COMPANY CERTIFICATION

POLICIES

Section 1: ABOUT *FIRST* COMPANY CERTIFICATION

The Flexographic Technical Association (FTA) is the body responsible for the *FIRST* Company Certification Program. FTA will grant certification to companies who comply with the evaluation procedure, meet established standards and adhere to the policies in this document. The *FIRST* Company Certification Program is under the direct administration of the FTA and such personnel as designated or employed by the Association.

The purpose of the *FIRST* Company Certification Program is to recognize flexographic printing companies which are applying *FIRST* methodology and have attained compliance with the specifications and tolerances related to Communication and Implementation, Design, Prepress and Press as detailed in the most current *FIRST* document. The FTA does not endorse the use of any specific materials or equipment for the company certification process.

1.1 Certification Fees

The cost for each company to achieve certification is based on individual company FTA membership status and is the same regardless of size, volume of production or membership classification. This cost will include self-audit materials, an application processing fee and an on-site audit conducted by a qualified representative of the FTA Technical Education Services Team.

FTA Member Pricing:
***FIRST* Certification Application Processing: $595.00 (non-refundable)**
Initial FTA *FIRST* On-site Audit and Review: $2,995.00 (Plus Travel and Expenses)
Preparation of Corrective Action Report $150.00
Subsequent FTA *FIRST* On-site Audits and Reviews: $2,995.00 (Plus Travel and Expenses) – per Audit
FTA *FIRST* Company Certification Renewal Fee (every three years): $595.00

Non-Member Pricing
***FIRST* Certification Application Processing: $1,190.00 (non-refundable)**
Initial FTA *FIRST* On-site Audit and Review: $5,990.00 (Plus Travel and Expenses)
Preparation of Corrective Action Report $300.00
Subsequent FTA *FIRST* On-site Audits and Reviews: $5,990.00 (Plus Travel and Expenses) – per Audit
FTA *FIRST* Company Certification Renewal Fee (every three years): $1,190.00

1.2 Certification Overview

FIRST Company Certification is valid for a three-year period provided that the company attains and retains the required number of certified staff, complies with the *FIRST* workflow methodology and adheres to the ongoing data submission requirements. Further information regarding renewing the *FIRST* Company Certification can be found under the Certification Renewal heading in this document.

1.3 Certification Criteria

In order for a company to be eligible for *FIRST* Company Certification, the following criteria must be met:

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1.3.A Employee Certifications

Pressroom Staff: 40% of all pressroom staff must have completed the *FIRST* Press Operator Levels I, II and III certification.

Prepress Staff: 40% of all prepress staff must have completed the *FIRST* Prepress Operator Levels I, II and III certification.

(Note: Companies that do not employ in house graphic artists/prepress will be required to provide a Certificate of Analysis displaying tonal value aimpoints and workflow calibration pararmeters for all prepress related items).

Management/Production Staff: 40% of all management/production staff must have completed the FIRST Implementation Specialist Levels I, II and III certification.

1.3.B *FIRST* Workflow Compliance

Documented evidence of workflow compliance must be provided through the self-audit process. Sample data created through the workflow must be submitted with the initial application. Workflow compliance will be verified during the on-site audit.

1.3.B.1 Workflow Mapping

In compliance with *FIRST* methodology, the company must map the workflow to identify the key workflow components such as devices and equipment. As part of the application process, the company must prove that these components have been clearly identified and documented. These components will also be reviewed as part of the auditing process. The required components are listed here by department/area:

1.3.B.1.a: Graphics
- **Identify the type of computer monitor(s) currently in use**
- **Identify the types of proofing device (s) currently in use**
- **Identify the type of measurement tool (s) currently in use**

1.3.B.1.b: Imaging
- **Identify the imaging equipment currently in use**
- **Identify the type of measurement tool(s) currently in use**

1.3.B.1.c: Platemaking
- **Identify the type of exposure unit(s) currently in use**
- **Identify the type of plate processing equipment currently in use**
- **Identify the type of finishing equipment currently in use**
- **Identify the Identify the measurement device(s) currently in use**

