

PHOTO ID BADGE PRINTING PROJECT GUIDE



At **eXpress badging** we know what it's like to be in a position to choose the right photo ID badge printing solution. In fact, we deal with businesses every single day who are looking to solve that challenge. To ensure your photo ID badge solution is delivered in a timely, cost-effective manner, we've put together this buyer's guide to assist you in this process. Here are 16 tips you can reference to help you plan and prepare for your photo ID badge printing project so it is completed correctly and on time, the first time!



Know your issuance timelines and deadline

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If you have a pressing deadline, disclose it to your rebadge project team and vendors on day one. Build a rebadge scope of work including; milestone completion dates such as when the badge data and photo will be print-ready, badge designs approved, card testing approved, badges printed and shipped, badges issued, and distribution to your badged population.



Determine the number of ID badges required upfront

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Think about the various badge types that will help secure your environment and identify your entire population quickly with the glance of a badge. Badge types to consider include; employee, contractor, temporary, volunteer, visitors, etc. Determine the total number of each badge type needed and then ensure that you order enough non-personalized badges (visitor, temporary...) that you'll need for a year or two. The final quantity will help in reaching reduced pricing tiers.



Determine the number of ID badges required for ongoing issuance

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Knowing this metric will allow you to determine your ongoing annual badging budget. Count how many badges you'll need for new hires and replacements, then add 10%, and you'll have a good forecast number. You can use your W2 annual count, less your current employee count, to determine the number of annual new hires needed using a growth factor. Regarding replacements, factor in the number of badges needed for ones that are lost or damaged. Also, include badge replacements for name and department changes.



Identify your badged audience

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When calculating the population of those who will receive an ID badge, you'll need to consider who'll be wearing them within your environment. Considerations for photo ID badges include; employees, students, contractors, members, etc.

Other types of badges that may not require a photo include; temporary, visitor, vendor, volunteer, buddy badges, and information ID cards. When using sequentially numbered temporary badges, they become a powerful resource allowing immediate ID badge issuance for new hires and those who need a replacement while waiting on the permanent photo ID badge to arrive when using a contracted badging service. Buddy Badges are a good secondary badge resource that could add value when additional information needs to be quickly accessible to those in need.

Determine the print format that works best for your ID badged environment

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PRINT FORMATS: Color Front/Black Back, Color Front /Unprinted Back, or Color Front/Color Back.

As a rule, you'll print the front of your badge in color, so your logos, artwork, and photos look sharp and professional. Regarding the backside of an ID badge, do not overlook this valuable piece of real estate. There is no additional cost to print the backside in true black as long as it is not grayscale. Printing the backside in color will only nominally increase the cost.

Consider the backside of a badge as if it is a billboard on the side of a busy highway; many people will see it, and they will get empowered by its message. Otherwise, if left unprinted, many people will see it, and they'll receive no message at all! Impactful options of content for the back of a badge include; core values, emergency evacuation processes, referenced codes, and definitions. Another option is to duplicate the front of the ID card and print it on the backside, so when it flips over, there are no concerns about looking at a plain white piece of rectangular plastic.

When to use, and when not to use photos on your badge

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A properly cropped ID badge photo ensures that the bearer is the owner of the badge, with a strong degree of certainty. Most identification cards and badges will require a photo. Review topics such as; the photo file format (jpg and png), industry-standard cropping size (1" x 1¼"), photo retakes for aged photos over five years old, and photo capture processes to meet your project's needs. Additionally, there may be non-photo ID badges as previously mentioned (see *TIP #4*) to complete your project.

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FORMATS: RFID, Barcode, QR Code, HiCo Mag Stripe, No Tech Required.

It's time to roll up your sleeves and conduct some discovery. If a single solution supports your ID card technology, define the card technology's specifications used within the current or new system. There is no room for assuming, be 100% certain you've obtained the exact specifications needed for each system. Take photos of RFID box labels and save them. Document the barcode and magnetic stripe formats, if applicable. Look at invoices from previous orders, call the company that services the system, then document all facts. If the specification discovery becomes complex with multiple systems, multiple technologies, and multiple locations, create a spreadsheet for tracking all relevant information, and then save it in a secure location. Then you'll have a valuable tool to manage your current project and as a future technology reference. Imagine if you had this tool now!

Test all badges before mass printing, document all results, and have a sign-off process for formal approval and acceptance, per system. Do not assume the rebadge stock is perfect. Test, test, test! This results in 100% certainty that all badges will work once distributed. Create a testing contact list of personnel for each system that will require sign-off. This could be an additional tab in the discovery spreadsheet. When discovery is complete and approved, then audit it annually to keep current, rebadge, or not.



Photo and Data preparation

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It is all about the data! When preparing data for batch badge issuance, you must first clean up your source badge data, excluding all inactive badges and including only active badge data. Then ensure all data is correct regarding first and last names, departments, employee numbers, location names, badge type, etc. Determine to use current photos, or if new photos are needed.

One key element is the photo file name and how it is associated with the badge data. Start by confirming there is a “matching” identifier (employee number: 123456.jpg), or set of fields (last_first_emplID.jpg) within the data to link large quantities of photos to their associated record. Open up a sample set of photo files to be printed and determine if they are 100% the same aspect ratio. The industry standard is 1"W x 1.25"H. If they are not, then the photos must be cropped before printing.



