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The changes wrought by the technology revolution of ever experienced before—and Graphic Exchange has retrospective on ten years of producing this magazine

BY DAN BRILL

I am a publisher, and this is a magazine about “publishing”.

I am also a writer, an artist, a graphic designer, a would-be comedian, and a wannabe film producer. And this is a magazine about graphic design, web design, graphic arts, and digital video, with an overlay of opinions and humour.

This is a personal perspective on ten years of astounding growth in “desktop” technologies and how *Graphic Exchange* has evolved with those technologies.

PRE-PUBLISHING AND PRE-PUBLISHER

“Pre-publishing” is a term which was coined about five or six years ago and which I still see used sporadically by some, mainly south of the border. It describes a process that happens just ahead of “prepress”, another term that seems obsolete today.

I’ve never been able to accept “pre-publishing” as a valid descriptive for what goes on before final production, mainly because in my opinion it implies a different model for the creative process than the one I espouse. Pre-publishing, as I see it, still conforms to the idea that the press is at the centre of the graphics universe, and that we who produce the content are still separated from our

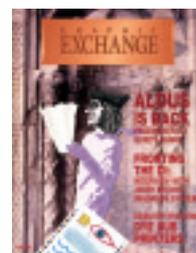
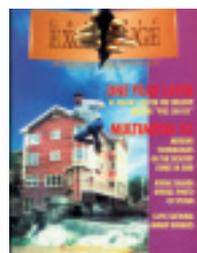
final output by a layer of specialized processes. But this isn’t what “desktop” is all about. (By the way, desktop is also a term that needs updating, but I’m using it here only because I haven’t run across another word that is universally recognized to refer to the tools and technologies that allow personal computing to drive the production processes I am describing.)

In my vision of the universe, I sit in the centre. Using the digital tools at my disposal, I create and output my concept (the “job”) to whichever final format I want. If I want print, I make files that conform to the standards required for print. If I want web pages, I adhere to the requirements of the Web. If I want multimedia, I create my content in a format suitable for that. If I want to put my work on a billboard, into a slide show, on a coffee mug, on a T-shirt, as part of an interactive presentation—all have their own standards for output, de facto or otherwise. All it takes is the know-how to do it. The machine is not in control; I am.

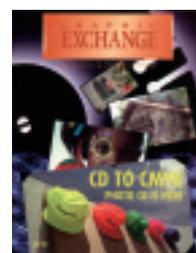
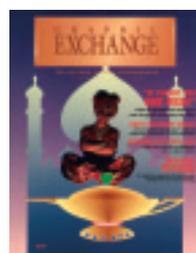
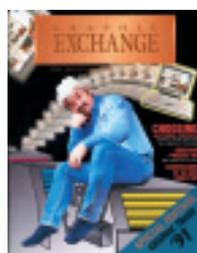
And if I don’t have the necessary ability, tools or expertise, I need to recognize that, too, and find someone else in the creative hub who can do it for me.

What I pay for is use of the “device”. It may be a printing

1991



1993



1992

ronicles

the last decade are like nothing the graphics world has evolved along with the industry. Here is a publisher's and the desktop revolution with which it has grown up.

press; it may be a postermaking machine; it may be a server. But all must be prepared to receive my digital content and produce my final product to my expectations. In turn, I must be prepared to accept responsibility for delivering this content in a format that works.

This is my model for a twenty-first century digital graphics universe.

My earliest recollection of visualizing this technological model for input, throughput and output was around 1980, some time before I was in the field of publishing. My background in fine furniture and interior design had led to a contract with a large appraisal company to produce a handbook for household appraisers that would act as a guide to evaluating and pricing furniture.

Now for those who have never thought about it, there are really only four basic functions for furniture: sitting, working or eating, sleeping and storage. The chair provides seating; the table is used for working; the bed is for sleeping; and the chest gives us a place to store things. All furniture designs are variations and permutations of these four fundamental forms.

So it was that in developing my master catalogue for this

handbook, I envisioned a computer illustration program that would accept the elements of these four forms and produce generic line drawings according to my input. Dimensions, specific design features, and combinations of the basic forms would describe any piece of furniture commercially produced. A sofa is just a padded oversized chair. A chest is simply a box of varying dimensions with an arrangement of doors and/or drawers. A table can be described by its length, width, height and support structure (legs, pedestal, etc.). A desk is a table married to a chest. A bed is a platform, raised or not, with variations on posts, headboards, canopies, and/or legs. You get the idea.

Style and detailing (materials, carving, fabric, embellishments, etc.) would be irrelevant for this generic catalogue; one way or another, all furniture fits into one of the basic variations described.

Unfortunately, I didn't have access to such a piece of software (if one even existed). The project eventually got shelved when my client balked at paying an artist to individually draw the hundreds of drawings which my catalogue required.

