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# Industry Standards for Desktop Publishing: Using the Right Tool for the Task

**A**mazingly, it has been nearly two decades since desktop publishing arrived on the scene. The debut of the Apple Macintosh computer and the Hewlett Packard LaserJet printer in 1984, plus Adobe's introduction of PostScript page description language in 1985 laid the groundwork. Then when the Aldus Corporation introduced PageMaker for the Macintosh and Adobe came out with the first PostScript printer (the Apple Laserwriter), a whole new way of publishing documents was born.



(Aldus founder Paul Brainerd is generally credited for coining the phrase *desktop publishing*.)

Fast forward to 2003. In addition to HP LaserJets and Apple LaserWriters, there are many other printers and printer manufacturers. PostScript is at level 3; PageMaker is now owned by Adobe and is at version 7; and Quark XPress eclipsed PageMaker as the favorite program of professional graphic designers. And while Macintosh is still considered by some to be the platform of choice for professional desktop publishing, PC users have rallied around PageMaker and Microsoft Publisher. In addition, there has been an explosion of inexpensive desktop publishing programs used by home designers on both PC and Macintosh platforms.

## **The Challenge: Getting It To Print**

In the early developmental stages of desktop publishing, the graphic arts industry adopted PostScript as its standard for page description language, while general business users chose

Hewlett-Packard's Printer Command Language (PCL) as their standard. Thus from the beginning, desktop publishing for graphic arts professionals has been at odds with the general business community. (Think Mac versus PC, PostScript versus PCL printers, and Quark XPress versus PageMaker.)

Caught in the middle, printers struggled to accommodate graphic designers and the general business community, both of whom were submitting files for output to film or to toner-based printers. Adobe's introduction of *portable document format (PDF)* has helped enormously, as has the recognition by the business community that printers need files created in programs that allow control over output as well as functionality for design.

## **Software Standards for Printing and Publishing**

There are six basic steps to create a document: design; page makeup; text acquisition and composition; image selection and preparation; file

preflight; and output. When you submit a file to us here at Nova, you have completed the first four steps and part of the fifth. We complete the preflight step, then output to our platesetter to produce press plates.

According to Dr. Taz Tally, columnist for *Photoshop User* magazine and frequent speaker on prepress topics, the process of preparing a digital file for print – also known as preflighting – has two parts: content preflight and technical preflight. Content preflighting confirms that all necessary components of a document (the document file, placed graphic images, font files) have been gathered together and basic checks have been completed (colors properly assigned, proofing and spell check complete).

Technical preflight is concerned with how your files are constructed. During technical preflight we check for image resolution, conversion from RGB to CMYK or spot color, mismatched colors, color breaks and separations. We may also make adjustments for dot gain and color correction; set bleeds, assign printer drivers, search and replace hairlines, reduce banding on gradients, assign screen angles and frequencies, apply trapping values; match trim and paper sizes and set up imposition.

The ability to perform these functions is built into four software programs, which is why they are the standards for printing and publishing.

The programs are:

- Quark XPress
- Adobe PageMaker
- Adobe InDesign
- Adobe Illustrator

Like the rest of the printing and publishing industry, we have adopted these standards for file submission. That doesn't mean we won't accept a file created in another program – we will – but it does mean that we will have to convert the file into one of the standard programs before we can proceed to technical preflight and output. And this means more time and expense to you.

### **Avoiding Charges for File Conversion**

If you do not work in any of the four standard programs, there are some things you can do to avoid charges for file conversion.

1. *Submit files to us in PDF format.* Be aware, though, that we will need Adobe Acrobat-distilled PDF files, not files created with the PDF option available in some applications. Also, be sure to preflight your document and collect its components prior to creating the PDF, then make a print from the PDF to submit along with the file.
2. *Agree to output on our digital printer/copiers.* If the specifications for printing your document are compatible with reproduction on our high speed black and white or color digital printer/copiers, we can accept alternate file formats.

3. *Print in a single ink color.* Similarly, if your document can be printed in one ink color, we can accept alternate file formats.
4. *Give us unformatted Word files.* When PDF, digital printing or single color printing aren't suitable and you can't submit the file in one of the standard formats, then consider providing us with text-only in Word and let us do the page layout for you.

### **A Final Word**

We realize you may have developed considerable proficiency in using applications such as Word, Corel Draw, Macromedia Freehand, Adobe Photoshop and even Microsoft Excel or Microsoft PowerPoint for page layout. We also realize you may be confused about why we can't fill your printing order using these files when you are able to print from them on your desktop. Please remember this: page layout software (Quark XPress, Adobe PageMaker, Adobe InDesign and Adobe Illustrator) allow for integrating text and images on the page, easy manipulation of page elements, using graphic design in layouts, and will work with multi-page documents. They also contain features that allow us to complete technical preflighting.

Word processing software, on the other hand, is best suited to working with words – typing and editing text, spell and grammar check and formatting words. Illustration and photo/image editing software is for working with artwork and photographs. Spreadsheet and presentation software is for accounting applications and presentations. Use the right tool for the job and we'll do the rest!

# TRICKS & tips

**T**ext can be typeset to be either *fully justified* or *justified right or left*, meaning that the right and left edges of the column of type are both aligned; or are aligned on the right but not the left; or aligned on the left but not the right. The decision on how to justify type is ultimately yours; however, there are a few conventions that may help you make the decision.

Fully-justified type is often considered more formal than left-justified. It is also more familiar to readers of books and newspapers, since these

publications almost always fully justify type in their columns. Fully-justified type allows for more characters per line (meaning more words can be fit into a defined amount of space). However, fully-justified type may require greater attention to word and character spacing and hyphenation in order to avoid rivers of white space visible throughout the text.

Left-justified type is considered more informal and the ragged right edge adds visual white space to the block of text.

In general, left-justifying type requires less time to adjust the type for maximum eye appeal. Be aware, though, that when type is left-justified on a short line length, it is necessary to pay extra attention to hyphenation to keep the right margin from becoming too ragged or to prevent over-hyphenation.

If you find that you must use fully-justified text due to space constraints or audience expectations, remember to break up dense blocks of text with techniques such as sub-headings, rules or graphics.

**Q.** What is the origin of the term “upper and lower case” type?

**A.** In the days when all type was set by hand, *compositors* (the people who composed type) kept the individual letters in a series of trays that fit like drawers into a cabinet. A tray, called a *typecase*, was divided into little sections, each of which housed many copies of a single letter in one point size. The compartment containing the letter *e* held the most letters, since that is the most used character. At the top of the cabinet was a metal stand holding two typecases.

The top case was held above and slightly behind the bottom case; this allowed the compositor to select type from or return it to any section in their case. The bottom tray – the *lower case* – held the most-used characters. The top one – the *upper case* – held the capital letters and other less-used characters.

# T H E I D E A C O R N E R

**H**ere are some ideas to help you improve your desktop designing skills.

*Try a template.* Predesigned templates, such as those available as wizards in some page layout programs, allow you to borrow an established design and use it effectively. They are also good to point you in a design direction if you'd like something more customized.

*Limit use of fonts.* Fonts can be fun to use, and many desktop publishing programs come with an amazing array of them. But be careful to limit the number of fonts in one publication to no more than three. If you are publishing a newsletter, you can bring in extra fonts as headlines. But try to keep body copy to one or two fonts.

*Plan the use of clip art.* Clip art is

helpful to illustrate a concept or theme of an article. But beware of using so much that you create eye clutter for the reader. Also, alter the size of clip art – include a single medium or large image on your pages, as a contrast to several smaller images.



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