

Life Without Adobe

AND QUARK AND APPLE AND MACROMEDIA

PART 2: OUTPUT

by Kirby Ferguson

Digital prepress is like high school. Ya got yer cool kids—*Quark*, *Illustrator*, *Photoshop*. Ya got yer average kids—*FreeHand*, *InDesign*, *PageMaker*. Then ya got yer outcasts—*Corel-Draw*, Microsoft *Publisher*, Deneba *Canvas*...on Windows. Fairly or unfairly, that's the hierarchy of desktop publishing snobbery. Last issue I evaluated *Draw*, *Publisher* and *Canvas* as alternative design tools to the “Big Three”: *QuarkXPress* and Adobe *Photoshop* and *Illustrator*. *Draw*, *Publisher* and *Canvas* had little trouble composing good-looking files on-screen, but prepress details are the dull—yet essential—fundamentals that dictate what life with a print graphics program is like. This time around we'll take a look at the practicality of using Windows versions of *Canvas*, *Publisher* and *Draw* to get work printed.

THE WAY IT WAS/IS

At the dawn of desktop publishing, print graphics work simply couldn't be done on the Windows platform. When applications like Aldus *PageMaker* and *CorelDraw* began to emerge for the PC, printers and service bureaus weren't equipped to image files using PCs, so these documents were opened and prepped for film on Macs. Through much elbow grease, salvaging whatever possible and rebuilding the rest, these files were painstakingly imaged. This was slow, aggravating work and thus, expensive.

Some service bureaus and printers then installed Windows workstations on their networks, allowing them to send PC files directly to film. But the headaches didn't end there—if anything, they may have become worse.

First, prepress operators work with *Quark/Illustrator/Photoshop* on Macs all day, every day, so they have little familiarity with Windows, let alone complex and—to them—unusual programs like *CorelDraw*. Since PC files typically represent a minority of their work day, these technicians have never been comfortable with Windows files and applications.

Second, since Windows graphics file are often the work of non-professionals, they tend to be badly built—to say the least. Rife with low-res images, RGB colors and garish, unprintable special effects, these files send the blood pressure of many prepress operators rocketing. (In fact, some printers and service bureaus simply rebuild PC files just to spare themselves the agony of troubleshooting them.) On top of all this, PC jobs tend to be small, low-margin affairs, so fuses are even shorter than usual.

These two factors—inexperienced operators and poorly created files—along with the quiriness of the applications themselves, combined to relegate Windows DTP to the low end, where it remains to this day despite the fact that all the dominant graphics applications are now available on PC.

GENERAL ADVICE

It's hard to distinguish which of these many issues causes the most headaches, and different service bureaus will give you different opinions about where the problem lies. Nonetheless, it can be agreed that better file composition makes a huge difference. A solid grasp of simple fundamentals and a little restraint go a long way toward remedying many of the problems that haunt Windows DTP. Much of what follows may be obvious, but let's take a moment to quickly review some common pitfalls.

Watch the resolution. Bafflingly, everything tends to default to a resolution of 72 dpi in these programs. Make sure bitmaps are set to something printable (150 dpi and up). Also, be careful with the clip art photos that come with these packages, since most are low-res—and RGB, to top it off.

Watch the colors. Those RGB defaults are everywhere, so PC files tend to fill up with unprintable colors. Pick your color model—spot or process—and stick with it all the way through.

Take it easy. Many Windows graphics files suffer from what I'll

inelegantly call kitchen-sink-itus. Somehow they inspire people to throw in tons of art, fonts, colors and effects. In turn, the files become a maze of problems. Programs like *Draw* and *Canvas* include many special effects that can instantly generate thousands of points; beware of point-intensive special effects.

Link images—don't embed. This makes editing support files much quicker and easier, but just as importantly, it's a safeguard against disaster. Files have a tendency to corrupt at the most inopportune times and if everything is embedded in one giant file, you'll lose it all in one crash.

Use sensible image formats. Since you're using an unusual program, stick with more common image formats, like TIFF and EPS; steer clear of the likes of BMP, JPEG and GIF, all of which tend to be screen-res anyway.

Export type as paths. This isn't always practical, especially with text-heavy files, but converting text to outlines skips one of the biggest headaches with Windows files: font issues. Use PostScript fonts if possible too, since many RIPs still gag on TrueType.

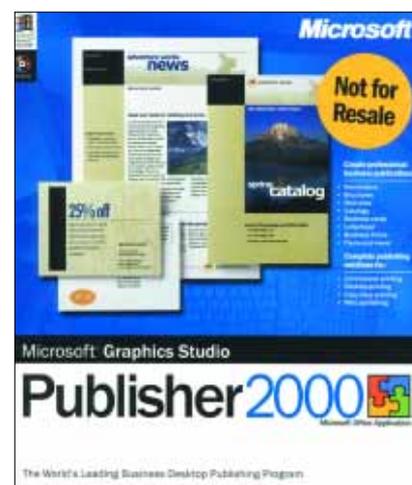
Print it. Sounds painfully obvious, but many prepress operators have nearly blown a gasket upon discovering that the client has never attempted to print her file. Print it not only to see if it will print, but also to supply a hard proof of what the document should look like.

Now let's take a quick look at some of the unique issues of each program.

