

The Homebrew PDF Workflow

by Lerrick Starr

After a rush of interest, including installations by a raft of top-of-the-market print players, the PDF workflow movement seems to have slowed down a bit.

Portable Document Format files work well as a prepress file format—that much has been established. It has the potential to supersede its PostScript progenitor as more flexible and reliable. Unfortunately, the buy-in price for a proprietary PDF workflow is a little rich for the folks who aren't!

If that's the case with your shop, and a replacement for your current workflow isn't in the cards, here's an opportunity to try a homebrew system that lets you image PDFs on your current setup while you and your clients get used to 'PD-Fing' around.

WORD OF WARNING

Don't expect that your experience with customer-generated PDF files will start out well. If there's a button somewhere on the desktop that says "Make PDF", it will get used. It doesn't even have to say it. Flash the *Acrobat* logo in front of your customer and it will get punched.

The best thing you can do is save the *Acrobat* Distiller settings you prefer and ask your clients to put them in the Job Options folder in Distiller. Tell them to select your settings file before distilling their PostScript. You may have to explain PostScript.

It seems like a lot of bother, and that's the reason for PDF inertia in the middle-sized and smaller prepress and print shops. It's easier to hand off a *Word* or *Excel* file than get a customer to

make a good PDF.

Why bother? Well, the advantages are plenty:

- the fonts are embedded (but can your smaller clients find them to give them to you? Even PC users?)
- file sizes are small (think about getting all your jobs by e-mail and only having to shmooze the client when they pick up a job—a real timesaver!)
- all the elements are in one package (no linked external files to worry about)
- platform-independency (no more PC to Mac conversions necessary—PDF swings both ways, maybe more!)

Starting to sound good?

Then for the backyard mechanic in you, let me offer this hand-tooled Mac OS PDF workflow for you to test on your existing output devices—and without spending a cent, provided you already own *Adobe Acrobat 4* (not Reader) and you don't mind the word 'Demo' appearing all over your test jobs (those disappear when you buy the software license).

For those who want to build as we go, please go to:

- www.lantanarips.com and get the latest version of *CrackerJack* (watermarked)
- www.enfocus.com and get *PitStop Professional 4.6* (30 day fully operational demo)
- www.dynagram.com and download *DynaStrip* for Macintosh (watermarked).

We're now ready to proceed.

The 20-Step Homebrew PDF Workflow

You can build your own basic PDF workflow just by following these twenty simple steps: 1. Launch Acrobat and open the CMYK test file. 2. Under 'Window' find the PitStop Preflight Panel, highlight the profile for '4-Color Press' and click 'Create Report' (when PitStop is finished checking the PDF, it generates an on-screen report of the suitability of the PDF for its intended use; save this report for future reference and close it). 3. Back in Acrobat, go to the Tools menu, launch DynaStrip>File>New

and choose DynaMo. 4. Give your file a name and set the default units to your taste (we'll work in inches). 5. Click the Pagination Sequence 'Definition' button (Figure 1). 6. Set the binding to 'Saddlestitch' and make the number of pages '8', then click OK. 7. Click the 'Sheet Button' and enter 23" as the height and 17.6" as the width (Figure 2), then click OK (this is setting up for a 4-up job).

FIGURE 1

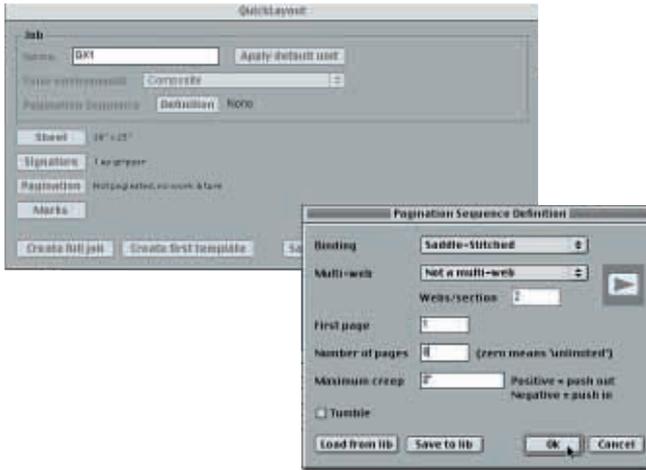
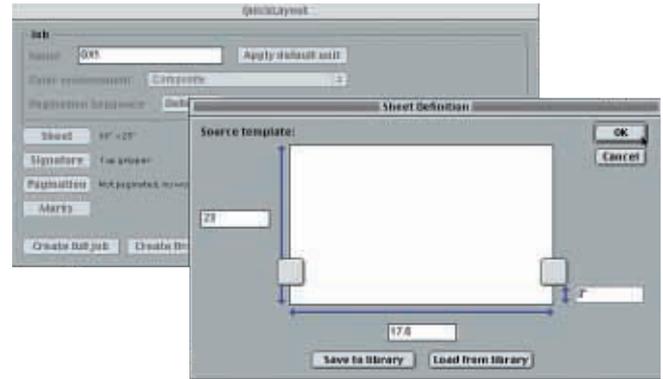