Nevertheless, the seed of my concept remained with me.



When the “desktop revolution” erupted between 1985 and 1989, I was extremely excited by the potential of these new technologies. Now thoroughly involved in both the publishing sector and the printing industry through my association with *PrintAction*, Canada’s venerable printing industry newspaper (through which I had gained some familiarity with page layout using the tools of the trade—a knife, a rule, a roller and hot wax—and with traditional typesetting and offset printing), I watched the rapid growth of personal computing and began speculating to myself on its impact on the graphic arts market.

The Apple Macintosh was the vehicle. PostScript was the catalyst. It seemed like only a matter of time before the various pieces of software and hardware would gel into one cohesive system for converting analog processes to digital. The big question was how quickly printers would wake up to the imminent changes.

CRITICAL MASS

In 1990, I was asked by John Young, publisher of *PrintAction*, to write and organize a two-day conference on desktop color. It was the first of its kind in Canada, and it carried the title The International Prepress Colour Conference.

Held in Toronto in December, 1990, the conference was a resounding success—so much so that we immediately began planning a second one for the following June.

By now, desktop color technologies were being recognized as a potent threat to conventional (and expensive) high end proprietary color systems from the Big Four—Scitex, Hell, Crosfield and Screen. At the December conference, as a panel was in full debate about the merits and efficiencies of building desktop color separations, I clearly remember Jim King, Adobe’s chief color scientist, standing up at the back of the room and volunteering that the next version of *Adobe Photoshop* would include RGB to CMYK color conversion. This was a critical step in bridging the gap between creative and prepress.

Plans for the June, 1991 conference went ahead full steam. We were all eagerly anticipating another landmark event.

Then, in May, 1991, just weeks before the conference, John Young died suddenly.

Although we regrouped and proceeded with our plans, I realized that this would have a major bearing on my personal business plan. And indeed, not long after the second conference (another success), with new management in place at *PrintAction* and a recession now weighing down the whole economy, I made the decision to take a chance on starting a new publication for the Canadian graphic arts industry. It would, for the first time, amalgamate the interests and needs of the creative design community with those of the printing industry. It would carry news and insights on burgeoning desktop tools as well as prepress. It would be positioned as a vehicle for exchanging vital information between two radically different cultures, graphic designers and printers—ponytails and Molson muscles.

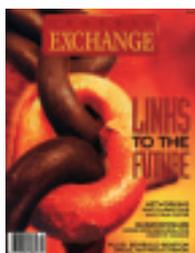
It would be called *Graphic Exchange*.

SCORING EARLY

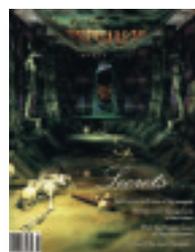
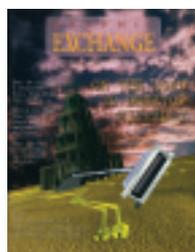
If you check the mastheads of most magazines, you generally find a lengthy list of people who work on the publication—publisher, editor, assistant editor, writers, production manager, circulation manager...more people than I wanted, and certainly more than I could afford. But that was a prime directive for me anyway; what desktop technologies were really all about was offering the capability to replace a lot of dependency on human labour with a set of computerized skills and tools. Technology could empower one guy (like me) to produce and publish a magazine.

So it was that in October, 1991, my partner and co-publisher Diane Boadway and I launched *Graphic Exchange*. The cover of the first issue featured a platoon of Lilliputians tying down a desktop computer on a beach; on the screen of the computer was a picture of the new Heidelberg GTO-DI, the world’s first press ca-

1995



1996



pable of making plates and printing directly from digital data.

Although I was able to write, design and lay out that first issue on a Mac (with ample assistance from my buddy and former *PrintAction* production manager Geoff Dufton), the cover was a bit more complicated. I enlisted the help of Jeff Kumagai at Herzig-Somerville to composite the cover image from scanned line drawings and photographs. Herzig-Somerville's bill for producing that one page was an astonishing \$3600 (which I traded for an ad).

A month later we made our mark at the Graphic Trade show in Toronto when we officially introduced *Graphic Exchange* to the Canadian graphic arts industry by giving away free haircuts at our homemade 1910-style barber shop (Diane's inspired idea).

Almost from the beginning we worked (by necessity) on a collaborative basis, gathering a small band of graphics renegades who would prove to be the magazine's greatest asset. One of the first people in the *Graphic Exchange* circle was Ron Giddings, a photographer who had adapted his talents to *Photoshop*, and who is still our house cover artist. Shane Steinman was also an early advocate and contributed much from his perspective as the owner of a Toronto service bureau. Bob Connolly (who had worked with me on the color conferences) and his partner Bea joined in as our experts in multimedia. Dave Kew discovered us at Graphic Trade when he was still a film stripper with a sense of the future.

