



SMARTPRESS

2026



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Every printed piece begins with a digital file. Smartpress analyzed more than 1.1 million files submitted by customers to examine the software behind print artwork and identify meaningful differences in file readiness, production requirements and print spend.

For businesses that print marketing assets, this information can connect design software decisions with operational and financial outcomes. For printers, it can provide insight into customer acquisition and lifetime value.

INDUSTRY EXPERTISE DELIVERED
VIA YEARS OF ANALYSIS OF OVER

1M
FILES

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This analysis evaluates a subset of a two-year sample of customers, drawing on automated document properties captured from over 1.1 million PDF files submitted to Smartpress between September 2024 and September 2026. Print spend data utilizes a 12-month rolling spend deduplicated at the individual level. For customers utilizing multiple authoring tools, attribution is assigned to the software representing the plurality of their submitted artwork.



PROFESSIONAL DESIGN TOOLS STILL DOMINATE PRINT

FILE SOURCES:

66%

ADOBE INDESIGN, ILLUSTRATOR

These tools produce files with characteristics better suited for commercial print, including appropriate bleed, color settings and image resolution.

68% 2025

18%

CANVA

While generally arriving more print-ready than files from other consumer-oriented tools, Canva-generated files still experience challenges in color space and non-standard page dimensions.

16% 2025

16%

OTHERS COMBINED

PHOTOSHOP, MICROSOFT OFFICE, BROWSERS, SYSTEM-LEVEL PDF TOOLS AND OTHER APPLICATIONS

These tools may produce acceptable on-screen results, but often require additional intervention for print production, adding time and potential quality tradeoffs to production.

16% 2025



SOFTWARE CHOICE CAN AFFECT PRODUCTION READINESS

Digital doesn't always mean print-ready. A file that looks finished on screen may still need work before it reaches the press, thus affecting the speed of production and quality of final results. Common print-readiness issues include:

DESIGN

RGB COLOR SPACE



Common in Canva, Microsoft Office and browser PDFs

LOW-RESOLUTION IMAGES



More frequent in Canva and Word files

MISSING BLEED



Common in Word, Publisher and Apple Pages

NON-STANDARD DIMENSIONS



Often found in Canva and Photoshop files

EXCESSIVE FILE SIZES



More common with Photoshop and Illustrator files

PRINT

These issues create additional file preparation time, cause quality issues and require additional proofing cycles, ultimately degrading the end-user experience and reducing the overall value delivered to the buyer.



THE OPPORTUNITY

UNDERSTAND THE FILE BEHIND THE PRINT

Authoring software can provide companies a useful signal about how the design-to-print workflow impacts their efficiency and future results.

BUSINESSES

SHOULD USE THESE INSIGHTS TO:

- Identify and prevent potential production issues earlier
- Improve file-preparation guidance and speed to production
- Understand differences in printing behavior and outcomes

