

# HELPING YOUR CUSTOMERS – AND YOURSELF

David van Driessche underscores the benefits of web-based pre-flighting

**What is the biggest complaint any printer has about its clients? Well, in these economically challenging times the answer might come back to correct payment, as well. But, long before that, comes the supply of correct material. It's a problem that gets worse as more clients 'quickly design something' rather than working with professional agencies. And who can afford to refuse work these days?**

So we dutifully accept everything clients send us and often eat the cost incurred by fixing problems. What else can we do?

## PRE-FLIGHT BENEFITS

Conceptually this is not a difficult problem; so-called pre-flight technology for PDF files has been around since 1997. With pre-flight tools such as Callas pdfToolbox or the pre-flight plug-in built into Adobe Acrobat, you can make a list of requirements for your workflow and quickly test whether your clients' files will cause problems or not.

You don't even have to invent your own pre-flight requirement list really; the ISO and other standards organisations have done that work long ago. Their standards are fully supported by modern pre-flight tools.

## DON'T JUST TELL ME I HAVE A PROBLEM

Even better, don't just check files, but fix them! Those same pre-flight tools can automatically convert colours, fix hairlines and flatten transparency... You can receive client files, fix most problems and only ask for new files when absolutely necessary (low-resolution images are a good example of a problem that cannot be

fixed without going back to the client).

Changing client files is obviously not without consequences; even though you are correcting real problems, you might still be exposing yourself to additional liability by doing so. So how do you take advantage of this splendid pre-flight technology without shooting yourself in the foot?

## LET CLIENTS FIX THEIR OWN FILES?

Pre-flight tools are capable of generating nicely formatted pre-flight reports that list all problems found in a document. How about you send this back to your client and politely ask them to fix the problems you've found in their documents?

There are a couple of real problems with that approach.

First of all, you look at the world from a production point of view. As a result, you know why, for example, transparency can be a problem. Your clients in many cases won't know this at all; they might not even realise their document contains transparency in the first place. Worse, when using tools such as Microsoft Word, they might not even be able to avoid transparency in their PDF files!

Secondly, clients look upon production difficulties as your problem – not something they should invest time or effort in. And definitely not something they should pay for.

And lastly, however nicely formatted the pre-flight report and your accompanying e-mail are, you are still basically telling clients they did things wrong and you will not print their file before they fix it. And this is a hard message for a client to hear and for a printer to deliver.



Time limited version - valid until 25-12-2012  
Pre-flight standards from ISO and GWG in the Callas pdfToolbox pre-flight application

## WHEN DO YOU GLADLY SPEND ADDITIONAL EFFORT?

Lets take a step back to find a way out of this bind. We have the technology to find problems in PDF files and to fix many of them automatically; how can we use this in such a way that clients will embrace it rather than go look for a different printer?

This is not a technical but a psychological question. We gladly spend time and effort doing things if we perceive additional value to us. And that value doesn't have to be money; it can be additional convenience, ease-of-use, control or simply the feel-good factor as well.

So the question becomes, how can you provide additional value to your clients while improving the quality of the PDF files that you receive to print?

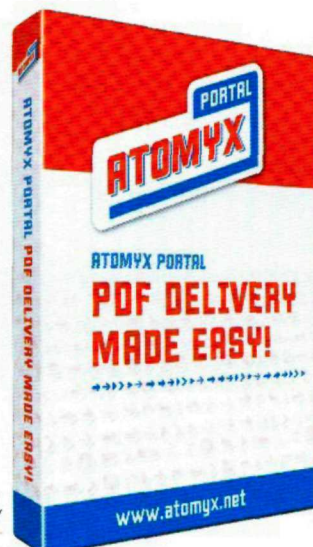
## THE FRUSTRATIONS CLIENTS FACE

The key to finding the answer for this problem lies with the frustrations that clients have when they have to get their work printed. First of all, because of the increasing complexity of the printing process, especially in work-flows where innovative media or printing methods are used, it is increasingly hard for clients to be sure that what they deliver will be faithfully reproduced. Anything that improves the clients' comfort levels when delivering work to you is going to be perceived as additional value.



An example of a web delivery portal (Atomyx Portal) showing an uploaded job with immediate quality control status

Atomyx Portal is an internet platform that incorporates traditional pre-flight technology



Secondly, just as that is the case for you, your clients feel increased economic pressure and the necessity to get more done more quickly. This implies the need for quicker turn-round times for jobs. Have you noticed you get more done if you can work on one task at a time? Imagine how annoying it is to send a job to a printer only to find out two days later something was wrong with it and you need to fix it. Having immediate feedback and being able to finish a job to where you're sure it's good are both key to being efficient.

### THE SOLUTION?

I believe the answer to this problem has been around for quite some time; but that it is only today the world has matured to the point where it becomes viable. Years ago, when most pre-flight tools were desktop-bound, a company called DevZeroG developed an Internet based pre-flight solution. For a number of reasons (that had to do with technical aspects but mainly with the business model used and the acceptance of Internet-based tools) the technology never reached a major breakthrough.

Obviously technology has evolved since then, but today we see systems such as Atomyx Portal ([www.atomyx.net](http://www.atomyx.net)) and Ad-handler (<http://www.ad-handler.co.uk>) following the same strategy. Both are

examples of Internet platforms that incorporate traditional pre-flight technology to offer quality control and corrections.

### WHAT'S SO DIFFERENT ABOUT THIS?

The first important point to make is that Internet based software is much more familiar and acceptable to us at this point. Look at how at-ease we all feel with tools such as Facebook, eBay, LinkedIn, Salesforce and many more web sites. This was not the case ten years ago and, together with increased adoption of high-speed connectivity, I believe this makes Internet-based pre-flight tools a viable proposition today.

The real key of course is that these tools add value to your clients. When you can upload a PDF file and immediately have it corrected and pre-flighted, this means you also have instant feedback. A client no longer feels like he's sending his job into a black hole only to receive complaints days later; they can see what is good and not good on the spot. And today's Internet technology allows providing a simple client experience with an easy yet elegant look-and-feel.

### AUTOMATION

But there's a ton of benefit on the printer side as well. In many cases printers today receive files through email, FTP and an array of

services such as YouSendIt. As a printer you're left sorting out all of that material and figuring out who sent you what for what purpose.

An Internet based platform excels not only at integrating pre-flight technology and giving instant feedback, but it's also a platform where we are used to providing accompanying information. Filling-out forms on web sites is probably something all of us do daily and modern browsers even offer built-in tools to make it easier for us to fill out repeating content.

This means that these platforms not only can take care about the quality of the uploaded jobs but they can also be used to solicit key additional information from the client. All of a sudden, as a printer, we have a way to receive quality-controlled content, together with additional metadata for that content – the ideal way to automate production processes further! ■

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