A key contributor in the early years was Victor Beitner, the laconic but brilliant owner of a local service bureau. Victor was kind enough to let me have my own key to his place. I would drive up to Concord with my raw materials and my sleeping bag, and all night long while Victor and his employees were home sleeping, I would work away on the issue, scanning, designing pages, writing, running film and processing it, preparing two-page output to take to the film house to be stripped into flats. I often lived at VBS for days while I was finishing a magazine.

And there were others who participated along the way:

Leonard O'Neill, John Gallagher, Dan Sloan, Vince Vaitiekunis, Lydia Varmazis, Avner Levona, Paul Doucet, Stephen Herron, Kathy Hollett, George Gatsis, John Korchok, Lorne Cherry, and of course the FoolProof maestro, Gary Shilling—all of whom seemed able to overlook the magazine's esthetic flaws and share the excitement and enthusiasm we felt as pioneers in a new emerging area of technology. Without these individuals and others, there would never have been a *Graphic Exchange*. But I think we all sensed that we were part of a tidal wave of digital revolution that was changing the graphics industry forever.

AGAINST THE ODDS

According to publishing industry reports, 80 per cent of all magazines fail within their first five years. *Graphic Exchange* had every reason to be part of that statistic.

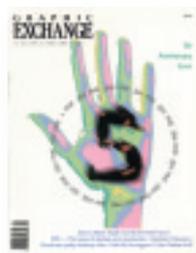
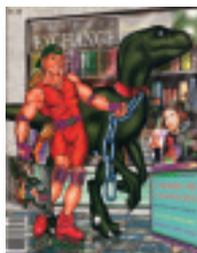
We began in a recession when advertising dollars were tough enough to find. Neither our production values nor our design were as good as other older, better-funded publications. And worse yet, we were advocating the promotion of desktop technologies which at the time were slow, unproven, often unreliable and a threat to the graphic arts status quo. I remember more than one potential advertiser saying to me, "I really don't understand why we need another printing publication in Canada."

Meanwhile, I was writing columns like my April, 1992 Publisher's Notes entitled *Servicing the "concept-to-print" market will be the challenge for the 90s* in which I chided printers for not changing their attitudes and business approaches fast enough. This was not what the industry wanted hear.

I suppose it never occurred to me that I could be wrong about where I saw desktop tools driving the market. I remained convinced that it was only a matter of time before the slow-moving world of commercial printing would finally catch on.

But in the early 90s we were working without a net, and with decidedly inferior machinery. There were no preflighting pro-

1997



1998

grams. There were no large format PostScript imagesetters. A Quadra 950 cost over \$10,000. The trade treated us with disdain because we dared to ask questions about the inner workings of prepress production and printing.

Little did we know that the *real* revolution was yet to come.

SLOWLY BLOSSOMING

For three or four years we eked out an existence, gradually liquidating whatever we had to support our publishing venture.

In mid-1994, at the height of the CD-ROM craze, I was approached by Howard Arfin, one of our irregular contributors, about the possibility of producing a special multimedia edition of *Graphic Exchange* on disc. The idea grabbed my imagination—I've always been a sucker for experiments into uncharted waters—so I agreed.

With equal parts of unrestrained optimism and unrealistic expectations, Howard and I set out to produce a CD that would reflect the offbeat character of the magazine while utilizing new creative dimensions offered by multimedia. We thought we could finish the project in six months; it actually took nine.

In the end, *The Digital Bridge* was a remarkably advanced production for its time and even earned a selection as one of three finalists in the Interactive Media and Marketing Awards sponsored by U.S. publications *Advertising Age* and *Newsweek*. But oh, what a drain it was on our precious resources.

And then, with almost no warning, along came the Internet.

Just when it seemed like the power of the desktop had begun to reach a plateau, just when it appeared that the last few remaining gaps were being plugged in the digital graphics domain, the Web burst onto the scene with all the intensity and explosiveness of a meteor shower.

For us at *Graphic Exchange*, the Internet fit right into our model for content creation. While some predicted that Web design would be a separate function, we felt that this creative role

would be filled more naturally by those who already understood desktop design. It was simply a matter of transferring existing skills to a new format.

Now we had a whole new subject to explore in addition to print, which was quickly settling into a more predictable pattern.

I approached Lynda Weinman, the diva of web design, to permit me to reproduce some of her work in *Graphic Exchange*. Much to my delight she agreed, and her valuable lessons on creating web pages proved to be a sterling addition to our expanding base of information.