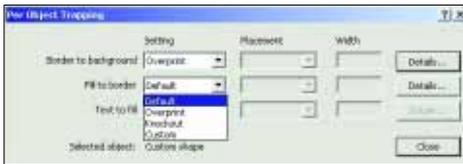
MICROSOFT PUBLISHER

Publisher is probably the most popular of these apps and also the most controversial. Its serious commercial printing aspirations are fairly recent, so the majority of printers are still coming to terms with this most dreaded of hybrids: a SOHO layout program suitable for real printing. Since *Publisher* comes in the box with many configurations of Microsoft *Office*, printers had better get used to this one.

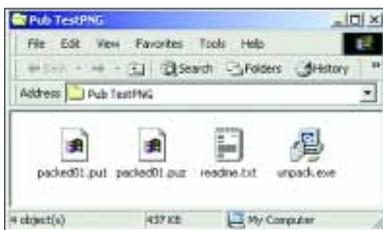
Publisher is unusual in this group because it only has two means of exporting files: native *Publisher* and PostScript. *Canvas* and *Draw*, on the other hand, export scores of formats (even the goofy ones!). Generating PostScript files is usually pointless because most places can't edit them. Besides, nobody exports them right anyway. In reality, *Publisher* files are shipped as *Publisher* files. Unfortunately, this doesn't leave prepress technicians many options as to how they can get these files to film.



While some of the printers with whom I spoke contend that with a little patience *Publisher* does what it claims to do, others complained of prevalent RGB issues, reflow problems and collection hiccups with copyrighted fonts. *Publisher* considers spot color jobs to be black, plus up to two other colors, which certainly



Here's *Publisher's* much-ballyhooed **TRAPPING OPTIONS**. But let's face it: you're using *Publisher*—should you really be messin' with this stuff?



Publisher's "Pack and Go" **WIZARD** leaves you with this tidy little collection of files.

has its limitations. The program also doesn't allow you to convert fonts to paths. *Publisher* users should consider upgrading to the much-improved *Publisher 2000*; some service bureaus even pay for the upgrade to avoid dealing with old *Publisher* files. Look out for the low-res images that appear in *Publisher's* templates.

Opinions on *Publisher* are wildly varied: some printers claim the program is fine for low-end work; others say it's impossible to work with. So inquire about your printer or service bureau's *Publisher* experiences before you ship your file.

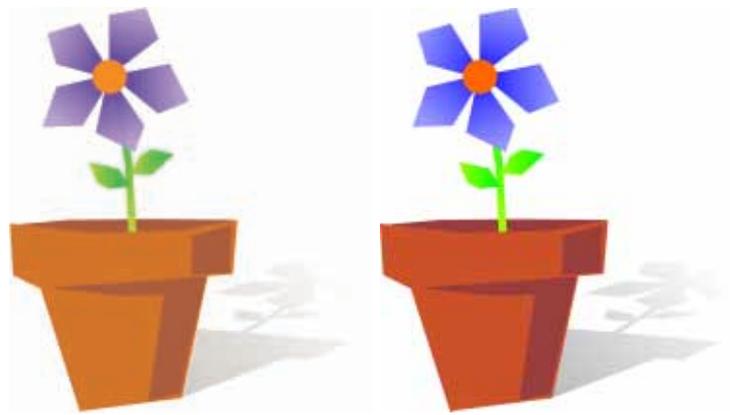
A correction from the last issue: I incorrectly stated that *Publisher* cannot create gradients, which in fact it can. Be warned, though, that gradients between spot colors don't work.

CORELDRAW

Despite its beleaguered history, *CorelDraw* may be the most respectable prepress citizen of this lot. It's been around the longest and sports enough export features to give technicians lots of alternatives for getting files to film. Over the years most service bureaus have developed some means of handling *CorelDraw* files;

most now accept native *Draw* files.

The classic way to export *Draw* files used to be in Adobe *Illustrator* format. Then the operator would set to work correcting the many translation blunders. This technique should be seen as a last resort, since *Draw's* EPS and Adobe *Illustrator* exports often look wacko. *Draw* now has a nice PDF export feature that should make file exchange simpler.



This a pretty simple graphic, but the EPS that **CORELDRAW EXPORTED** (left) is totally messed up, dude. Just compare it to the original file (right).

In *Draw's* "Options" dialog, make sure the resolution for tools like Drop Shadow and Transparency are set to something printable, like 300 dpi. *Draw* can generate a PDF when you collect your files for output. This is intended to serve as a soft proof, but seems risky since digital files are not immutable.

It may be worth knowing (but probably isn't) that many *Draw* users are superstitious about the numbering of the program's upgrades: odd numbers are good, even numbers are bad. (It's kinda like the reverse of the *Star Trek* movie formula.) This has often



This image from **CORELDRAW 10'S COLLECTION** of clip art has nothing to do with anything...I just think it's hilarious.

been true in the past: versions 4 and 6 were rotten, while 5 and 7 were pretty solid. Nonetheless, my experience thusfar with version 10 suggests it's the best one yet.

DENEBA CANVAS

First of all, nobody's gonna accept your native *Canvas* files. I'm sorry, I know you paid a lot for the program, but hey, life is cruel.

None of the printers with whom I spoke had ever even seen a *Canvas* file, and neither have I. Fortunately, *Canvas* does export many different formats, though AI and EPS were erratic enough to be considered desperation options, much as they are in *Draw*. Most importantly, *Canvas* generates solid PDFs (and no, you don't need *Acrobat Distiller*).

These files are rendered quite accurately, and most service bureaus can now handle PDFs. In all likelihood this is how *Canvas*

