmap and Add Effects

We will use Illustrators bitmap editing feature to add some effects to the bitmap to attain a similar look to the customer file.

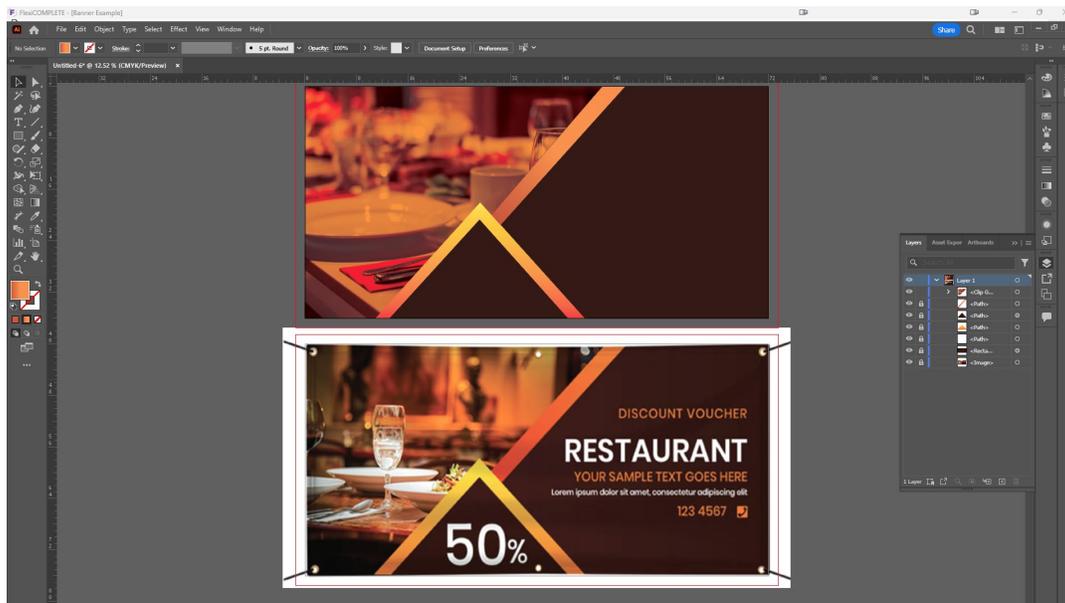


Create the Geometry

This may take a little time depending on your skill level, but we want to create the triangle and the slanted rectangle. I've added strategic guidelines to assist me in this.



I used the pen tool to create geometry. I then filled them with a gradient using the appropriate colors and adjusted the gradient.



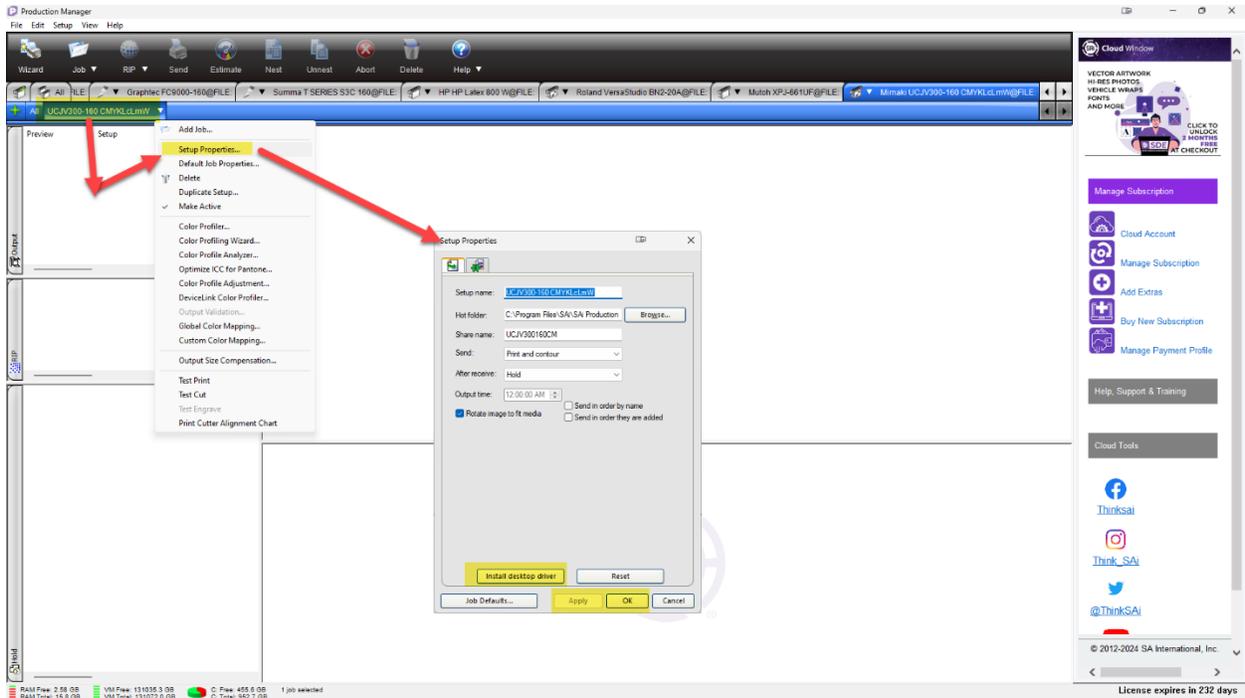
Add the Text

I added the text to the artboard.



