

GRAPHIC EXCHANGE

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REVIEWS

Markzware FlightCheck

Extensis PreFlight Pro

Macromedia Fireworks 2

Adobe GoLive 4



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Predicting the future of print — one job at a time

Markzware FlightCheck 3.5.2
 Extensis Preflight Pro 2.1

BY SHANE STEINMAN

HINDSIGHT MAY BE 20-20, BUT IT'S ALSO EXPENSIVE. ONE FONT substitution or color separation error can lead to additional approval cycles, higher labour costs, lost time, scrapped film, trashed proofs, wasted plates and even (heaven forbid!) an entire press run in the recycling bin.

The key is to find a fortune teller with whom you are comfortable. For most people in the desktop world, this savant will appear as a shrink-wrapped box with one of two names emblazoned on its cover: Extensis *Preflight Pro* or Markzware *FlightCheck*.

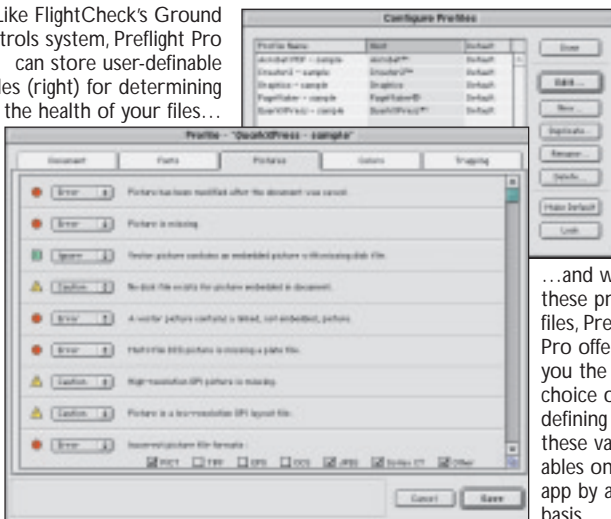
HEAD TO HEAD

Although the two applications perform very similar functions, they are quite different in appearance and operation.

Preflight Pro has a decidedly cleaner interface design. On the other hand, Markzware would contend that their *FlightCheck* interface offers more data at a single glance. Some might consider this to be a strictly cosmetic issue, but the design of your particular workflow may result in a preference for one versus the other. Coming from a prepress production background, I felt fairly comfortable in either application — although I could see where *Preflight Pro's* design could be more accessible for relative newbies. This could potentially result in reduced training time.

From a technical perspective, both applications can screen files on an in-depth basis, with the degree of scrutiny being user-definable through Ground Controls (*FlightCheck*)

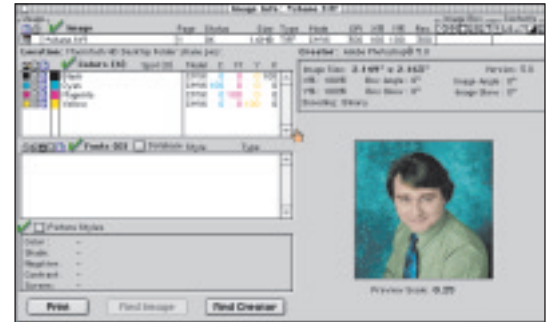
Like FlightCheck's Ground Controls system, Preflight Pro can store user-definable Profiles (right) for determining the health of your files...



...and with these profiles, Preflight Pro offers you the choice of defining these variables on an app by app basis.

or Profiles (*Preflight Pro*). In either case, these defaults can be easily stored and edited. However, it should be noted that *Preflight Pro* allows you to customize its profiles based upon the application-specific attributes of the files being inspected. *FlightCheck's* Ground Controls permit only general flagging of errors which are likely to occur.

While *FlightCheck* and *Preflight Pro* both support the checking of most major graphics applications, there are some important distinctions which must be made between them. *FlightCheck* can inspect documents without having the originating application present on the machine being used. This could represent a significant cost saving when setting up a preflighting station. *Preflight Pro* requires that *QuarkXPress* (3.x and 4.x), *PageMaker* and *Creator2* applica-



With the click of an icon, FlightCheck reveals in-depth information on included elements, in this case an image.

tions be present on the machine when inspecting these document types. While this may lead to extra costs (software and RAM requirements) there may be a net benefit, in that type reflows which may lead to overflowed text boxes are more likely to be caught. However, this also means that you will need any special XTensions (for *Quark*) that were used in the construction of the document.

Preflight Pro will convert PC-based *Quark* files to the Macintosh equivalent since there is no Windows version currently available (for inspection purposes only).

FlightCheck flags problems with a Pass or Fail grade. *Preflight Pro* takes this a step further by assigning Error, Caution or Ignore status to individually selectable variables. A Caution flag may not result in an improper print result, but may require an operator's closer attention.

