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YES, I KNOW PDF IS SUPPOSED TO BE THE FILE FORMAT FOR A DIVINE future when everybody is a digital guru and nobody makes mistakes. I also know that there are stories today of digital graphics gurus printing PDF files to imagesetters and digital presses and computer-to-plate with fantastic results.

However, here I am, a graphic designer and an instructor, but not a digital guru — yet.

My clients are nice people who send me thank you notes, and my students are professionals upgrading their skills, who know what they need to know and often become my friends.

And although I haven't quite made the leap to a PDF workflow for final print production, I know that, for some very basic, every day situations, simply knowing how to create a PDF has solved many a problem for me, my students and my clients.

My telephone help-line is a free and vital part of my training: students call, ex-students call, friends call, clients call.

What follows are a few short examples from my hot line.

ARGHHH!!! I HAVE A 9 A.M. MEETING WITH THE CLIENT AND THE JOB WON'T PRINT!

A designer I know was trying to print a color flyer from *Quark* which included *Illustrator* and *Photoshop* EPS files. But all her EPS files came out jagged, and one *Quark* box lost its fancy border. It was Sunday evening, and the client was due in her studio the next day at 9 a.m.! She had neglected the fact that her Epson 600 was a non-PostScript printer (of course, she could buy PostScript software for it — but not on a Sunday evening).

Since she was on the Internet and had *Acrobat Reader*, the solution I gave her was simple: Either print a PostScript file from *Quark* or save the page as EPS; distill it to PDF; open the PDF in *Acrobat Reader*; and print it on her non-PostScript printer.

THEY WANT MY RESUMÉ BY E-MAIL — BUT WHAT ABOUT MY GRAPHICS?

A very talented art director was totally fed up with the sweat shop where she worked and needed a change. She was asked to e-mail her resumé to an agency where she *really* wanted to work. Her resumé was created in *Quark* and included a *Photoshop* TIFF. A full Adobe *Acrobat Distiller* had been installed on her machine for over a year, but she had never touched it, and really didn't know how to use it.

So I explained it to her: First, Print to File from *Quark*; then distill it with *Acrobat Distiller*, producing a nice, clean PDF ready to be e-mailed.

PDF TO

There is also another handy method for creating PDF.

Included with *Acrobat 3.0* is a small (33K) utility application called *DistAsstDaemon* which goes in the system folder. If you use the *PSPrinter* driver instead of *LaserWriter*, when the print dialogue box comes up in an application, there is now an additional box for printing PDF.

Check this box, and print. *PSPrinter* generates a PostScript file from the application, *DistAsstDaemon* opens *Distiller*, the PostScript is distilled and deleted, and an activity log is created.

WHOOPS! THE CLIENT SENT THE JOB AS A POSTSCRIPT FILE — WITH NO TRAPPING

A service bureau digital prepress technician who specializes in trapping had a client who sent him an *Illustrator* file saved as PostScript (not EPS). Of course, the file was not trapped. Why this particular file was saved as PostScript is anybody's guess.

The file could be opened in *Illustrator*; but the text baselines were broken up, and objects were grouped in the strangest manner. It's not easy, if even possible, to edit a file like this.

But we quickly solved the problem: Distill the PostScript file with *Acrobat Distiller* and open the PDF in *Illustrator*.

It wasn't 100% perfect, but at least it was now editable.

IT'S A FLYER, IT AIN'T FANCY, BUT THE CLIENT'S GOTTA FAX IT — FROM A PC

Yes, I have a few clients on Windows. Not long ago one of them needed a faxable (via both hard copy and electronic) flyer for his product. Since PDF is platform-independent, I didn't really have to worry about whether my client had a PC or a Mac.

My client needed to be able to see the flyer, print it on his desktop printer, and fax it from either a standard fax machine or a fax modem. PDF solved the problem.

I designed it in *Illustrator*, using TIFF and EPS images, saved it as a PDF, and e-mailed it to him.

My client sent me his cheque, and I managed to complete another project without even meeting him. Which left lots of time for spring cleaning in my backyard.

THE CLIENT WANTS TO FAX HIS PAGEMAKER FILE... UH, OH... HE LOST HIS APPLICATION FILE

Then there was the short-term "Client from Hell", disorganized to the point where he had been dropped by three designers in a row (including me).

When he got here, he had a black-and-white version of his

THE RESCUE



new product flyer, created by someone in *PageMaker*, which he needed to be able to fax and e-mail from his computer. Unfortunately, he had dumped his copy of *PageMaker* by mistake and couldn't find the original CD.