The design is finished, but we need to soft proof the design to assure we are going to get the printed output colors we want. This is why we added the ICC profiles to Windows.

ADOBE ILLUSTRATOR VS. FLEXI COMPLETE

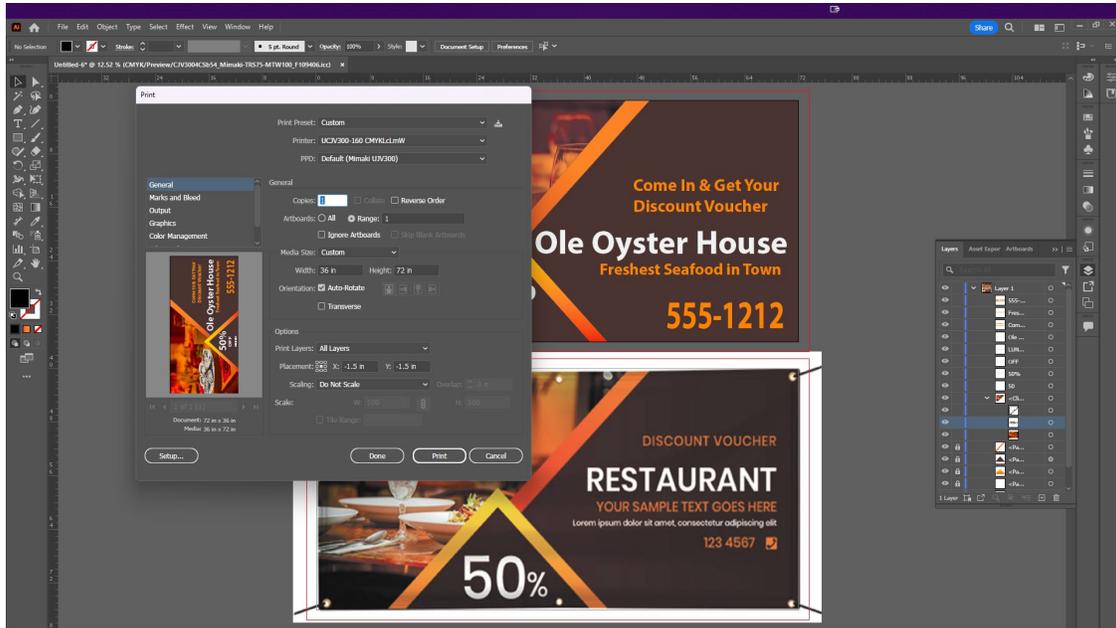


This is the Flexi Production Manager. When a printer is set up, you can choose the setup menu and as you can see the resulting dialog box has a button near the bottom that says, “Install Desktop driver”. Click that and Flexi will install the printer driver in Windows.

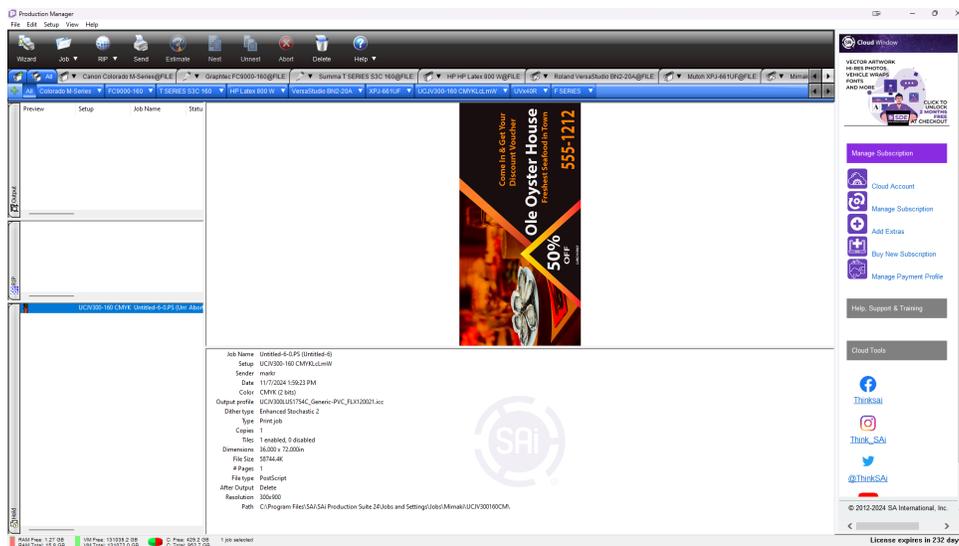
Now any program with a print capability can send files directly to the Production Manager.

