

Hard Facts About Soft Proofs

You'll save time and money by using your printer's soft-proofing abilities.

In a perfect workflow, catalogers never leave the digital space. Digital photography is placed into digital files using page layout software.

Then, catalog production personnel release files using one of several online transmission options. Finally, they review and approve using digital proofs, send through to computer-to-plate and finally to the press.

Soft proofing completes the digital workflow, replacing some, if not all, of the hard digital proofs. Soft proofing easily can be adopted at the online level and immediately can begin to save catalogers time and money.

Two categories usually fall under the general heading of soft proofing: online proofs and collaborative, Web-based proofs.

Online Soft Proofs

Many of today's catalogers use online soft proofs for content and layout review.

An Adobe Acrobat PDF file, attached to an e-mail or posted on a Web site, is the most popular soft proof. Used as an interim content proof prior to releasing files to the printer—or by the printer for content and layout with a hard digital proof—a well-made PDF file is an

accurate visual capture of the native files used by the designer. Fonts are perfectly rendered, images are clear, and the color breaks are evident.

A cataloger receives a PDF file attachment or is invited to view a PDF posted to a Web or FTP site. Comments can be phoned in or e-mailed, or the file can be printed and marked up with changes. If the cataloger purchases Acrobat 5.0, he or she can mark up and annotate the PDF soft proof online. Annotations are saved by user name, date and time, thus providing an invaluable audit trail.

PDF files are not intrinsically color-accurate. How the native file was prepared, the PDF was created, and monitors are calibrated all affect color. Without additional color-management tools, soft PDF proofs

<Definition>

A Soft Proof

An image on a computer monitor that is used to predict the color and content of the page when it is printed.

www.catalogsuccess.com

Some Printers Offering Soft Proofs

Banta Corp. uses the CreoScitex InSite software to produce PDF content soft proofs for clients such as American Express. Banta still produces hard proofs to go to press and has them available for clients during their learning curves.

Quad Graphics uses a soft-proofing system called DBLonline that allows customers to view final high-resolution files in page, spread or press-form format. For the color review process, Quad Graphics uses a branded version of RealTimeProof's Web-based collaborative tool.

High-end commercial printer **Pictorial Offset** offers clients Online Virtual Proof, a branded RealTimeProof, for collaborative, Web-based soft proofing. It is an important component of Pictorial Offset's progressive Design-to-Destination support workflow.

generally are not used as final contract proofs. However, Trendwatch, a research firm, reports that 44 percent of graphic designers who use PDF plan to invest in color-management software.

The cost to institute a PDF content proofs process is about \$249 per PDF creator—the cost of the Acrobat 5.0 software. Once a PDF file is created, the Acrobat PDF Reader can be used to view PDF files. The Acrobat Reader is free, bundled with all cur-

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rent browsers and most applications, and can be downloaded from Adobe's Web site (www.adobe.com).

Collaborative, Web-Based Soft Proofs

Some of the products and services listed below add collaborative interaction to soft proofing. As with a PDF soft proof, color accuracy is not guaranteed by any of these solutions without using additional color-management tools.

◆ **RealTimeProof** (www.realtimeproof.com) is a popular, Web-based, collaborative proofing solution using proprietary technology in an ASP (Application Service Provider) model. Users dial into the RealTimeProof network from any Internet connection after

**USING ADOBE'S
ACROBAT 5.0,
you can mark up and
annotate a PDF soft
proof online.**

receiving an invitation by the paying subscriber to the service, usually a printer or prepress shop. Invitees must download a free viewer to participate. Team members are alerted by e-mail when annotations are made. The entire collaborative process is secure and private.

RealTimeProof, like all Web-based solutions, is cross-platform and supports all standard graphic file formats. The files uploaded

for review can be final, high-resolution, production files ready to be imaged to a plate. These files have gone through a generic RIP but not necessarily the printer's actual RIP.

Most of the tools used to mark up and annotate files are familiar to PDF users. One that is not—and this is my favorite—is the online densitometer, which measures the exact color mix of an area in CMYK and spot colors without leaving the Web browser. Trapping and bleeds also can be checked online.

RealTimeImage, the company that markets RealTimeProof, would not disclose the cost to implement the solution, but a spokesperson did say the cost can be offset by the time and cost savings it provides customers.

