

PDF prepress workflow can look after itself

PDF Editing Software Enfocus PitStop Server

by Lerrick Starr

It's still a persistent industry myth that Portable Document Format is unsuitable for quality prepress work. Most shops actively discourage clients from submitting PDF anyway, even though it could be noted that PDF-capable shops have a significant productivity advantage over their PostScript-based counterparts, who struggle to layout application files from QuarkXPress to PageMaker to Word, on a range of operating systems from Mac OS 8.6 to Windows 2000 Professional.

TRUE PDF STORY

One night last month a financial printer had a little press trouble. To meet a delivery date, they had to send out a relatively simple 128-page four-color process job to another printer in the neighborhood.

The quote to look after printing this job

was in line—except it included the cost of five hours of prepress time for RGB to CMYK conversions. The reason? The file was a customer-supplied Windows-generated PDF.

But for this financial printer, the prepress surcharge on the job represented the difference between a profit and a loss.

So the job was sent back. There it was opened on one of the printer's workstations and converted to CMYK in about five minutes—or less than 2% of the five hours originally quoted. It was shipped back for printing and ran without a hitch.

TYPICAL PDF PROBLEMS AND HOW ENFOCUS DEALS WITH THEM

There are a whole range of issues which may prompt a prepress shop to reject jobs provided in PDF: RGB color in images or graphics; inappropriate overprint/knockout settings for white- and black-colored type; missing or simulated fonts; unnamed colors; rules or lines that are immeasurably thin; missing or inadequate bleeds; or low resolution images. At first blush, caution would seem to be the order of the day.

Leading the field in PDF prepress edit-

ing tools is unquestionably Enfocus Software. Enfocus began in Belgium but now maintains branch offices throughout the world, and its PDF handling technologies have been integrated into the workflows of virtually all major printing vendors. Using Enfocus PitStop Professional, a ripper can manually and sequentially fix all the typical problems in a PDF file (except low image resolution)—and generally faster than in an applications-based output workflow.

But for busy owner-operators or prepress shops looking for ways to lower production costs, PitStop Server can automate PDF processing with a really quick ROI. Unlike PitStop Professional, which is a plug-in to Adobe Acrobat, PitStop Server is a stand-alone application running in PC or Mac 8.6+/OS X Classic environments. Just install the Server software, point the application at your font library, and then create a number of hot folders that the application searches for incoming PDFs.

You may also attach PitStop Action Lists to each folder so that the Server automatically applies them to the PDF. The Action Lists supplied are numerous and cover all typical conversions that a prepress operator might require—but without the operator.

These Action Lists are available in PitStop Server or downloadable from www.enfocus.com:

Color

Change RGB Red to CMYK Red
Convert Color to CMYK
Convert Color to Gray
Convert Color to RGB
Remap all to CMYK + Gray

Document and Pages

Add Confidential Stamp
Add Enfocus Background
Attach Footer
Change Document Info
Spread Pages

Page Numbering

Number Pages (alternating)
Number Pages (center)

Renumber (alternating)
Renumber (center)

Remove Pages

Remove Empty Pages
Remove First and Last
Empty

Resize Pages

Resize Page to A4
Resize Page to Letter
Scale Page Contents to Fit

Fonts

Embed All Fonts
Embed Non-Base14 Fonts
Embed Non-Standard Fonts

Images

Resample for Print
Resample for Web

Penguins

Add Penguin

Preflight - Additional Checks

Detect Acrobat 5 PDF
Detect External Links
Detect Font Courier
Detect Invisible text
Detect Photoshop PDF
Detect Small Objects
Detect Specific SpotColor
Gather Information

Preflight - Profiles In ActionList

4-Color Press
CD-ROM Publication
Press Optimized
Print Optimized
Web Optimized
Web Publishing

Prepress - Color

All 100 CMYK to 100K
All Black to Real Black
All Gray to Real Gray

Convert SpotColor to CMYK
Make 2 Color Job
Make Rich Black
Registration CMYK to All
Remove ICC tag
Tag Images with ICC

Prepress - General

Ensure Lineweight
Remove BG, UCR, HT

Prepress - OPI

Remove OPI

Prepress - Overprint

Knockout Light Objects
Knockout White Text
Overprint Black Text
Overprint Dark Objects

Prepress—Page Boxes and Printer Marks

Add Color Bars
Add Crop Marks

Add Document Creator
Add Printer Marks
Add Registration Marks
Enlarge for Printer Marks
Remove CropBox
Remove Printer Marks

Prepress - PDFX-1

Ensure Trapped Flag Set

Repurposing - Proofing

Make UltraThin Proof

Repurposing - Scrubbing

Remove All External Links
Remove Annotations
Remove Invisible Data
Remove Meta Information
Scrubber

Repurposing - To Web

Remove Non-Link Annotations
Optimize for Web

ACTION LISTS

A typical Action List detects and corrects identified PDF file conditions. You can also string Action Lists together, so that a file is sequentially processed until all work is done.