1.3.B.1.d: Ink Lab
- **Identify the type of ink formulation equipment currently in use**
- **Identify the type of measurement tool(s) currently in use**

1.3.B.1.e: Press Room
- **Identify the press type(s) currently in use**
- **Identify the type of measurement equipment currently in use**

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1.3.B.2 Device/Equipment Calibration Schedule/Manufacturer's Recommended Operating Parameters (MROP) Documentation

In compliance with *FIRST* methodology, the company must provide documented evidence of a routine calibration schedule and/or MROP for the devices/equipment identified in section 1.3.B.1. As part of the application process, the company must clearly identify and document the calibration schedule and/or MROP for each device identified in 1.3.B.1 a through 1.3.B.1.e. This documentation will also be reviewed as part of the self-audit and audit processes as well as during ongoing data monitoring. Documented evidence of both the calibration schedule as well as MROP for calibration must be available to all departmental users. Evidence of the documentation availability will be reviewed periodically. The required components are listed here by department/area:

1.3.B.2.a: Graphics
- **Document the calibration schedule and/or MROP for computer monitors currently in use**
- **Document the calibration schedule and/or MROP for proofing device(s) currently in use**
- **Document the calibration schedule and/or MROP for measurement tool(s) currently in use**

1.3.B.2.b: Imaging
- **Document the calibration schedule and/or MROP for imaging equipment currently in use**
- **Document the calibration schedule and/or MROP for the measurement tool(s) currently in use**

1.3.B.2.c: Platemaking
- **Document the calibration schedule and/or MROP for exposure unit(s) currently in use**
- **Document the calibration schedule and/or MROP for plate processing equipment currently in use**
- **Document the calibration schedule and/or MROP for finishing equipment currently in use**
- **Document the calibration schedule and/or MROP for measurement device(s) currently in use**

1.3.B.2.d: Ink Lab
- **Document the calibration schedule and/or MROP for equipment currently in use**
- **Document the calibration schedule and/or MROP for measurement tool(s) currently in use**

1.3.B.2.e: Press Room
- **Document the calibration schedule and/or MROP for press type(s) currently in use**
- **Document the calibration schedule and/or MROP for measurement equipment currently in use**

1.3.B.3 Workflow Tagging

A workflow tag is defined as the result of the plate package optimization.

In compliance with *FIRST* methodology, the company must document the results of the optimization and the analysis of the plate package. Each company will create its own standard for its own workflow based on the optimization results. Each *FIRST* compliant workflow must include a workflow tag (naming convention) accompanied by a description of the components included in each. Evidence of the workflow tags and their descriptions must be located throughout the workflow for all users to access. The required components are listed here:

1.3.B.3.1 – Results for plate material type and line screen

1.3.B.3.2 – Results for mounting materials

1.3.B.3.3 – Results for press configuration (anilox roll, line screen/volume)