FIGURE 2



8. Click 'Signature', then click the 'Maximum format' button—four sheets should appear (Figure 3). 9. Enter '.5" in the 'Space between rows', click OK, and accept the suggested gutter value. 10. Click the 'Pagination' button, click the 'Pagination template' button, click 'Load from library', choosing template 2x2.PGT or 2x2A.PGT (Figure 4), click OK, and then click OK again (there's no work and turn in this

example). 11. Click 'Marks' and select all three linear marks and the registration mark, ignoring the 'Text Tag' and Color Bar sections (Figure 5). 12. Click 'Create full job' (you should be looking at two flats, numbered correctly—this is an imposition template only). 13. Get the source file (using CMD-D or by selecting File>Source documents) or click the blue document icon (Figure 6). *(continued)*

FIGURE 3

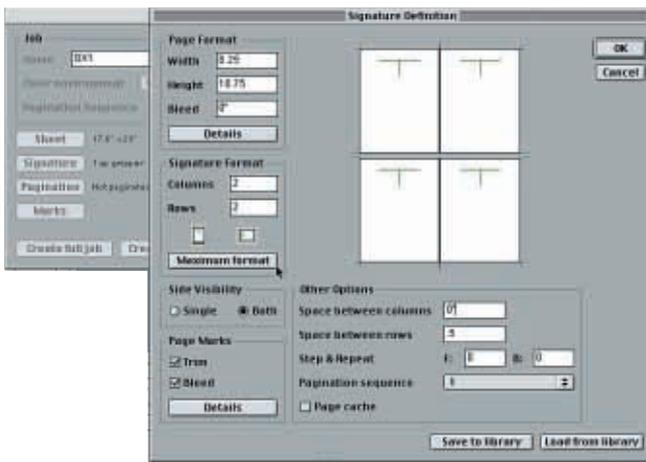


