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PRINTtips

Using the Right Tool for the Task



MacMillan Graphics, Ltd.

Park 50 TechneCenter

2002 Ford Circle

Millford, OH 45150

(513) 248-2121

Fax (513) 248-5141

Website:

www.macgra.com

Email:

info@macgra.com

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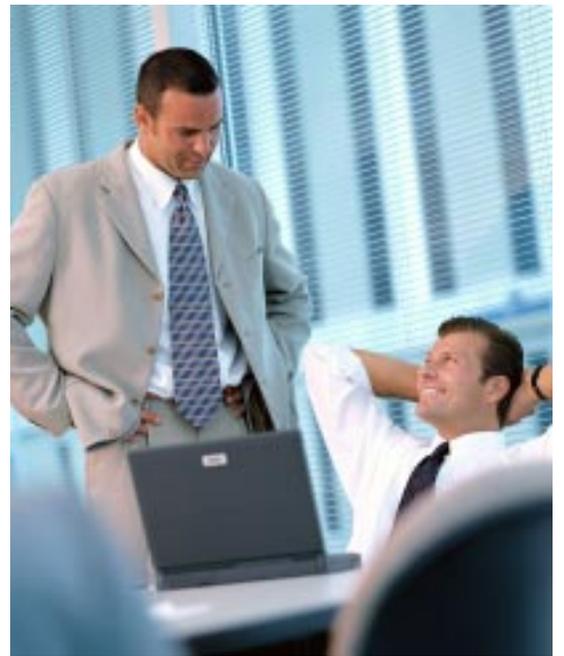
Tricks & Tips

Amazingly, it has been nearly two decades since desktop publishing arrived on the scene. The debut of the Apple Macintosh computer and the Hewlett Packard LaserJet printer in 1984, plus Adobe's introduction of PostScript page description language in 1985, laid the groundwork. Then when the Aldus Corporation introduced PageMaker for the Macintosh and Adobe came out with the first PostScript printer (the Apple Laserwriter), a whole new way of publishing documents was born. (Aldus founder Paul Brainerd is generally credited for coining the phrase desktop publishing.)

Fast forward to 2003. In addition to HP LaserJets and Apple LaserWriters, there are many other printers and printer manufacturers. PostScript is at level 3; PageMaker is now owned by Adobe and is at version 7; and Quark XPress eclipsed PageMaker as the favorite program of professional graphic designers. And while Macintosh is still considered by some to be the platform of choice for professional desktop publishing, PC users have rallied around PageMaker and Microsoft Publisher. In addition, there has been an explosion of inexpensive desktop publishing programs used by home designers on both PC and Macintosh platforms.

The Challenge: Getting It To Print

In the early developmental stages of desktop publishing, the graphic arts industry adopted PostScript as its standard for page description



language, while general business users chose Hewlett-Packard's Printer Command Language (PCL) as their standard. Thus from the beginning, desktop publishing for graphic arts professionals has been at odds with the general business community. (Think Mac versus PC, PostScript versus PCL printers, and Quark XPress versus PageMaker.)

Caught in the middle, printers struggled to accommodate graphic designers and the general business community, both of whom were submitting files for output to film or to toner-based printers. Adobe's introduction of portable document format (PDF) has helped enormously, as has the recognition by the business community that printers need files created in programs that allow control over output as well as functionality for design.

Using the Right Tool for the Task (Continued)

Software Standards for Printing and Publishing

There are six basic steps to create a document: design; page makeup; text acquisition and composition; image selection and preparation; file preflight; and output. When you submit a file to us here at MacMillan Graphics, you have completed the first four steps and part of the fifth. We complete the preflight step, then output to an imagesetter to produce press plates or print directly to our imaging equipment.

According to Dr. Taz Tally, columnist for Photoshop User magazine and frequent speaker on prepress topics, the process of preparing a digital file for print – also known as preflighting – has two parts: content preflight and technical preflight. Content preflighting confirms that all necessary components of a document (the document file, placed graphic images, font files) have been gathered together and basic checks have been completed (colors properly assigned, proofing and spell check complete).

Technical preflight is concerned with how your files are constructed. During technical preflight we check for image resolution, conversion from RGB to CMYK or spot color, mismatched colors, color breaks and separations. We may also: make adjustments for dot gain and color correction; set bleeds, assign printer drivers, search and replace hairlines, reduce banding on gradients, assign screen angles and frequencies, apply trapping values; match trim and paper sizes and set up imposition.

The ability to perform these functions is built into three software programs, which is why they are the standards for printing and publishing.