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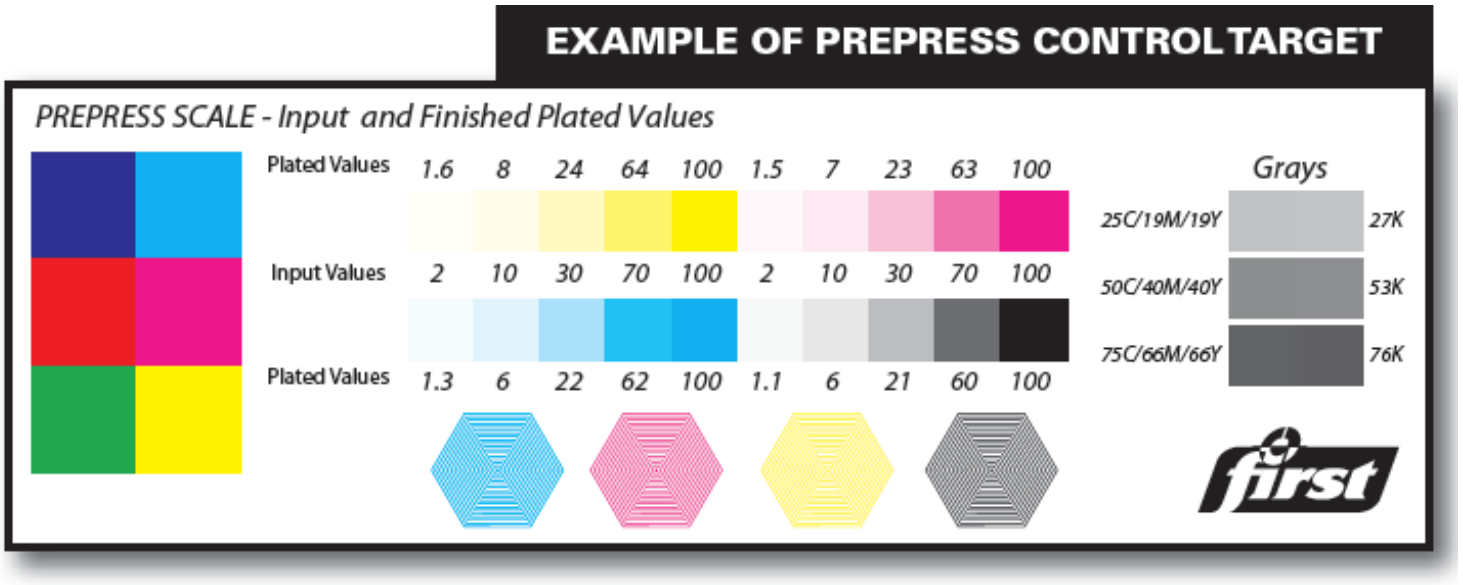
1.3.B.4 Tonal Value Aim Points

In compliance with *FIRST* methodology, the company must provide documented evidence of the established tonal value aim points. This evidence may be included with the workflow tags, but must also be displayed press side or included on the press run control target. The target values must have production tolerances placed around them for both the prepress/platemaking process and the printing process. Both scales must also be included on the contract proof.

Labeling Tone Scales: Each type of scale must be clearly labeled in the file and on the plate to avoid confusion. For example, label "Printer"/"Linear" and "Prepress"/"Profiled"/"Adjusted" next to the corresponding scales. With both tone scales, the printer may choose to have values for each patch placed in the file above or below the patch for clarity. There are two approaches for labeling tint patches. The printer may choose either labeling approach or both:

1.3.B.4.1 – Label each patch with the plated tint value. *FIRST* recommends labeling the plated tint value on the Prepress Scale because it is a QC tool for the prepress/platemaking process.

1.3.B.4.2 – Label each patch with the expected printed tint value. For example, if the 30% plated tint patch is expected to print as a 55% tint on press, the label for the 30% plated tint patch should be 55%. The expected printed tint value is determined during the press fingerprint & characterization trials.



1.4 *FIRST* Ongoing Workflow Compliance Data Collection: To sustain a certification for the three-year duration, a company must verify its ongoing commitment to workflow compliance through uploading workflow data to the FTA designated portal on a weekly basis. The data submitted to the portal will not be shared with other companies, used for promotional purposes or shared with any external parties. The purpose of requiring the ongoing data submission is to ensure the business is maintaining its *FIRST* recommended workflow compliance throughout its tenure as an FTA/*FIRST* certified entity.

Section 2: COMPANY CERTIFICATION PROCESS
The application process is detailed in specific steps below:

Step 1: Company seeking certification must meet all application criteria prior to submitting application.

Step 2: Company completes and submits the application form and fees to the FTA.

Step 3: The FTA processes the application and fees within 7-10 business days of receiving the application. **Note: The FTA strongly recommends that all application criteria are in place prior to application submission as the application processing fee is non-refundable.**

Step 4: Company receives application acceptance letter accompanied by certification criteria and timelines from the FTA.

Step 5: Company performs the self-audit process within the time frame outlined in the acceptance letter (generally, the time frame is 30 days) from the FTA.

Step 6: Company submits self-audit form within the FTA determined time frame.

