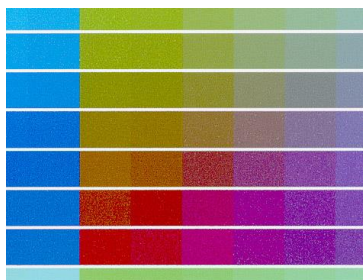


Digital Printing Insights #3: Print “white noise”

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“...I am having an issue that I wonder if you could help me with. It is best described as “white noise” in mostly the yellow, yellow/ green, yellow/red colors. It does not appear in the file as such and I have made sure all colors are “in gamut” before printing. It does not appear in test swatches of solid yellow – it is a little baffling to me.”



What Paul describes here is a byproduct of *dithering*. That is, how the continuous tone of an original digital file is translated into the tiny droplets of ink of which inkjet prints are composed. The dot size (referred to as “picoliter” size) and smoothness of those dots is governed by the printer, firmware/software, and ultimately the coating of your preferred inkjet paper. And here’s the rub: not all inkjet papers are created equally. Not even close.

Some are coated considerably better than others, resulting in much smoother prints that show no visible dithering (except under magnification).

Take a close look at the color patches on the attached sample (which has been enlarged to show more obvious detail), Calumet Photo’s Brilliant Double Sided Matte. Note how evident is the dithering; this is what Paul described as “white noise”. Note that anytime you use third-party papers (non-Epson, non-HP, etc.), you must make the media selection that the paper manufacturer recommends. This media selection determines how much ink is laid down on the paper, but in some cases (like this one) it may not necessarily be the best media selection for the paper. In looking at this sample I think you’ll agree that this level of visible dithering is not acceptable. You have two choices in this case: try different media selections for improved ink coverage/dithering (make sure that the blacks do not bleed!), or try a different paper altogether. Unless you are stuck on a particular paper, I wouldn’t recommend fussing with media selections to get better results when out there are many other outstanding papers that print very well according to the paper manufacturer’s specifications. In short, if something resembling “white noise” is evident in your prints and is not visible in the original digital file, the paper you are using could be the #1 culprit. Look closely!

If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions for future Printing Insights, I would love to hear them! Thanks for reading.