The programs are:

- Quark XPress
- Adobe PageMaker
- Adobe InDesign

Like the rest of the printing and publishing industry, we have adopted these standards for file submission. That doesn't mean we won't accept a

file created in another program – we will – but it does mean that we will have to convert the file into one of the standard programs before we can proceed to technical preflight and output. And this means more time and expense to you.

Avoiding Charges for File Conversion

If you do not work in any of the three standard programs, there are some things you can do to avoid charges for file conversion.

1. **Submit files to us in PDF format.** Be aware, though, that we will need Adobe Acrobat-distilled PDF files, not files created with the PDF option available in some applications. Also, be sure to preflight your document and collect its components prior to creating the PDF, then make a print from the PDF to submit along with the file.
2. **Agree to output on our digital printer/copiers.** If the specifications for printing your document are compatible with reproduction on our high speed black and white or color digital printer/copiers, we can accept alternate file formats.
3. **Print in a single ink color.** Similarly, if your document can be printed in one ink color, we can accept alternate file formats.
4. **Give us unformatted Word files.** When PDF, digital printing, or single color printing aren't suitable, and you can't submit the file in one of the standard formats, then consider providing us with text-only in Word and let us do the page layout for you.

A Final Word

Word processing software, on the other hand, is best suited to working with words - typing and editing text, spell and grammar check, and formatting words. Illustration and photo/image editing software is for working with artwork and photographs. Spreadsheet and presentation software is for accounting applications and presentations. Use the right tool for the job and we'll do the rest!

“Technical preflight is concerned with how your files are constructed.”

“... there are some things you can do to avoid charges for file conversion.”

Improving Your Desktop Designing Skills

Here are some ideas to help you improve your desktop designing skills.

Try a template. Predesigned templates, such as those available as wizards in some page layout programs, allow you to borrow an established design and use it effectively. They are also good to point you in a design direction if you'd like something more customized.

Limit use of fonts. Fonts can be fun to use, and many desktop publishing programs come with an amazing array of them. But be careful

to limit the number of fonts in one publication to no more than three. If you are publishing a newsletter, you can bring in extra fonts as headlines. But try to keep body copy to one or two fonts.

Plan the use of clip art. Clip art is helpful to illustrate a concept or theme of an article. But beware of using so much that you create eye clutter for the reader. Also, alter the size of clip art – include a single medium or large image on your pages, as a contrast to several smaller images.



“... try to keep body copy to one or two fonts.”

A Vocabulary of the Graphic Arts

Bullets: Round symbols used to organize a list or draw attention to information.

Distiller: A software application used to create PDF files from PostScript files. The process of distilling converts text-based PostScript code into a viewable, editable, and flexible PDF document.

Finishing: A general term for post-print operations; includes trimming, folding, binding, stitching, drilling, padding.

HSV: Hue, saturation, and value. Used to describe the color of a pixel. Hue is the basic color (determined by its frequency or wavelength of light). Saturation is the amount of white color added to the basic color. Value is the grayscale value, indicating the amount of black added.

Leaders: Rows of dots between words that lead the reader from one bit of information to another across a page. Frequently used in a table of contents, an index, or a price list.

Prepress: Preparing digital files for output to a printer, copier, or imagesetter.

Register: The relationship of one ink color to another. Tight register occurs when two ink colors touch, or when a critical amount of space must be maintained between two different colors.

Rule: In graphic design, a line. The width of a rule is measured in points.

Thumbnails: Rough drawings or sketches used to explore layout options. Also, small representations of PDF document pages.

Words

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Fax 513-248-5141

www.macgra.com
info@macgra.com

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TRICKS & tips

“Left-justified type is considered more informal, and the ragged right edge adds visual white space to the block of text.”

When To Justify Type

Text can be typeset to be either fully justified or justified right or left, meaning that the right and left edges of the column of type are both aligned; or are aligned on the right but not the left; or aligned on the left but not the right. The decision on how to justify type is ultimately yours; however, there are a few conventions that may help you make the decision.

Fully-justified type is often considered more formal than left-justified. It is also more familiar to readers of books and newspapers, since these publications almost always fully justify type in their columns. Fully-justified type allows for more characters per line (meaning more words can be fit into a defined amount of space). However, fully-justified type may require greater attention to word and character spacing and hyphenation in order to

avoid rivers of white space visible throughout the text.

Left-justified type is considered more informal, and the ragged right edge adds visual white space to the block of text.

In general, left-justifying type requires less time to adjust the type for maximum eye appeal. Be aware, though, that when type is left-justified on a short line length, it is necessary to pay extra attention to hyphenation to keep the right margin from becoming too ragged or to prevent over-hyphenation.

If you find that you must use fully-justified text due to space constraints or audience expectations, remember to break up dense blocks of text with techniques such as subheadings, rules, or graphics.