Step 7: The self-audit is reviewed by the FTA. The FTA will determine the following:

1. The company is ready to schedule an on-site audit.
2. The company is not ready for an on-site audit. If this is the case, the FTA will make recommendations for self-audit corrective actions and will provide a timeframe for self-audit resubmission. Each Corrective Action Report the FTA produces for the company will incur a fee as outlined in section 1.1.

NOTE: The FTA will only provide two Corrective Action Reports per company per year. If the company cannot comply with the corrective actions after the second recommendation, the company will not be allowed to reapply for one calendar year from original application acceptance date.

Step 8: if the company is ready for an on-site audit, the FTA and the company Facility Representative will arrange a date for an on-site audit.

Step 9: A representative from the FTA TEST Team will perform an on-site audit within a four to eight hour window on the designated on-site audit date.

Step 10: Audit score verbal results will be provided for the company on the same day as the on-site audit. Documentation of the company's FIRST Certification status, ongoing compliance database and certification materials will be provided within 30 business days of the on-site audit.

Step 11: In the event that the company does not fulfill all of the criteria required for the on-site audit, the FTA will verbally notify the company of its non-certified status by the end of the audit. The FTA will also send the following written information to the company within 30 days of the completed audit:

1. Written notification of the company's non-certified *FIRST* status
2. On-site audit Corrective Action Report
3. Timeline for arranging a new audit date

NOTE: The company will be charged the full on-site audit fee and expenses for each subsequent on-site audit.

Step 12: On-site audit and travel expenses will be charged to the same credit used for the application fee once the on-site audit has been performed.

2.1 Company Certification Application

In order to submit the company certification application, the company must meet all of the criteria specified in section 1.3.A Employee Certifications. The certification process will begin once the company seeking certification submits an application (Application form can be found at www.flexography.org) and the associated fees to the FTA. When the FTA has received the application, the company will be notified in writing that the application has been either approved or denied. The approval letter will be accompanied by certification timelines, due date and all other necessary self-audit materials and instructions. The FTA will send a letter of approval and/or denial within 7-10 business days of receiving the application and fees.

2.2 Company Self-Audit

The certification process begins with an extensive self-audit performed by employees of the company seeking certification. A sample company self-audit form can be found on page 7 of this document. The self-audit requires the company to document all details related to its compliance with *FIRST* methodology as detailed in section 1.3 (1.3 through 1.3.B.4). The company seeking certification must complete the self-audit and return it along with any accompanying documentation to the FTA within 6 months of submitting the original application. Company self- audit form can be found on page 8 of this document.

2.3 FTA Review

Once received by the FTA, the self-audit materials are reviewed to determine if the company qualifies for an on-site audit. If the elements found on the self-audit form are not complete, the company will not be considered ready for the on-site auditing process. If this occurs, a Corrective Action Report will be sent back to the company based on the unmet criteria.

Once a company is approved for an on-site audit, a letter will be sent to the company's Facility Representative to verify that the company should prepare for an on-site audit.

2.4 On-Site Audit

The on-site audit date/time will be determined and agreed upon by the FTA and the company seeking certification. A representative of the FTA Technical Education Services Team will conduct the audit.

Audit score verbal results will be provided for the company on the same day as the on-site audit. Documentation of the company's FIRST Certification status, ongoing compliance database and certification materials will be provided within 30 business days of the on-site audit. Sample auditing form can be found on page 17 of this document.

2.5 Recommendation for Certification

Once all of the audit summary information has been submitted to, reviewed by and recommended for certification by the FTA, the company will be notified in writing that it has been approved for *FIRST* Company Certification for a three-year period. Audit score verbal results will be provided for the company on the same day as the on-site audit. Documentation of the company's FIRST Certification status, ongoing compliance database, certification and certification expiration date materials will be provided within 30 business days of the on-site audit.