Although only one party assumes the primary investment of implementing this and other Web-based collaborative solutions, many printers and prepress shops may charge customers a moderate fee to use these collaborative soft-proofing tools.

◆ **CreoScitex Synapse InSite** software suite (www.creoscitex.com) provides a similar service with similar tools. InSite, however, is bought by the printer or prepress shop and managed locally. Customers can collaborate online by reviewing full-resolution production PDF files that have gone through the local printer's or prepress house's RIP and are ready to image to plate.

Some printers have enhanced the basic InSite service with a preferred PDF Distiller setting. Customers using those settings can upload their PDF files and then have RIPed soft proofs in about 10 minutes. Those files can be approved and sent directly to plating.

With additional ICC profiling, InSite can provide a robust, com-



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Write in 11 on Fax-Back Form

plete system for current CreoScitex users. The InSite software costs \$40,000 to \$75,000.

◆ **GroupLogic's Imagexpo** (www.grouplogic.com) is a remote soft-proofing and annotation software system that lets users create soft proofs from software and formats such as QuarkXpress, Photoshop, Illustrator, PageMaker, TIFF, EPS, Scitex CT, Scitex LW, Crosfield DDEF, PhotoCD, JPEG and PostScript.

Using familiar whiteboard technology, Imagexpo allows multipoint conferencing to interactively share proofs online. Annotations are instantly visible—that is, in real time—on all users' screens.

Imagexpo supports Apple ColorSync and ICC profiles.

◆ Software giant **Adobe** (www.adobe.com) entered the online collaborative solutions arena with its patented Design Team. It offers annotations, file tracking and version controls. A tiered-subscription pricing model is flexible and easy to understand. All subscription levels include an unlimited number of reviews and deliveries to an unlimited number of recipients.

◆ The much-anticipated **Web Distributed Authoring and Versioning (WebDAV)** standard allows multiple users to collaborate on any file from any Internet connection without third-party solutions or software. (For a primer on WebDAV, visit: www.fileangel.org/docs/DAV_2min.html.)

WebDAV is an extension of the HTTP 1.1 protocol that adds the capability of securing data on a Web server. This solution is an open industry standard and is supported by Adobe, Microsoft and Macromedia.

And it is eagerly awaited by current users of interim PDF proofs. WebDAV takes full advantage of PDF's XML underlying data structure.

PDF soft proofing is inexpensive and ubiquitous and can only grow in importance with the adoption of the WebDAV standard.

Conclusion

Catalogers, advertising agencies and publishers are relying more than ever on a digital approval

process. From free to expensive and from proprietary to industry open standards, soft proofing improves communication and production processes while reducing costs and cycle times. ■

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Why are catalog merchants converting their paper catalogs to iCatalog solutions?

The iCatalog process created an exact replica of our catalog and presented it in a highly organized manner. We enjoyed working with knowledgeable and professional people who were as interested in getting a great result as we were.

*Esther Fuhrman, President, EF Design
www.eyeglassesoutasight.com*

... We are going to get better qualified catalog requestors and higher conversion rates because our catalog requestor matches their wants vs. guessing by just looking at a cover online. This is the type of cost savings we need at this time.

*Mel Kay, Chairman
Performance Products*

The iCatalog model is the first that I have seen that allows the continuity of design from catalog to website. The fact that AllYourCatalogs had our site up complete with a customized shopping cart, in a matter of days, was a pleasant surprise.

*Tom Frost, Business Development Manager
Pacific Spirit Corp.*

The iCatalog process provides our customers with a convenient way to browse our product. More importantly, it allows our prospective customers an efficient means to peruse the catalog prior to ordering it on their website. Additionally, the iCatalog files are very

small in comparison to the PDF format which we were using. The PDF files were over 4 MB each, but with the iCatalog our files are now 1/10th that size and our customer only needs to download a single page. We plan to publish the iCatalog version of our catalogs 1-2 weeks before the printed catalog hits the mailbox. This will give the hardcore gadget enthusiast a jump on our latest innovations.

*Guy Turner, VP of Creative Design
Gadget Universe*

We wanted to put our sales flyer online, but our PDF files took too long to display. The iCatalog process has created a smaller image file that displays quickly with working links to our shopping cart. AllYourCatalogs is one of the easiest companies to work with from both the business and software development perspective.

*Nancy Miller, Director of Internet Development
Woodcraft Supply*

DEMO SITE

www.AllYourCatalogs.com/demo3.html

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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