Since I had *PageMaker* 6 installed on only one older computer which didn't have a full *Acrobat* with *Distiller*, I couldn't make a PDF directly from *PageMaker*.

Ah, but I *could* make a PostScript file: In *PageMaker*, under File, I chose Create Adobe PDF, then Prepare PostScript file. The rest was simple: transfer it to a computer with *Distiller* installed, distill the PostScript file, and send it back to my unwelcome client.

THE BIG DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ADOBE ACROBAT DISTILLER AND ADOBE ACROBAT PDFWRITER

All PDFs are not created equal.

There is a big difference between PDFs made using Adobe's PDFWriter driver and PDFs distilled through *Acrobat Distiller* 3.02 from PostScript. For starters, files produced by *Distiller* 3 are considerably smaller.

But most important is that PDFWriter does not have *Acrobat* 3's full feature set, which includes the ability to display virtually any kind of design element and embed fonts for cross-platform compatibility. It uses the on-screen display (QuickDraw commands on the Macintosh or GDI commands in Windows) to make this conversion. *Distiller*, on the other hand, supports PostScript-based applications.

The fact that Adobe has seen fit to include a "Save as PDF" option in *Photoshop* and *Illustrator* that makes a PDF using a PDFWriter routine further confuses the issue. "Save as PDF" can mean that clipping paths disappear, CMYK colors turn to mud, *Illustrator* outlines vanish, and smooth shading turns very rough.

The only bulletproof way to make a PDF is to create a PostScript file and distill it through *Distiller* — which I suppose is exactly what Adobe wants to hear. And using *Distiller* means being conversant with *Distiller*'s Job Options setup.

If — you don't downsample at the right setting, or you don't embed fonts, or you don't define font subsetting properly, or you don't select *Acrobat* 2.1 compatibility (which also makes a larger file), or you don't uncheck Convert CMYK Images to RGB, or you don't distill with prologue.ps/epilogue.ps checked, or you don't select Preserve Under Color Removal, then you risk: making a file too big or too small, losing last minute editability of type, losing readability for anyone with a version 2.1 *Acrobat Reader* (and there are still lots of them out there), losing your color on press, losing

printability of spot colors and/or losing your UCR/GCR settings.

But if you want a file with decent color fidelity, full font and graphics transportability, and, most important, excellent compression, for both screen viewing or desktop printers, then in my opinion, PDF is the best file format to use today.

NOW, WHAT ABOUT QUARK?

Although *QuarkXPress* 4 is PostScript Level 2, *Quark* 3 is still Level 1. This is important simply because so many designers are generating PDFs from *Quark* 3, and occasionally Level 1 PostScript produces errors.

But the good news is that Quark has promised to build PDF Import and Export capability into *XPress* — although there's no timetable for that yet (an alpha version of a Quark PDF Export filter is available from www.quark.com).

HOW TO MAKE A GOOD PDF

From *QuarkXPress* or any Adobe application, Print > File to make a PostScript file (there is also a very good Quark XTension available for creating PostScript called LPX which is available from Luminous/Imation). Then distill the PostScript file with *Acrobat Distiller* 3.02. And that's it.

Or, on a Mac, install Adobe's DistAsstDaemon (included with *Acrobat*) in your system folder and use the PSPrinter driver. Choose *Acrobat Distiller* as your PPD under Page Setup. Then just select Print > PDF from any application.

If you are sending your PDF for offset printing, your *Distiller* Job Options must be set up according to your printer's instructions for the appropriate PPD, OPI comments, overprint settings and halftone screen information; CMYK to RGB conversion must be unchecked, as well as UCR preserved and fonts embedded. Best to get specific details for setting up your Job Options from your printer or prepress house.

Today, to use PDF in a high end color print production workflow, you'll probably be exporting the PDF to PostScript for a Level 2 RIP, but it won't be too long before PostScript 3 RIPs will be accepting PDF directly.

But for most of us today, PDF's cross-platform, application- and resource-independent format can be a really dependable solution for many common graphic communication problems. *

IF YOU EXPERIENCE PROBLEMS WITH YOUR FILE OUTPUT, OR IF YOUR MAC CRASHES ALL THE TIME AND YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW WHO DOCTOR NORTON IS, E-MAIL LIDKA AT STUDIO_L@ISTAR.CA.