FIGURE 4

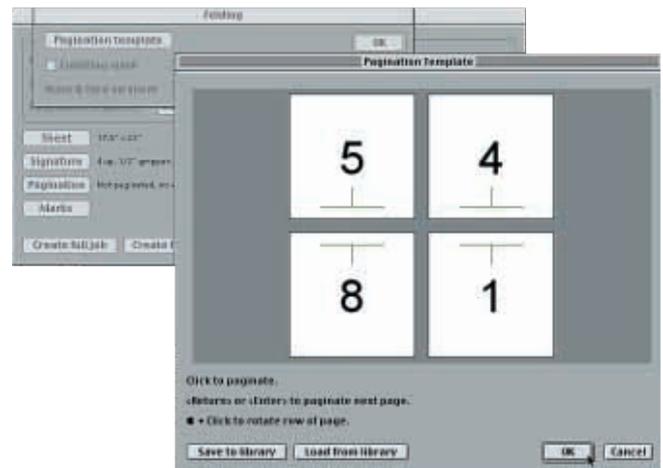


FIGURE 5

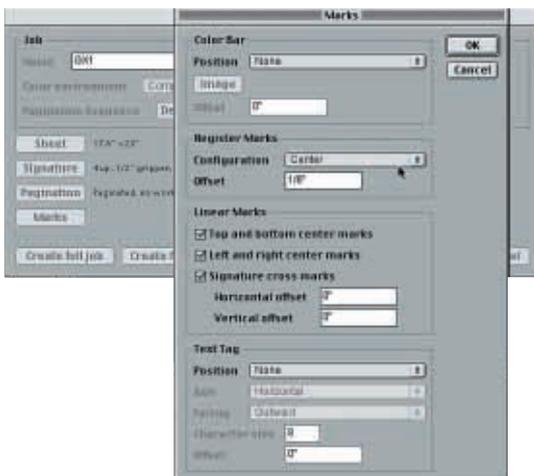
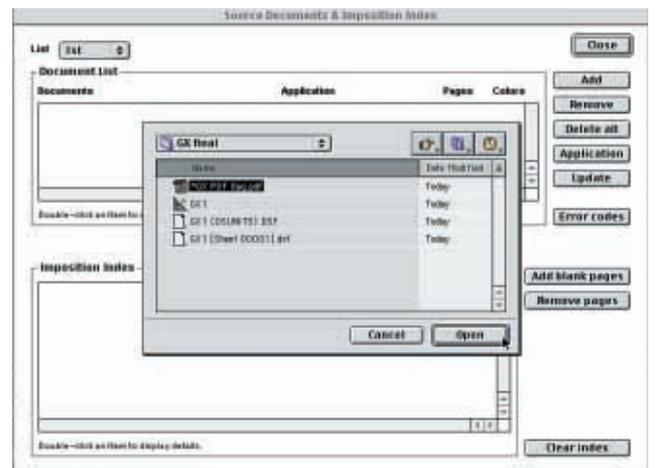


FIGURE 6



14. Click 'Add' and locate the GX_CMYK.pdf file, then click 'Open'. 15. Highlight this file name in the Document list and click 'Update'. 16. Highlight the name again, click the 'Add' button between the upper and lower windows, then click 'Close' (Figures 7 and 8). 17. Hit CMD-P (or File>Print) or click the blue printer icon (Figure

FIGURE 7

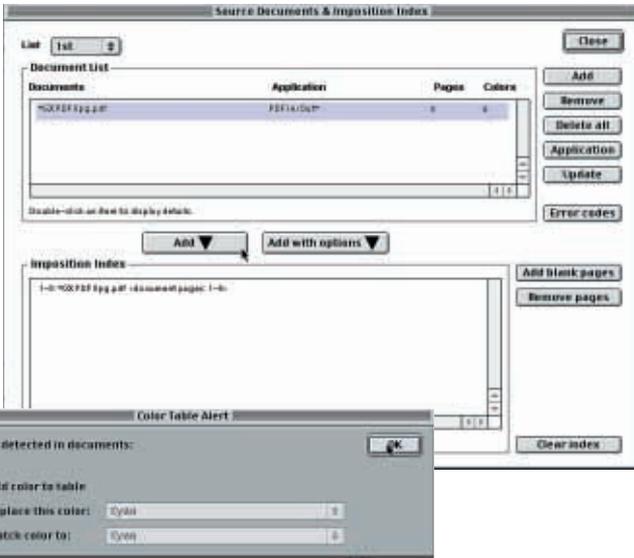


FIGURE 8

9). 18. Click 'Output Format', click 'Image Area', then make the output size equal to our sheet size, 23x17.6" (Figure 10). 19. Ensure that the other settings are the same as the screen grab and click 'Close'. 20. Click 'Preview'. A new PDF is created and opened in Acrobat (Figure 11).