PRINTERS

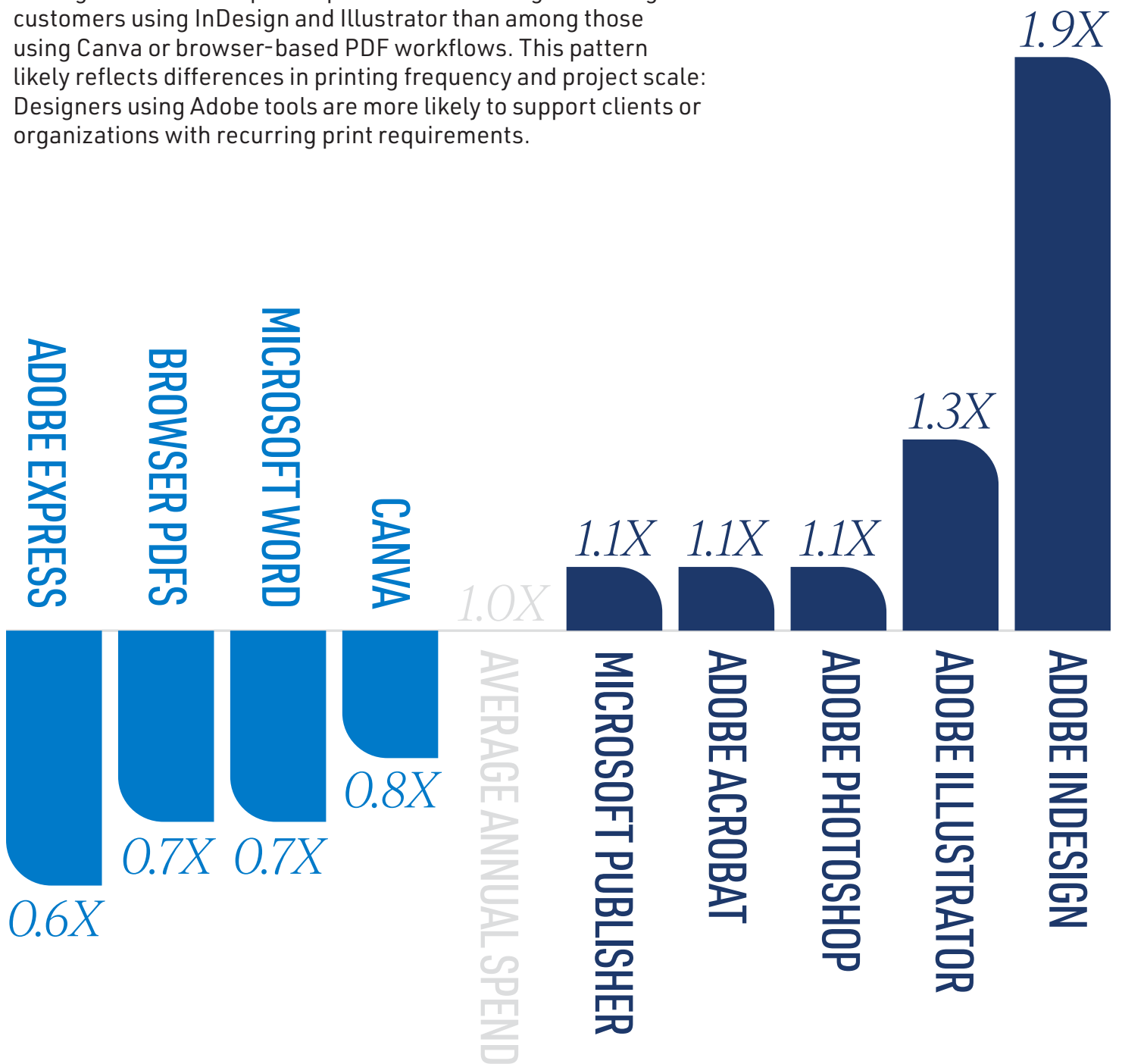
SHOULD USE THESE INSIGHTS TO:

- Guide customers to use appropriate software and file export settings to optimize print quality and reduce file preparation time
- Evaluate customer lifetime-value modeling for segmentation and acquisition strategies
- Gain context about a customer's potential print engagement



SOFTWARE CHOICE CORRELATES WITH PRINT SPEND

Average annual Smartpress spend is 2.5 times higher among customers using InDesign and Illustrator than among those using Canva or browser-based PDF workflows. This pattern likely reflects differences in printing frequency and project scale: Designers using Adobe tools are more likely to support clients or organizations with recurring print requirements.





ADOBE USERS ARE RUNNING THE MOST CURRENT VERSIONS

- InDesign and Illustrator users generally work with recent versions of the software.
- Most common versions are within one or two releases of the current version, consistent with active Creative Cloud usage.



*Adobe users up-to-date
within 2 releases*



CANVA EMERGES AS A KEY PLAYER IN COMMERCIAL PRINT

- Nearly one in five files analyzed originated in Canva, up from an estimated 5-10% in 2022. And 81% of Canva users are business customers rather than consumers.
- Canva is becoming an important part of commercial print workflows.