However *FlightCheck* was able to provide me with greater elemental details of the files that I inspected than *Preflight Pro*. The application uses a number of "mini-icons" throughout its various displays and dialogs. Once I learned what each of these little pictures meant, I was able to use them effectively to quickly collect information on embedded or included files.

Both apps have drag-and-drop support, the main difference being that *FlightCheck* checks files consecutively whereas *Preflight Pro* inspects them concurrently.

SLIGHT EDGE TO PREFLIGHT PRO

The reporting functions in both systems work well. The detail and accuracy of these reports is tremendous.



MARKZWARE FLIGHTCHECK

System requirements
Power Macintosh or compatible,
Mac OS 7.0 or later, 8 MB available RAM
Street price \$399 (US)

Telephone 800-300-3532; Web www.markzware.com



EXTENSIS PREFLIGHT PRO

System requirements
Power Macintosh or compatible,
Mac OS 7.5 or later, 8 MB available RAM
Street price \$399 (US)

Telephone (800) 796-9798; Web www.extensis.com

However I have to give the edge to *Preflight Pro*, which summarizes the results of several documents belonging to the same job within the same report. For example, if you had a job composed of two *Quark* files and sundry support files for each, *FlightCheck* would view these as two jobs. This is due to the fact that *Preflight Pro* has an additional layer in its job architecture (the Job Jacket) which allows it to “group” multiple parent documents into the same report.

Each of these products has a method for effecting live repairs of the files being reviewed. You can open, view and correct flagged errors in the file’s native application using the Pilot tool (in *Preflight Pro*) or Go To Problem (in *FlightCheck*). Once again, *Preflight Pro* gets the nod in this category since its Pilot interacts seamlessly with the graphics software being used. This saves a lot of jumping around between apps that tends to happen when resolving these problems with the help of *FlightCheck*.

Of course, each of these programs can collect and compress all the required elements that are needed for your print job. They also allow for segmenting these files across multiple transfer disks when the files are too large to fit on one piece of media. Heck, they’ll even binhex the compressed archive for a more reliable Internet transfer.

PDF file inspection is supported by both *FlightCheck* and *Preflight Pro*, but I ran into a number of problems when inspecting these files with either package — particularly when complex documents were involved. On the whole, *FlightCheck* performed better in this regard, with its support for PDF 1.3 specs.

One interesting item is that *Preflight Pro* will automatically generate PDF files from the documents that are being checked. The interface allows you to determine settings for the creation of these PDF files based upon their intended usage: Composite Print, Separated Print, or Web. Each of these options is configurable for all standard Distiller options and new setups can be created for specialized uses.

IS PREFLIGHTING IN YOUR FUTURE?

You may base your choice of preflighting software upon the amount of automation that you desire. In that case, centered on a direct comparison between the respective products, I’d have to say that *Preflight Pro*’s “watch folder” automation beats out *FlightCheck*’s AppleScript support for ease of use. But, if you want to go a step beyond basic hot folders and are looking to construct a customized automated

workflow system, you might consider *FlightCheck* in conjunction with Markzware *MarkzScout* software.

In this day and age, it’s nice to know that you can log-on to the Internet and download free demos of software at your leisure. In this case, that’s a course of action that I’d highly recommend. It’s also nice to know that you don’t have to call Jo-Jo’s Psychic Alliance to find out how your jobs are going to print.

As an alternative to full preflighting, Extensis and Markzware both offer scaled-down versions of their products in the form of Markzware *Collect!* and Extensis *Collect Pro*. These “skinier” apps gather your files and fonts together and pack them up for transit, thereby eliminating the number one reason for delays — incomplete job delivery due to missing elements. In a neat marketing twist, Extensis includes five free *Collect Pro* certificates that purchasers of *Preflight Pro* can hand out to five lucky customers.

BREAKING NEWS

We have just learned that Extensis will soon be introducing a new online service for remote preflighting.

This innovative option for file checking will obviate the need for sending files before they are determined to be fit for imaging. Working through a standard browser interface, a remote client will be able to drag jobs onto an icon in the browser window and, by means of a downloaded applet which contains the Extensis *Preflight* engine, be permitted to preflight that job prior to its submission. This new “e-flight” program, which will be marketed to imaging and print providers subscribing to a feed from the Extensis server site, will be free to subscribers’ clients.

No cost or official implementation date has yet been announced. The initial launch of the service will offer preflighting for PDF files, with support for other applications expected to follow. *



Preflight Pro provides a pre-configured Job Ticket which can contain information on the most common aspects of job output, delivery and client contact. On the other hand, *FlightCheck* allows you to design and customize your own form.