Throughout the first eight years of publishing *Graphic Exchange*, I continued on in the position of production manager (in addition to filling the roles of publisher and editor). It was important to me that I write and publish content about print production from ground level. Over the years I was forced to learn the process in the real world—and, as well, cope with my mistakes. Thankfully I had backup support—after Victor, Shane; after Shane, my invaluable prepress partner Lerrick Starr. I also was lucky enough to find Lidka Schuch, who not only provided editorial support but also took over our Web needs. Nick Shinn came along to fill a vital role as our font expert. Probably the epitome of the model I'm describing is Peter Dudar, who designs the bulk of the pages in each *Graphic Exchange*—then follows and watches over them right through output all the way to press checks. You have read reports, articles and reviews in this magazine written by all these people. And of course, special credit must be paid to Sandra Pettit for her skills as our liaison with our advertisers.

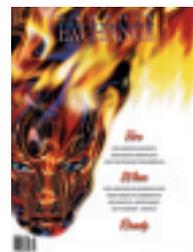
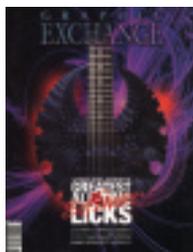
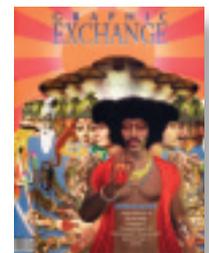
This is what has always distinguished *Graphic Exchange* from other trade publications. It has never been a magazine written by editorial writers. Its content comes from the trenches, whether it be the design or photography studio, the service bureau, the pressroom—or even the publisher's office.

The principle at work is that in a digital workflow, whether to print or to screen, everyone in the food chain is a partner. It is a

1999



2000



You Designers!

All you **creative-types** with your
8 point, 4-colour-black
text and your

fancy

metallic
duotones...

Get as **creative** as you want!
I'll run it on my  **Heidelberg.**

Rick Sherrard
Production, Quebecor World MIL

collaborative process that includes everyone from the content creator to the printer or webmaster. Although we may each be working with different tools and sets of expertise, we are all working with the same medium: digital data. It is a process which demands that all of us share as much information about each of our respective disciplines as possible.

IS THIS ALL THERE IS?

Speaking of digital workflows, these days I get asked regularly (usually by printers, ironically, looking for my business) why I haven't adopted computer-to-plate for the production of the magazine. I am still running film, making proofs and dyluxes, and sending it all to my printer to make conventional plates.

So here's my explanation, for all you printers out there.

First of all, up until earlier this year (and despite my requests for ads in digital form), I was still receiving a fair amount of advertising material as film (ad agencies have been the slowest to trust publishers with their clients' ads in digital form), and as long as I had film mixed into my workflow I was not prepared to consider a switch to CTP. Ask any publisher how much they enjoy dealing with copydot scans of advertiser material. Not much.

We deal with files coming from everywhere—advertising agencies, designers, advertisers, contributors, and our own internally generated files. I look at every single one of them. Most are application files, although lately I have started to see the odd PDF file. Big name agencies tend to be the worst (and someone please tell me, what's the point of delivering Quark pages as oversized digital art boards, complete with color bars, crop marks and agency logos, when all I need is a page sized to magazine specs?). It only takes one glitch at the RIP to ruin a whole flat. I like the safety net that film provides, because no matter how much we'd like to think otherwise, this workflow still ain't perfect.

More to the point is that in today's market, I can buy film, dyluxes and conventional plates for about the same price as CTP

plates. And if I run CTP, I'm pretty well forced to buy a full set of color proofs (more expense), just to be safe. My way, I can pick and choose the critical pages I want to proof in color.

When all is said and done, I still prefer the extra peace of mind that the "old" way gives me—at least until a time when all my clients and contributors can deliver rock solid PDFs.

IT'S ALL ABOUT WORDS AND PICTURES

In the past ten years we have all witnessed an astonishing spiral of growth in the power and capabilities of desktop computing. I am proud to be able to say that *Graphic Exchange* has been at the forefront of these technological developments, both as an information channel and as a testing ground.

If we needed a barometer of the dramatic changes that have transpired in the graphic arts, we need only stop and reflect on what a Heidelberg advertising manager would have said ten years ago if asked why he wasn't advertising to graphic designers. Presses are for printers, would have been the answer.

A short decade later, the world's largest manufacturer of presses has come to understand that branding itself to the creative market is just as important as convincing printers of the merits of its machines—and if you doubt that observation, turn back one page and read the Heidelberg ad.

It's all about producing pages of words and pictures. But control over the production of those words and pictures has shifted from the machines to the creators. And as the graphics universe continues to unfold as it should, the importance of our role as the bearers of words and pictures will continue to grow.

So let us take our responsibility seriously. Keep learning. Keep experimenting. Keep sharing what we know and asking for answers to what we don't know. Changes in the world of digital graphics may seem inevitable and relentless, but I'm sure we'll all grow wiser as long as we continue to maintain this dialogue, this interaction of ideas, this—graphic exchange. 🌐

