

## Submitting Artwork Via Email or Disk

VSN is a one woman operation and the logistics of returning artwork sent in for publication is frankly more than I can keep up with. For this reason, I have always asked that you only send artwork that you do not need returned. But sometimes, you need to keep your artwork and want to submit it too. Depending on the artwork and your computer graphics skills, submitting your artwork via computer file can be the perfect solution – or a real headache. The following tips should help keep that ache away but you do need some basic computer graphics skills (or need a friend who can help you out) to submit artwork this way.

First, keep in mind that every publication has its own guidelines for artwork submissions in general and for computer files in particular. If you are creating an artwork file for submission to another publication, please check with them to see what they need before spending a lot of time on it! Requirements for cards that will be posted online have a different set of requirements. Again, check with the folks behind the web site to see what they need before sending artwork computer files!

The artwork you see in each issue of VSN is reproduced in each issue through one of two routes. If you send in a card, I will normally scan the card to create a computer file using my flatbed scanner. (I have an ArtixScan 1800f from Microtek.) Sometimes I will instead take a digital photograph of the artwork. (I have a Nikon CoolPix 995.) I scan more cards than I photograph, but I might take a digital photo if the artwork is too large for the scanner, dimensional (like a box), or needs to be shown at an angle impossible for a flatbed scanner. Sometimes I have problems with color accuracy and will try both methods to get the best result possible.

The first thing you need to understand about submitting artwork for print is that you need a higher resolution than you need for posting on a web page. For example, many of the images you see on a typical web site are 72 to 100 dpi resolution and they look great. But have you ever printed out one of these pictures only to find the image looks pixilated? That is due to the resolution. VSN's artwork is usually 300 dpi resolution for color or grayscale art and 600 dpi for black/white line art (like most stamp images you see in a catalog.)

If you scan a card for submission to VSN, it is important that you set your scanner to 300 dpi resolution. Do NOT scan the card at 72 dpi and then use image editing software to just bump the resolution up to 300 dpi. "Dpi" stands for dots per inch. If the scanner only records 72 dots per inch in the first place, all the information it has to fill the image out to 300 dpi is those original 72 dots per inch, so the resolution will still look low. (You CAN get around this problem if you reduce the physical size – the height/width – when you increase the resolution, but if you scan your card at 100% and 72 dpi, this means that your card will need to get very tiny – maybe only an inch or so high!)

When scanning (or photographing), make sure that the entire card is being scanned – that you don't accidentally cut off a corner for example. It is better to make the scan bigger than the card, showing a bit of background than to lose part of the card. (I can always delete unnecessary background and straighten out a crooked scan on this end, but I can't always "grow back" a missing section of the card!) Usually either a solid white or solid black background is appropriate for scanning or photographing cards. (Solids are easier to remove if needed later.)

If you are scanning something that wants to roll on the scanner's glass – like a pen for example – you can sometimes get away with putting it between two things that will stay put – maybe a wood mount on either side for example. As long as the blocking item(s) doesn't obscure any part of the rolling item, we can remove the blocking item(s) from the picture using graphics software later. My scanner's lid will adjust to accommodate thicker items, but if yours doesn't, you might try putting your artwork on the scanner glass, covering the artwork with a box (to make a dark scanning environment) and scanning with the lid open. Make sure the scanner glass is clean. If your artwork has embellishments that might scratch the glass, you might lay a clean, clear piece of plastic down first to

protect the scanner glass. (This may not work with all scanners – experiment and see if it is helpful with yours.)

If you instead take a digital photograph of the card, you may worry that your camera takes 72 dpi photos and think that you can't use this to create a file at the right resolution. The nifty trick with digital camera files is that they are usually 72 dpi but have huge dimensions. So for example, if you use graphic software to look at the image size, you may be surprised to find that your 4" by 6" card is well over 20" high and wide! This is a blessing in disguise because you can use graphics software to increase the resolution and bring it down to a reasonable size for printing.

This is a case where you either need to make this change correctly or don't do it at all! In other words, either send the original unchanged 72 dpi jpg digital camera file with the huge physical dimensions and let me deal with it or do the conversion yourself in the correct way. Half-way doesn't work. For example, if you take your file and reduce the physical size without increasing the resolution at the same time, you will wind up with a picture that prints out at the correct size but is too low in resolution to be usable in print.

The following instructions can be used to size your file. If you can accomplish this, great! If you can't, don't worry. Instead send the unaltered file and a print out of how the card is supposed to look.

I use PhotoShop as my graphics software. I shared this information with a VSN reader recently who uses PhotoShop Elements software and she confirmed that it worked with her software as well. If you use different graphics software, you may need to experiment and/or read the manual or program help to accomplish something similar.