3. MAINTAINING *FIRST* COMPANY CERTIFICATION

The FTA *FIRST* Company Certification is valid for three years from the date of issue provided the participating company adheres to the ongoing data submission requirements. The FTA will periodically audit the company's FTA provided data site to make sure the company is in compliance. Should the company let the data submission lapse for more than two months at any time during the certification period, the FTA will notify the company that it has breached its certification requirements and that it has been moved to probation status. If the company does not correct the data submission lapse or if the company does not submit the data for a period of four months, the FTA reserves the right to change the company's status to non-certified. Once the company has been placed in non-certified status, the company name will be removed from the FTA *FIRST* Certified Companies webpage. The company will also receive a formal letter informing it that it must remove the *FIRST* Company Certified plaque from public view within its facility until its status has been changed. The company may regain its *FIRST* Company Certified status if it can correct the data submission lapse within three weeks of notification of its change in status.

4. RENEWING FIRST COMPANY CERTIFICATION

The FTA will notify a company in writing that it needs to renew its *FIRST* Company Certification status 6 months in advance of its *FIRST* Company Certification expiration date. It is the responsibility of the company seeking recertification to submit the *FIRST* Company Certification Renewal Application Form in enough time to allow for the FTA to process the renewal request and plan for an on-site audit prior to the company's certification expiration date. The process for renewing the *FIRST* Company Certification is identical to the initial certification process.

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FTA Member Pricing:
FTA *FIRST* Company Certification Renewal Fee (every three years): $595.00

Non-Member Pricing:
FTA *FIRST* Company Certification Renewal Fee (every three years): $1,190.00

***Companies that have let their certification lapse for two or more years will be required to follow the procedures for, and pay the fees for, the initial certification when they apply for renewal of their certification.**

***Please note: Expired companies will be allowed to submit the "recertification" forms versus "initial" certification forms up to 18 months past their expiration date (applications for recertification submitted 18 months or more after company expiration will be returned). Furthermore, expired companies must *complete* the entire recertification process within two years of their expiration date.**

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Self-Audit Form

Facility Information

Facility Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Type of Printer: ☐ WW ☐ NW ☐ Corrugated

Facility Rep: _____

Title: _____

Telephone: _____

Fax: _____

Auditing Information

Date of Audit: _____

Lead Auditor: _____

Persons Interviewed: _____

Inaccessible Areas: _____

General Comments: _____

Auditing Instructions

1. Please refer to the "*FIRST* Company Certification Policies Document" as you complete each question on this checklist to ensure that you correctly answer each compliance question below.
2. Unless otherwise noted below, each question on this form is asking for an honest and accurate ***assessment of the current conditions and operations*** at the facility.

   If you have difficulty answering any compliance questions, you may be in jeopardy of failing the audit.

   If you cannot answer a compliance questions, you should address the problem as soon as possible, and document the corrective action. Provide the date the corrective action was completed. Keep this record to show an auditor that you have documented the corrective actions.
3. Each section of this document contains specific information related to the *FIRST* compliant workflow. Providing the specific details requested in each section will define the *FIRST* compliant workflow. Please note: you may or may not need to use all of the spaces provided throughout the document.

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I. Workflow Mapping

In compliance with FIRST methodology, the company must map the workflow to identify the key workflow components such as devices and equipment. As part of the application process, the company must prove that these components have been clearly identified and documented. These components will also be reviewed as part of the auditing process.

a. Graphics: Identify the types of computer monitor(s), proofing device (s), measurement tool (s), etc. currently in use.

1. _____ 6. _____
2. _____ 7. _____
3. _____ 8. _____
4. _____ 9. _____
5. _____ 10. _____

Comments: _____

b. Imaging: Identify the imaging, measurement and all other equipment currently in use.

1. _____ 6. _____
2. _____ 7. _____
3. _____ 8. _____
4. _____ 9. _____
5. _____ 10. _____

Comments: _____

c. Platemaking: Identify the type of exposure unit(s), plate processing equipment and measurement device(s) currently in use.

1. _____ 6. _____
2. _____ 7. _____
3. _____ 8. _____
4. _____ 9. _____
5. _____ 10. _____

Comments: _____

d. Ink Lab: Identify the type of ink formulation and measurement equipment currently in use.

1. _____ 6. _____
2. _____ 7. _____
3. _____ 8. _____
4. _____ 9. _____
5. _____ 10. _____

Comments: _____

e. Pressroom: Identify the press type(s) and measurement equipment currently in use.