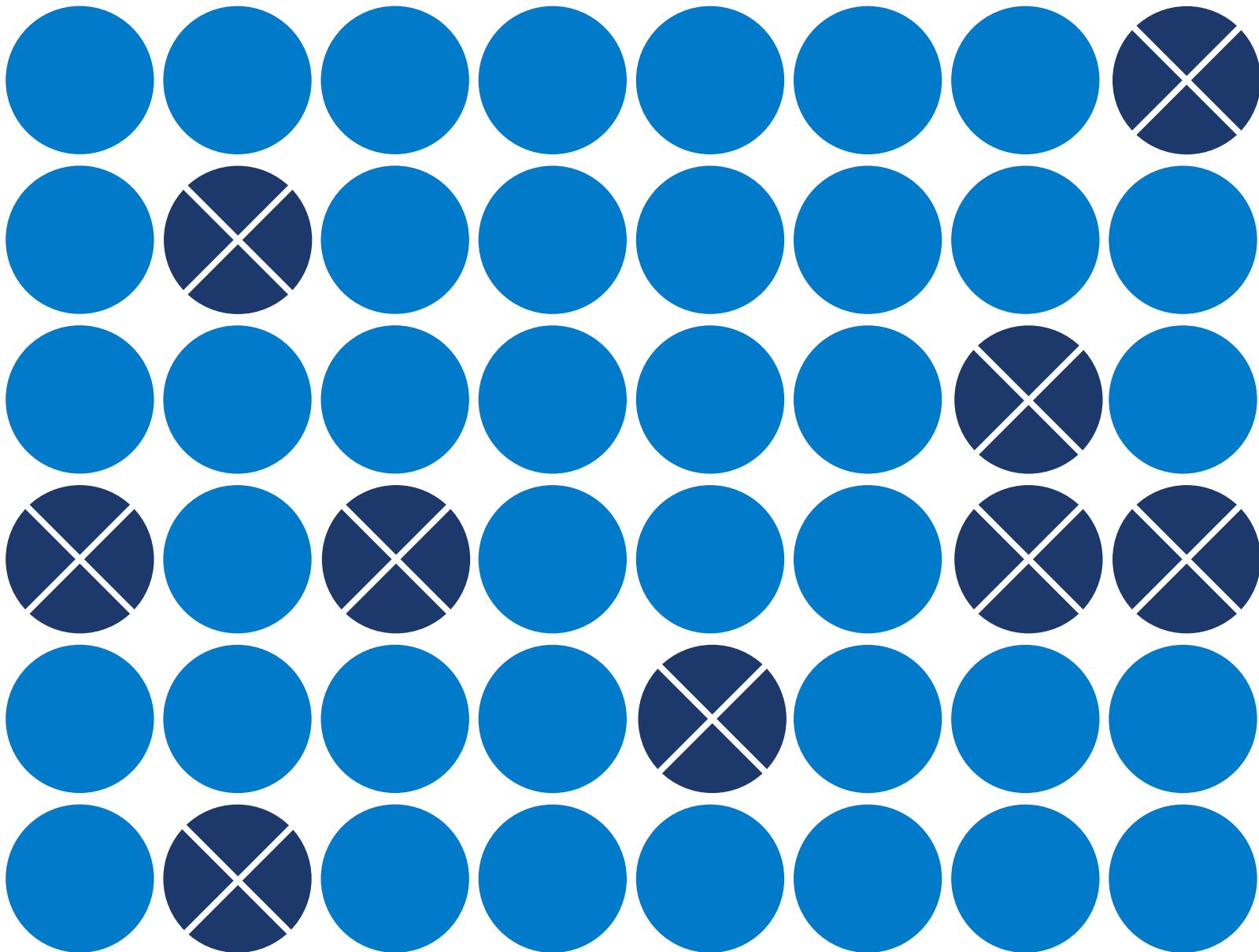


*One in
every
five files
came
from
Canva*



PROGRAMMATICALLY-CREATED PRINT FILES HAVE THE MOST ISSUES

- System-level PDF creation - PDFs generated directly by software rather than design programs - is an increasingly visible part of the print workflow.
- These files are rarely optimized for commercial print production and have the highest rate of file preparation intervention and quality issues.





AI ADVANCES INTO PRINT FILE CREATION

- Although the share of AI tools is still very small (0.1% in 2026), it grew by 25x compared to the previous year.
- This is a trend that will be interesting to watch as AI tools become more prevalent and adopted. It's worth noting, these files are rarely print-ready and more likely to need intervention.

25X

growth year over year

THE SOFTWARE BEHIND A PRINT FILE PROVIDES INSIGHT INTO PRODUCTION READINESS, OPERATIONAL FRICTION AND CUSTOMER VALUE

*- it connects the digital tools used to
create artwork with what happens when
that artwork becomes physical print.*





SMARTPRESS

Smartpress is a leading commercial printer known for their premium print, world-class service and sustainability. The 100% employee-owned company produces everything from custom brochures and booklets to signage, mailers and more.

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