FIGURE 9

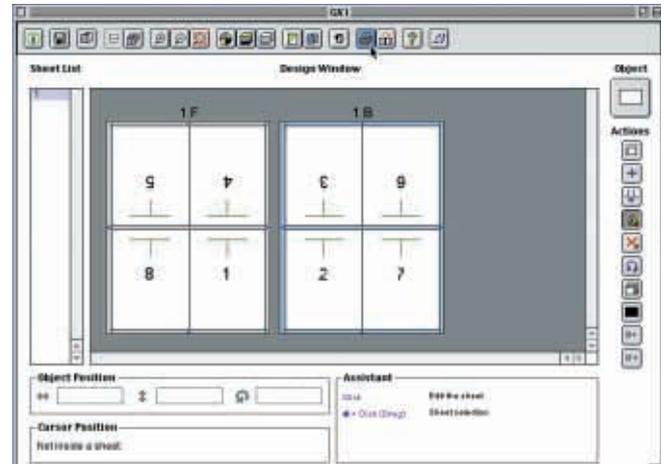


FIGURE 10

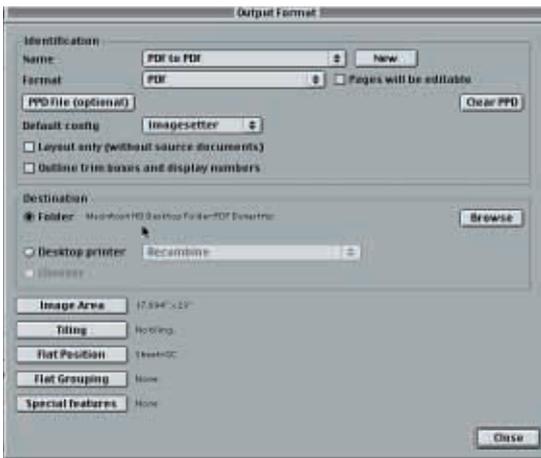
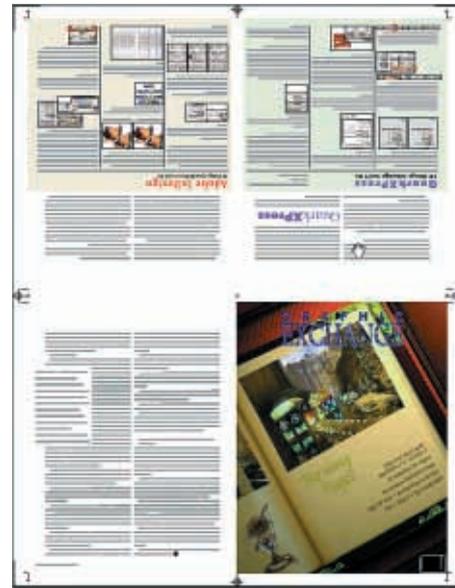


FIGURE 11



INSTALLING THE WORKFLOW

This workflow is centred on *Acrobat*. Begin by installing *PitStop*, and *CrackerJack* (restart *Acrobat* between installs). This places additional plug-ins in *Acrobat* and adds tools to the toolbars.

Install *DynaStrip*. This is a separate application with a hook into *Acrobat*. Once installed, *DynaStrip* appears in the Tools pull-down menu in *Acrobat*.

CrackerJack is used for producing PostScript color separations, *PitStop* for editing and *DynaStrip* for PDF imposition.

Get your test files from the Graphic Exchange website at www.gxo.com (their names identify their contents). These files are optimized for your use—in other words, they have already been tested and are ready to use.

This workflow should work with any RIP from PostScript Level 1 to PS3 and is independent of manufacturer. However, if your RIP offers a preview function, it may not work properly. In that

case, you will be able to view the separate color plates but not view your rasters as composite.

Now follow the procedure described under THE 20-STEP HOMEBREW PDF WORKFLOW on the preceding page (Figures 1 through 11) to create your test PDF.

OUTPUT WITH A TWIST

Here's the twist in the workflow. *DynaStrip* has an output button that would send the job to a RIP capable of imaging PDFs directly (PostScript 3).

But instead, we're going to output the job from the PDF preview file now open in *Acrobat*. By using *CrackerJack* to write traditional PostScript, we can bridge the PDF to PostScript gulf and make the most of the equipment you have on hand. Just proceed with the seven steps described under CREATING SEPARATIONS WITH CRACKERJACK (opposite).

CrackerJack Separations

Once you have created your imposed PDF, you can make CMYK separations using Lantana's CrackerJack. The separation utilities in the CrackerJack interface should be familiar to most professional prepress folks. Some of the choices will be unique to your individual workflow, but in general this is how you will proceed: 1. Click the CrackerJack button on the right toolbar. 2. Under 'Target' select your output device or 'to file', as well as the appropriate printer description file (PPD) and output resolution (Figure 1). 3. Under 'Media' click 'Autosize' or select from your PPD (Figure 2); if one doesn't work, the other will. 4. Under 'Options' set negative or positive and make the other choices as required. 5. Select nothing in the 'Marks' window (DynaStrip will supply them automatically). 6. Choose 'Color' and in this dialog box select Output colors as 'pre-separated' (Figure 3); optionally you can set line screens, choose individual color plates and apply gain curves. 7. Click 'Output'. CrackerJack will analyze the PDF's contents and generate CMYK plates as PostScript. With luck, your output device will be imaging something by now!