Print the Design

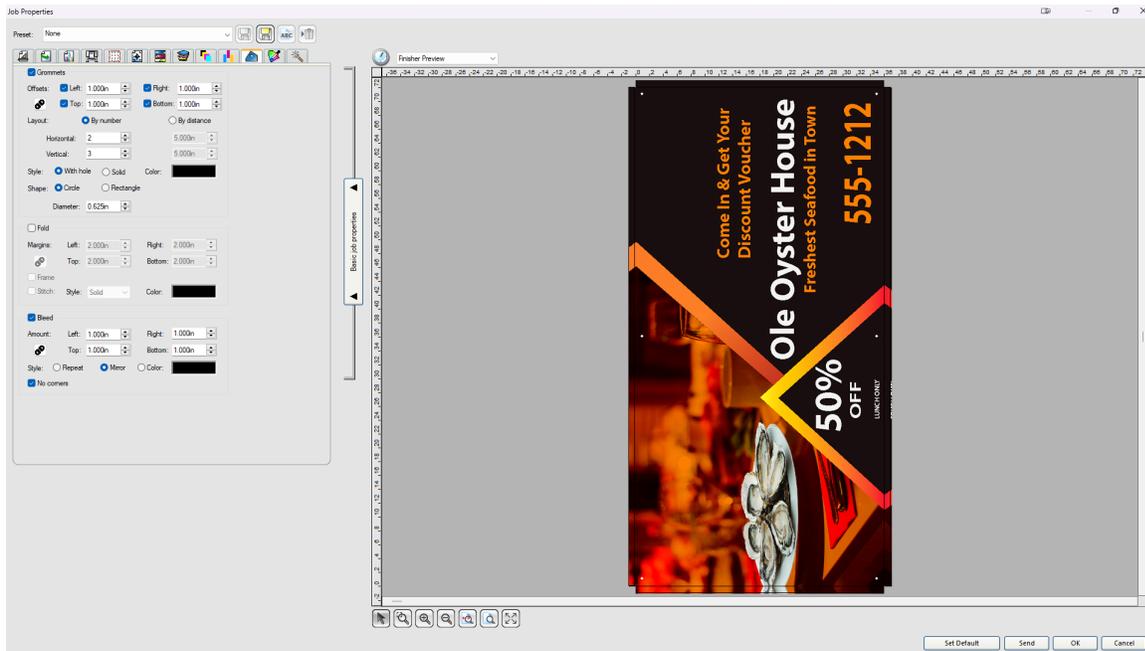
Back in Illustrator, choose to print the file, just like you would to a desktop printer, but choose the name of your wide format printer. You'll get a menu such as the once seen here.



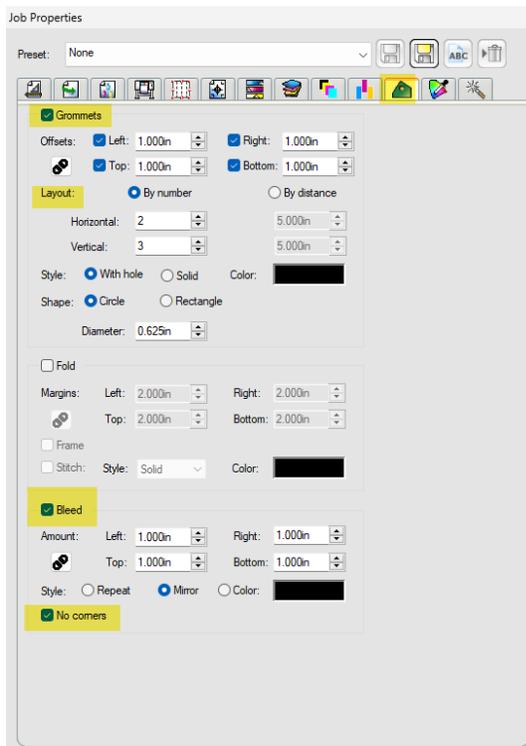
There are a couple of options that need attention. One is the media size, choose custom and set that to the design size or artboard size. You'll know if it's right because you now see the entire design in the preview area. Since we had TWO artboards open, we need to limit the Artboard option to 1 so it only sends the design created. Send the file and it then transfers to the Production Manager.



Double-Click the image Name and Add Finishing Options



Double-click the file name and this will open the Job Properties dialog screen. This is where you can add additional options to your print, such as gromets, folds, bleeds etc.



This is where you add gromet holes. The banner will print with the location is white or any color you choose so you know where to punch the holes.

You can add a bleed, and I did some here and even mirrored the bleed so that when I fold it over and tape the hem, there is no white line.

We have an entire eCourse on using Flexi and Production manager and in fact, we have Flexi Complete Training manuals that is over 600 pages with 140 videos to show you everything.

VIDEO: Adobe Illustrator Banner Design



**The Two Faces of
Design.**

**Should I use Adobe
Illustrator or Flexi
Complete?**

**The differences & when
to use each one.**

The Choice is Clear

I think the choice is clear, both programs will work, but with a little learning, Flexi can be used 90% of the time! But hey, if you're one of those diehard people that insist on Illustrator....we can make it happen as well.

Get More Info on Flexi Complete

Want more info on Flexi Complete? Just click the image below or this link:

<https://www.thinksai.com/products-flexi-family/>



To learn more about anything wide format, visit us at:

www.adendo.com

<https://adendo.freshlearn.com/home-page>

