

Creating Good PDF Files: It's All A Matter of Settings

by Kevin Slimp, August 2005

Wow! What a response to my previous column concerning color settings in Photoshop. I received messages and invitations from publishers around the globe. Apparently, a lot of newspapers would like to have a little more pop in their pictures.

Another issue of concern to many newspapers is the ability to **create PDF files that actually print as intended.** Between Courier printing where Helvetica should be and extra plates spitting out of the imagesetter, there is a lot that can go wrong with a PDF file. Just like the color settings we discussed in my last column, PDF settings are something I talk about so often I forget that everyone doesn't dream of downsampling options.

The following are a few of the most important things to remember when creating a PDF file for print:

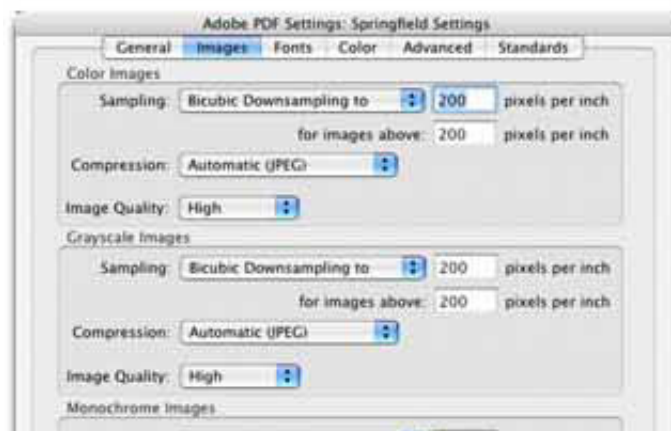
Never export a PDF from an application unless you're sending the file to a single location that has printed this type of exported file before. Exported PDF files cause a variety of headaches for newspapers trying to print them. Always create a Postscript or EPS file, then convert the file to PDF using Acrobat Distiller.

Make sure your settings are correct in Acrobat Distiller. Whether you're using versions 4, 5, 6, or 7 of Distiller, be sure of the basics, including:

- *Set PDF to Acrobat 4.0 (PDF 1.3) compatibility.* Files crashed applications, incorrectly printed fonts and caused Postscript errors when set to later versions of Acrobat. These problems are directly related to the applications and printers that are used to output the files. Play it safe. Set compatibility to Acrobat 4.0.
- *Set downsampling in Distiller to approximately twice your expected line screen.* Most newspapers set their color and grayscale downsampling to approximately 200 pixels per inch.
- *Embed all fonts.* I used to have lengthy discussions with other trainers and writers concerning this topic. I'm happy that most have finally seen the light. In



Kevin Slimp speaks at Opening General Session of the California Newspaper Publishers Association Convention.



Distiller, set your fonts to embed. Do not check the option to “subset embedded fonts.”

Preflight PDF files in Acrobat Professional to find potential problems. Before sending or printing potentially dangerous PDF files, run them through a Preflight Profile, available in Acrobat Professional 6.0 and 7.0. It's a relatively simple task to create your own profile. At a minimum, newspapers should have profiles for CMYK PDF files, grayscale PDF files, and spot color files. A few items to include:

- *font not embedded*
- *PDF version not equal to Acrobat 4.0 (PDF 1.3)*
- *uses RGB color*
- *more than four plates (for CMYK file)*

Use Color Tools in the most recent versions of Acrobat Professional to correct mistakes. Versions 6.0 and 7.0 include the ability to find potential color problems by using the **Separation Preview** (6.0) and **Output Preview** (7.0) tools. The same tool, with different names, allows you to view all the color separations before sending a file to print.

Acrobat Professional 7.0 includes two valuable tools for correcting many of these color problems. The first, **Ink Manager**, allows the user to convert spot colors to CMYK before sending the file to print. The second, **Convert Colors**, does just what the name implies - converts individual colors to CMYK or to spot color plates. Just as importantly, these changes can be saved permanently in the PDF files by utilizing the PDF Optimizer, also found in Acrobat Professional.

For those who would like to learn more about utilizing the tools in Acrobat Professional 7.0, a new book by Jennifer Alspach, *Adobe Acrobat 7 Visual Quickstart Guide*, just hit the shelves and is available at many bookstores.

More information concerning the Visual Quickstart series can be found at www.peachpit.com.