A typical hot folder example might contain the following self-explanatory and automatic actions:

- Convert Color to CMYK
- Embed All Fonts
- All 100% CMYK to 100K
- Ensure Lineweight
- Knockout White Text

A less typical set might be:

- Remove First and Last Empty
- Renumber alternating
- Make Place for Printer Marks
- Add Printer Marks
- Make 2 Color Job

These are but a small selection of the available Action List options.

You can also attach Preflight Profiles to the hot folders. Preflight profiles are specific tests and actions gathered together and applied for certain press conditions, like CMYK or spot color jobs. A preflight report documents the incoming state of the PDF and lists the changes applied by the preflight profile. These reports can also be forwarded to clients so that future PDFs do not contain the same errors.

IMPROVEMENTS TO V2.01

The latest version of PitStop Server can be downloaded from the Enfocus website (www.enfocus.com); it is a fully featured 30-day trial version.

New features include an improved user interface and a PDF Profile editor that allows complete control of profile checks and corrections. The routing of the PDF document through the workflow can now be based on the warnings received during the preflight check. There are new help menu items which take users to key areas of the Enfocus website. And a new tool allows managers to receive e-mail, warning them of PitStop Server problems.

I installed and ran PitStop Server in both OS 9.1 and in OS X Classic mode.

Operation under both was virtually identical. But I was troubled by a series of crashes while setting up my first test folders.

In the Color Management tab, while setting up a “new” folder, I could access the Override General Color Settings check box. Then the rest of the choices appeared to become active. But changing the Gray source to anything other than ‘Use General Preferences’ resulted in a crash, and likewise with the LAB settings. Yet the RGB and CMYK source and target choices worked without producing a crash, adding to the mystery!

To avoid this glitch I had to activate the Color Management System in the application’s Prefs (Setup>Preferences Panel [Cmd-K]) *before* creating my first set of hot folders. You should review the available options *first* and choose all your initial settings before proceeding.

THE RUNDOWN ON SETUP

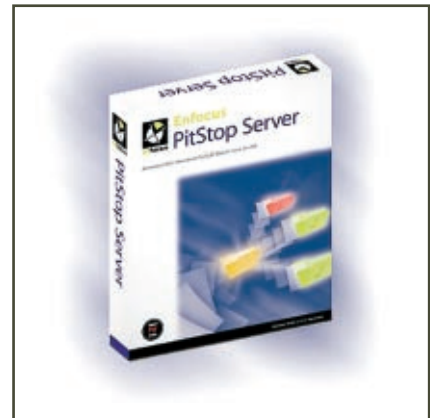
First, under the General tab, define a folder to be your input folder. Note the default deletion date and Check Time for watched folders. Under Fonts, point PitStop Server at your font library. Under PDF Profile and Action Lists, target your custom library (although at this point you won’t have more than the stock set).

Under Color Management you should Enable Color Management, even if you disable it for your created queues, to avoid the possibility of the glitch just described. While you’re there you can set your source and target profiles. Under E-mail, you are instructed to enter the name of an SMTP server and port, whereby you will be notified of warnings in the workflow (although I didn’t actually test this feature).

Once everything is set up, create your own hot folders, and attach the Action Lists. PitStop Server operates as promised.

AUTOMATION IS THE KEY

There simply isn’t a PostScript workflow that can touch the simplicity of PDF processing. There may still be no remedy for low res images. But application and PostScript rippers are still stopped cold as well



ENFOCUS PITSTOP SERVER

System Requirements

- Microsoft Windows 98 or later, Windows 2000 or Windows NT 4.0 with Service Pack 5 or later, or

- Apple System Software version 8.6 (or later) on a Power Macintosh computer

To enable color management you must have a color management-enabled operating system such as Windows 98 or later, Windows 2000 or Mac OS with Apple ColorSync 2.5 or later.

Memory Requirements

Minimum 64 MB RAM

In the Mac OS, increase the memory allocation of Adobe Acrobat to 64 MB or more. Depending on the type of documents you work with and the types of changes you make, more memory may be needed.

Pricing

Suggested list US\$1699

Enfocus

Web www.enfocus.com

by the ‘Link is missing’ error message.

To build an automated workflow like PitStop Server would tax the abilities of even the greatest AppleScripter. Yet here—in the oft-maligned PDF workflow—exists a product that does more out of the gate than application-based imaging ever did, even at its peak. 🍌

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