

Portable Document Format (PDF) has become the industry standard for secure file transfer. PDF is a universal format that preserves the typefaces, artwork, logos and page layout of an original document, regardless of the application or platform used to create it. This issue of the Tech Bulletin is devoted to a brief overview of PDF technology.

THE RISE OF THE PDF

This convenient technology is now used by over 500 million people throughout the world. PDF is also an increasingly popular method of exchanging files in the prepress environment. Some would even say that using a PDF is preferable to supplying the actual document in its original file format. One thing is certain: when using PDFs, the printer and the creator of the document must agree on the standards and procedures to be followed.

BACKGROUND

Developed by Adobe, PDF (Portable Document Format) was, in the beginning, designed for the office environment. It allowed users to transfer documents from one computer to another without having to install the software and fonts that were used to create the original documents. Optimized for on-screen visualization and laser printing only, the first generation of PDF technology was not designed for use with film or printing-plate imagesetters. At the urging of the printing industry, however, Adobe extended the PDF's capabilities to make it compatible with print production requirements. At the same time, the Internet was greatly expanding the popularity of the PDF. Its small file size, universality, compatibility with different platforms, plus the fact that the Acrobat Reader software is available for free, have made PDF the format of choice for over 500 million people worldwide.

AVAILABLE IN VARIOUS FLAVOURS

The ultimate use of the PDF document will determine the method used to create it. For instance, a resolution of 300 dpi is necessary for use on a platemaking device, but would be far too high for something that is merely going to be viewed on a website. Acrobat Distiller offers various default settings, but you can also customize your preferences in consultation with your supplier to determine the optimum settings for the production of final proofs, films or plates. The

application, the platform, and the types of documents being transferred are important factors to be considered; many new applications feature extensions that allow you to create and export PDF files from within the software itself.

NATIVE APPLICATION OR PDF?

When it comes to transferring documents to a service bureau, PDF technology has some clear advantages. The PDF includes graphic elements and fonts in a single, lightweight package. On the other hand, performing last-minute corrections on a PDF file can be a difficult matter. Certain applications do, however, allow such changes – Datachrome uses Enfocus PitStop. Still, despite the possibilities offered by PitStop, it is often preferable to return to the original document, in its native software, to make the required corrections. If you do need to send us documents in their native formats, you must be sure to include all fonts, photos and graphic elements used. Your application's extensions will allow you to conveniently assemble these elements. The resulting file will be larger than a simple PDF, but corrections on it can be performed efficiently.

PDF/X

PDF/X is a format created for the specific needs of prepress. It features a sub-set of characteristics that documents destined for prepress production must contain. The PDF/X standard eliminates problems associated with missing fonts or images, as well as problems related to the use of colours other than CMYK or spot. PDF/X1a is the standard that we generally recommend to clients who are sending us documents. Along with your Datachrome representative, our technical support team will be pleased to assist you in setting proper parameters for your applications. We can also perform a trial run on a test file to make sure that the best possible configurations are being used. ■

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