WHAT IF IT DOESN'T OUTPUT?

If your imposed PDF doesn't image, try this little test.

In *Acrobat*, take the imposed PDF file and export it as an *.eps file with PICT Preview (File>Export>PostScript or EPS with PICT Preview; select PS level 1, Binary, and include all RGB and LAB images). This will generate a *.eps file from the PDF. Place the EPS in a page layout program just like a picture and output it as usual.

If this works with your system and *CrackerJack* doesn't, it's probably a PostScript level incompatibility that is cured by creating EPS from the file as PostScript Level 1. In any case, you have still successfully output from a PDF source file.

THE PITSTOP REPORT

At the beginning of this exercise, we ran a preflight report using *Enfocus PitStop*. Now open it and view its contents.

In the *PitStop* report you will find several pages of text documenting the status of the images, text and graphics in the PDF. You can view the fonts and their embedding status, check the document's color space, resolution of the images, and other file information you will find useful. *PitStop*'s real strength is in altering a customer-supplied PDF so that it conforms to your prepress requirements.

In addition to the *GX_CMYK.pdf* available from *gxo.com*, there are several other examples you should download that require editing in *PitStop* before output.

THERE'S LOTS MORE TO PDF

This is just the beginning of a homebrew PDF workflow. There is a multitude of plug-ins for *Acrobat* and standalone applications which you can use to bring the power of PDF to your workflow, so start researching.

I suggest that you start with the websites listed earlier. Most plug-ins are available with a demo mode so you can experiment with them before you buy.

In recent news, CreoScitex announced *Supertrap*, an *Acrobat* plug-in that brings trapping to the desktop environment. CreoScitex has also released its latest version of *Seps2Comp*, a utility that recombines separated PDFs into composite CMYK (plus spot colors if they are there). With *Seps2Comp* you can preserve your *QuarkXPress* trapping in a PDF workflow. Visit www.primergy.com for info and downloads for these products. While you're there you can also pick up their useful set of free Distiller plug-ins.

See www.planetpdf.com for a list of almost 100 print-related PDF tools, and check www.quite.com for *QuiteABoxOfTricks* software which performs RGB to CMYK or grayscale conversion, page transforms, and an info tool that shows the names of subsetted fonts. 🍌

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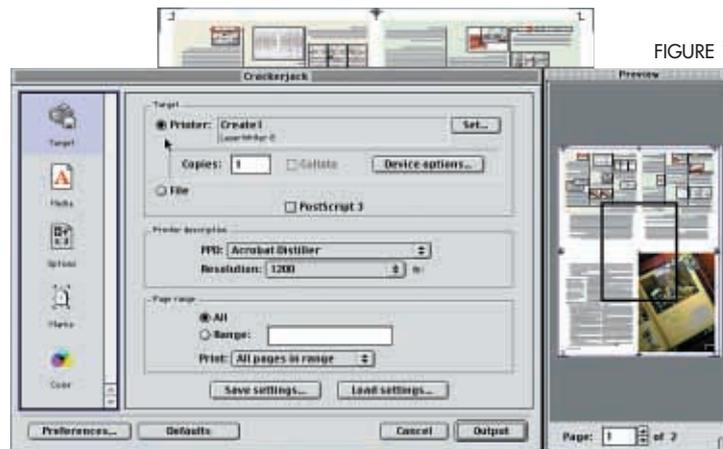


FIGURE 2

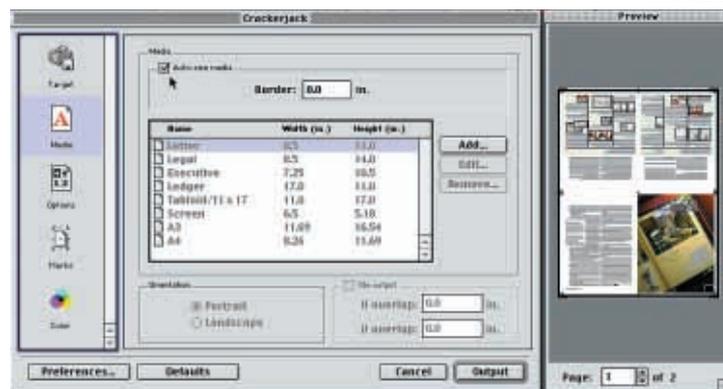


FIGURE 3