Data and Photo management best practices

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Whether your organization has strict personally identifiable information (PII) practices and guidelines or not, you'll need to treat all badge data (photo and data) securely. Never email data! All PII documents and photos that are on your computer or server should be stored using encryption at rest. Never leave printed copies of badge data lists on your desk. Shred all PII documents before discarding. Now you're secure, and we can continue.

When transferring photo ID badge data outside of your organization's network, ensure you are using encryption in transit resources. These could be FTP, MFTP, or direct HTTPS secured imports into hosted solutions to selected contracted badge issuance vendors like eXpress badging.

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When designing a photo ID badge, it is important to enhance the security aspects of the design. The photo should be rectangular (1" x 1.25" cropped with 75% face). Print the first name using large fonts that can be read from four to five feet away. Use standard fonts like Arial for badge data and do not use fancy uncommon fonts. Logos should be prominent in size, easily recognizable, and omit any co-branded marketing tag lines that are difficult to read from a distance. Use color bars for quick internal referencing of departments and various badge types. If round photos are a must, make them an oval that matches most facial shapes.

Badge printing software uses design templates where data is merged within the design during the printing process. Your badge design is converted to a matching design template. Provide your badge rendering along with separate logos and other artwork files, meeting the system specification of the badge software and printer used. The final template is reviewed, proofed, and eventually used to batch-print all badges using merged badge data and photos. One key feature to note is "auto reduce," where the software will automatically reduce the font size of longer names until it fits without being truncated. If you request auto-reduce to be disabled, be aware that all provided data must fit; otherwise, truncation will occur once the characters exceed the field length within the design.

Reference our [Photo ID Design Center](#) for best practices.



Define your badge types

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Another key data element is the data that defines “badge type” selection during printing when using multiple badge designs or color-coding. Example: if Department equals “Security”, print the red color-bar badge, or if Certification equals “Forklift Certified I”, then print the yellow forklift icon on the badge. Your data must tell the story. We suggest creating a cross-reference table for complex designs to communicate badge-to-data relationships to your rebadge team.



To slot punch your badge, or not to slot

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Do not overlook this feature. When used correctly, it will eliminate the need for protective badge holders, making the badge much easier to wear and be prominently displayed. For badges that are slot punched, we recommend using composite PVC stock as a minimum requirement, then adding lamination, preventing the slotted area from cracking and breaking. There are some combo technology RFID cards that cannot be slot punched on the horizontal edge; however, most do not have this restriction.



Consider laminating all badges

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Most photo ID badges are printed on 100% PVC card stock and only have a very thin clear film applied during printing that is not much of a deterrent in protecting the badge from image fading, surface abrasion, and badge cracking. The addition of lamination will create a very durable badge and eliminate the need for clunky protective badge holders. When laminating, we recommend using a 1 MIL laminate, which requires composite PVC card stock made of 60% PVC and 40% polyester plastics. A laminated ID badge will last significantly longer than those that are not laminated.



Pick a badge holder that's best for your environment

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A simple lanyard or strap clip should meet your needs, except when the badge will be used in a card reader. When presenting a badge to a reader, the addition of a retractable badge reel or quick disconnect on your badge lanyard is a great ergonomic feature to add. We recommend always adding the safety breakaway feature to all badge lanyards. Color coding via the lanyard is a great resource as a quick internal reference of various badge groups. We suggest that you never use metal swivel hooks on your badge lanyards. The best option is a wide plastic hook. If you're dealing with multiple badges per employee, consider using a hard-plastic multiple-card holder. For large projects issuing thousands of badges, the selection of the correct badge holder, or combination of holders, could save overall dollars, and we suggest discussing your needs with a qualified ID specialist.



Shipping and location distribution plan

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Shipping can be a very simple step in your ID badge issuance process by shipping all ID badges to one “ship to” location. However, if expedited shipping is required to meet a deadline, ensure to communicate this upfront and not the day before your due date. When shipping to multiple locations, publish in an importable format (csv, xls...), confirm all “ship to” addresses are correct, then update the list as needed. If shipping the photo ID credential directly to the badged individual works best for your issuance model, consider a fulfillment model where the badge is attached to a custom printed letter, and inserted in an address and stamped envelope.



Unique project issues

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There are nuances to every rebadge project. It is key to plan your project, be organized, develop and document a process, and adhere to that process. Think about other issues that will affect your project. These can include topics like how will you enroll all of the newly issued RFID badge numbers in your access control system, time clocks, etc? How will you capture new photos for outdated records? How will you test the newly printed badges before handing them out? How will you efficiently distribute all of the badges, and who will be on that team? How will you take back the current badges, document, and securely shred them?

WE WISH YOU THE BEST OF LUCK ON YOUR BADGING PROJECT.

Feel free to reach out to an **eXpress badging ID Specialist** if you'd like some assistance. We're here to help make this entire process easy for you. Regardless if WE PRINT for you or if YOU PRINT inhouse, we can completely support your badging needs.

▶ 800-909-8602

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