1. _____ 6. _____
2. _____ 7. _____
3. _____ 8. _____
4. _____ 9. _____
5. _____ 10. _____

Comments: _____

II. Device/Equipment Calibration Schedule/Manufacturer's Recommended Operating Parameters (MROP) Documentation

In compliance with *FIRST* methodology, the company must provide documented evidence of a routine calibration schedule and/or MROP for the devices/equipment identified above in Section I. (Workflow Mapping), As part of the application process, the company must clearly identify and document the calibration schedule and/or MROP for each device identified above in Section I.a. (Workflow Mapping Graphics). Documented evidence of both the calibration schedule as well as MROP for calibration must be available to all departmental users. Evidence of the documentation availability will be reviewed periodically.

A calibration schedule/procedure and/or MROP are in place for all items in section I.a.?

Item #	Yes	No	NA	Location of Procedure and/or Documented Evidence
I.a.1.				
I.a.2.				
I.a.3.				
I.a.4				
I.a.5				
I.a.6				

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I.a.7				
I.a.8				
I.a.9				
I.a.10				

Please provide an action plan for any items marked in the grey "No" Section.

A calibration schedule/procedure and/or MROP are in place for all items in section I.b.?

Item #	Yes	No	NA	Location of Procedure and/or Documented Evidence
I.b.1.				
I.b.2.				
I.b.3.				
I.b.4				
I.b.5				
I.b.6				
I.b.7				
I.b.8				
I.b.9				
I.b.10				

Please provide an action plan for any items marked in the grey "No" Section.

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A calibration schedule/procedure and/or MROP are in place for all items in section I.c.?

Item #	Yes	No	NA	Location of Procedure and/or Documented Evidence
I.c.1.				
I.c.2.				
I.c.3.				
I.c.4				
I.c.5				
I.c.6				
I.c.7				
I.c.8				
I.c.9				
I.c.10				

Please provide an action plan for any items marked in the grey "No" Section. _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

A calibration schedule/procedure and/or MROP are in place for all items in section I.d.?

Item #	Yes	No	NA	Location of Procedure and/or Documented Evidence
I.d.1.				
I.d.2.				
I.d.3.				
I.d.4				
I.d.5				
I.d.6				
I.d.7				
I.d.8				
I.d.9				
I.d.10				

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Please provide an action plan for any items marked in the grey "No" Section.

A calibration schedule/procedure and/or MROP are in place for all items in section I.e.?

Item #	Yes	No	NA	Location of Procedure and/or Documented Evidence
I.e.1.				
I.e.2.				
I.e.3.				
I.e.4				
I.e.5				
I.e.6				
I.e.7				
I.e.8				
I.e.9				
I.e.10				

Please provide an action plan for any items marked in the grey "No" Section.

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III. Consumable Specification Verification (Process Control).

In compliance with *FIRST* methodology, the company must identify the process control practices used to verify consumable consistencies throughout the workflow. (i.e. plate imaging and making, ink pH and/or viscosity, etc.) Please identify each process control element currently in place accompanied by the procedure used.

Process Control for Imaging:

Process Control for Plate Making:

Process Control for Pressroom Components: (i.e. inks, substrates, etc.)

IV. Workflow Tagging: A workflow tag is defined as the result of the plate package optimization.

In compliance with *FIRST* methodology, the company must document the results of the optimization and the analysis of the plate package. Each company will create its own standard for its own workflow based on the optimization results. Each *FIRST* compliant workflow must include a workflow tag (naming convention) accompanied by a description of the components included in each. Evidence of the workflow tags and their descriptions must be located throughout the workflow for all users to access. Please identify each workflow tag.

Workflow Tag Name:	LPI	Plate Material	Anilox Roll LS/Vol	Substrate	Mounting Tape	Ink Type

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VI. Tonal Value Aim Points

In compliance with *FIRST* methodology, the company must provide documented evidence of the established tonal value aim points. This evidence may be included with the workflow tags, but must also be displayed press side or included on the press run control target. The target values must have production tolerances placed around them for both the prepress/platemaking process and the printing process. Both scales must also be included on the contract proof.