In PhotoShop, open up the "Image Size" menu and increase the resolution from 72 dpi to 300 dpi while the "resample image" box is unchecked. You should notice that the height and width decrease automatically when you do this. Doing it this way increases the image resolution to something printable and reduces the height/width to something reasonable at the same time. If you do it in two separate steps, it doesn't seem to work as well. Changing both the resolution and the width/height at the same time usually does the trick. Click OK to get out of the Image Size menu.

If you then need to make further changes to the height/width of the image, go back into the Image Size menu, check the "resample image" box (so that the resolution won't change when you change the dimensions this time) and adjust the height/width. Then click OK to get out of the menu.

Your scanner or digital camera is likely to scan your card in RGB color mode. This is a mode ideal for a computer screen, but that is fine. I print VSN in CMYK mode (the mode needed to create color separations for four-color presses) but I can convert your RGB file to CMYK on this end. There are color issues involved with this conversion, but if you send me a print of what your card is supposed to look like, I can correct for this.

Color accuracy is the big downside of artwork submitted via computer file. If you email me a file of your card, what I see is what I get – whether it is accurate or not! If your scanner or digital camera tends to be a bit weak on blues or strong on yellows for example, the card I see may be "off" color-wise and not true to the actual colors of the card. When you send the actual card, I work very hard adjusting the colors in the computer file to match the card as closely as possible. If I don't have the original card, I can only assume that the card's colors are correct and will print the colors as is.

If you scan or digitally photograph a card and have computer software to correct the colors, you can do this step yourself. Then you can email me the computer file. Ideally if you then can print out a copy of the card to send me showing the correct coloring, then I'll be sure that the color is as accurate as possible. (Obviously this assumes that you have a color printer.)

Finally, we need to touch on file formats. Most of the artwork printed in VSN is in tif format (i.e. "filename.tif".) This is a very good format for print. I can accept jpg files as well ("filename.jpg"), but keep in mind that jpg loses

quality every time it is saved. Jpg files tend to be smaller in size because they compress the file each time it is saved, throwing out some information in the process. If you save a file as a jpg, close it, open it and save it again, etc., each version of the file looks a little less good because a little more information is being thrown out each time. The first or second time you do it, you may not notice the difference, but save it enough times and it gets very noticeable. If your scanner or digital camera creates jpg files and you want to work with the file before sending it in to VSN, consider converting it to a tif file in your graphics program to do your editing, keeping the original jpg to go back to if you need it. Then send me the edited tif version.

Please do NOT create an artwork computer file and then send me the print out and not the file itself. I usually can not use artwork printed out in this way since I would have to scan the printout and the resulting quality is typically not high. Send the actual file and include the printout for reference.

Computer files can get very large, making them sometimes a pain to email. If your card is black/white or grayscale, be sure that it is not set to RGB or CMYK color (since your file doesn't need the color) to keep your file size smaller. Most cards shown in VSN wind up being 60% - 70% of their actual size, so you can also reduce the physical dimensions a little if you need to get your file size down. (Multiply the height or width by .6 or .7 and use that number for the height or width in your graphics program.) Files can also be compressed before sending using zip or Stuff-it compression utilities. Or you might instead find it easier to save your file to a disk and mail it. This may be necessary if the company that provides your email service has limits to the file size you can email. Even if they don't, large files can take a surprisingly long time to email even with a high-speed connection, so you may find sending the file by disk less frustrating.

Whether you send your artwork file as an attachment to an email or send it on a disk, make sure to include your name and address and what is in the attached email or enclosed disk. If it is for a particular issue theme or challenge, please mention that as well. I will not open any attachment or disk that does not have the contents very clearly identified. Remember too that I need stamp credits, a description of how you created your artwork and any notes on details in your piece that might not be immediately obvious from the picture file. If you have reduced your card to 60%-70% of actual size, please include a line listing the card's original dimensions.

All this said, keep in mind that not every card is a good candidate for sending via computer file. Some cards are very tricky to scan or photograph. There are usually a few cards in every issue that I spend hours on in order to get just right. Computer artwork files can have problems with color accuracy, glare, details getting lost, moiré patterns and more. Other cards are relatively easy to scan or photograph. You can't always anticipate which cards are going to be the tough ones! If you are good with graphics software, this may not be a problem for you. If you haven't done much with graphics software, it may realistically be less trouble to just send the actual card. What it really comes down to is this: Can you create a file that can be printed out on this end to look as much like the original card as possible? If you can, great! If you can't, reconsider sending in the actual card. The goal after all is to make your art look its best!