Workflow Tag Name:	Solid Ink Density		L*a*b* C H
	C		
	M		
	Y		
	K		

File Input Values:	%	%	%	%	%
Plated Values:	%	%	%	%	%
Printed Values:	%	%	%	%	%

Workflow Tag Name:	Solid Ink Density		L*a*b* C H
	C		
	M		
	Y		
	K		

File Input Values:	%	%	%	%	%
Plated Values:	%	%	%	%	%
Printed Values:	%	%	%	%	%

Workflow Tag Name:	Solid Ink Density		L*a*b* C H
	C		
	M		
	Y		
	K		

File Input Values:	%	%	%	%	%
Plated Values:	%	%	%	%	%
Printed Values:	%	%	%	%	%

Workflow Tag Name:	Solid Ink Density		L*a*b* C H
	C		

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				M		
				Y		
				K		
File Input Values:	%	%	%	%	%	
Plated Values:	%	%	%	%	%	
Printed Values:	%	%	%	%	%	

Workflow Tag Name:			Solid Ink Density		L*a*b* C H	
			C			
			M			
			Y			
			K			
File Input Values:	%	%	%	%	%	
Plated Values:	%	%	%	%	%	
Printed Values:	%	%	%	%	%	

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Sample **Audit Form**

Facility Information

Facility Name: _____	Facility Rep: _____
Address: _____	Title: _____
City, State, Zip: _____	Telephone: _____
Type of Printer: ☐ WW ☐ NW ☐ Corrugated	Fax: _____

Auditing Information

Date of Audit: _____

Lead Auditor: _____

Persons Interviewed: _____

_____

_____

Inaccessible Areas: _____

_____

General Comments: _____

_____

_____

Section I. Workflow Mapping

In compliance with FIRST methodology, the company must map the workflow to identify the key workflow components such as devices and equipment. As part of the application process, the company must prove that these components have been clearly identified and documented. These components will also be reviewed as part of the auditing process.

1	2	3	4	5
Unacceptable	Improvement Needed	Acceptable	Good	Excellent

Auditors Comments: _____

_____

_____

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Section II. Device/Equipment Calibration Schedule/Manufacturer's Recommended Operating Parameters (MROP) Documentation

In compliance with FIRST methodology, the company must provide documented evidence of a routine calibration schedule and/or MROP for the devices/equipment identified above in Section I. (Workflow Mapping), As part of the application process, the company must clearly identify and document the calibration schedule and/or MROP for each device identified above in Section I.a. (Workflow Mapping Graphics). Documented evidence of both the calibration schedule as well as MROP for calibration must be available to all departmental users. Evidence of the documentation availability will be reviewed periodically.

1	2	3	4	5
Unacceptable	Improvement Needed	Acceptable	Good	Excellent

Auditors Comments:

Section III. Consumable Specification Verification (Process Control)

1	2	3	4	5
Unacceptable	Improvement Needed	Acceptable	Good	Excellent

Auditors Comments:

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Section IV. Workflow Tagging: A workflow tag is defined as the result of the plate package optimization.

In compliance with FIRST methodology, the company must document the results of the optimization and the analysis of the plate package. Each company will create its own standard for its own workflow based on the optimization results. Each FIRST compliant workflow must include a workflow tag (naming convention) accompanied by a description of the components included in each. Evidence of the workflow tags and their descriptions must be located throughout the workflow for all users to access.

1	2	3	4	5
Unacceptable	Improvement Needed	Acceptable	Good	Excellent

Auditors Comments: _____

Section V. Tonal Value Aim Points

In compliance with FIRST methodology, the company must provide documented evidence of the established tonal value aim points. This evidence may be included with the workflow tags, but must also be displayed press side or included on the press run control target. The target values must have production tolerances placed around them for both the prepress/platemaking process and the printing process. Both scales must also be included on the contract proof.

1	2	3	4	5
Unacceptable	Improvement Needed	Acceptable	Good	Excellent

Auditors Comments: _____

Total possible points =25

Minimum passing score must be 3 or greater for each section of this document.