

Tackling Those Pesky PDF Problems

by Kevin Slimp, January 2006

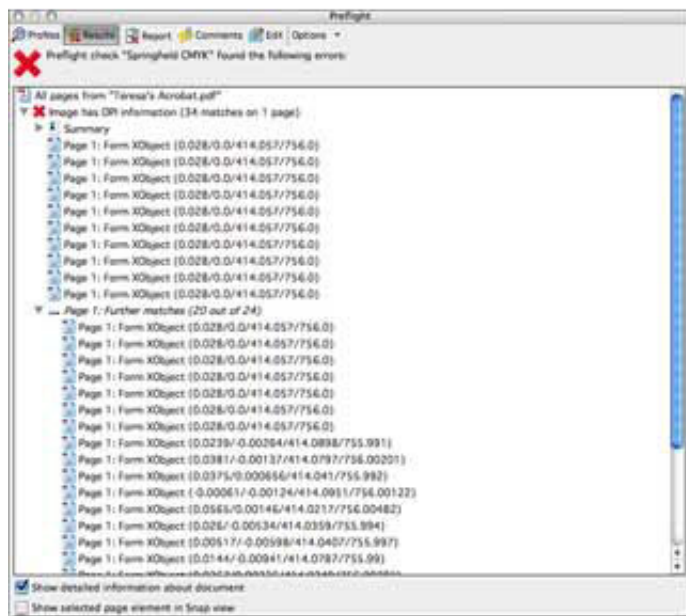
OK. I didn't mean to write another column about PDF files. After a week at the beach with my family, I arrived at the office with plans to pen my annual "favorites" column, providing an overview of my favorite hardware and software products for 2006. My plans quickly changed when I found an inbox filled with desperate cries for help, all related to problem PDF files.

Just four months ago, I wrote a column about creating the perfect PDF file. I failed, however, to mention what to do with those pesky PDF files that you receive from other, good-natured, sources. Allow me to share some of the messages from my inbox, along with suggestions for curing these PDF woes.

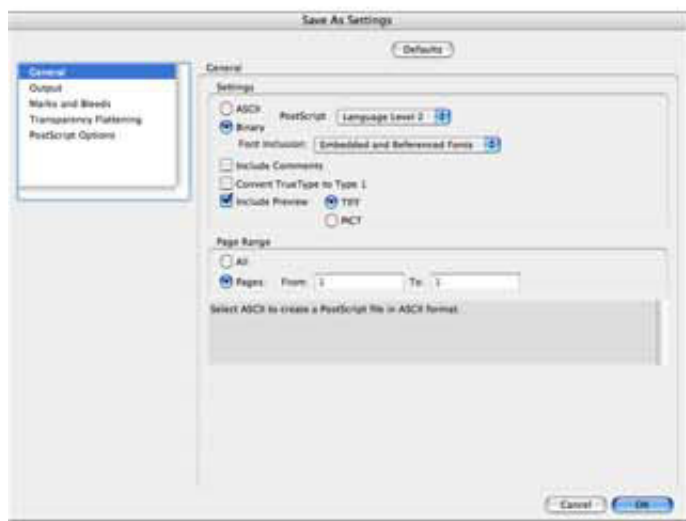
From Brian in Illinois: *"Any chance you could give me direction on these files? The one labeled MyMac.PDF causes Acrobat to quit when creating an EPS using Acrobat 7. The PDF labeled Teresa.PDF was created in Distiller 5 and OS 9. It created an EPS OK, but causes Quark 6.5 to crash."*

Well, Brian, I'm not sure why Acrobat was crashing, but let me tell you what I've learned. Upon examination of the PDF files, using a Preflight Profile in Acrobat Pro (versions 6 & 7), I found that these files were filled with OPI information. OPI information can cause some applications and imagesetters to act strangely.

The problem was caused by faulty settings in the creator's Acrobat Distiller. In addition, the PDF file saved in OS 9 was saved as a version 1.4 (Acrobat 5) PDF file. To be safe, set your Distiller to always create 1.3 (Acrobat 4) compatible files. This will help all applications understand the file when placed on a page. The fix for files with OPI information is to save the file as an EPS, then convert it to PDF using the correct Distiller settings. If the OPI information was causing the problem with saving the file as an EPS (I've not seen this before), you could use a PDF plug-in like PDF Enhancer (available at www.apagoinc.com) to remove the OPI information from the PDF file.



This preflight found 34 instances of OPI information in images in a PDF file.



Saving a PDF file as an EPS, then running the EPS through Distiller

From Leanne in Alberta: *"The original ad preflight indicated OPI problems. What do you think the "X" through the OPI means?"*

The "X" is Acrobat's way of letting you know a problem has been found in the PDF file. I fixed this file by saving it as an EPS file (grayscale), then redistilled it using the appropriate settings in Distiller. This removed the OPI information altogether.

From Scott in Tennessee: *"I received this file from a client this morning. When I send it to the RIP, the text prints in Courier and comes out on all four plates."*

I feel your pain, Scott. You've run into two major problems, neither created by you. But, as the printer, you're expected to fix the problems and print the files. There are two ways to tackle this problem. The text separation problem could be quickly fixed using an Acrobat plug-in known as Quite a Box of Tricks (available at www.quite.com). The Courier problem was caused by fonts that weren't embedded. Not much you can do on your end about that. I called the offending party and learned that their Distiller settings were faulty. Unknown to them, their settings instructed Distiller to remove many of their fonts from the PDF files.

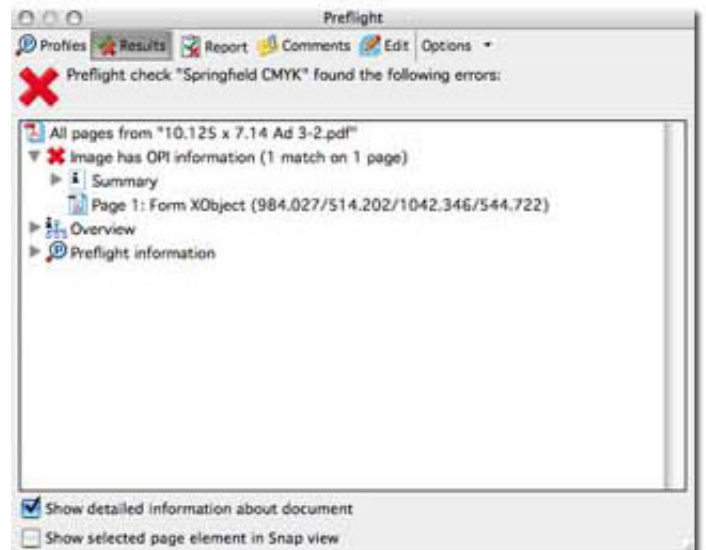
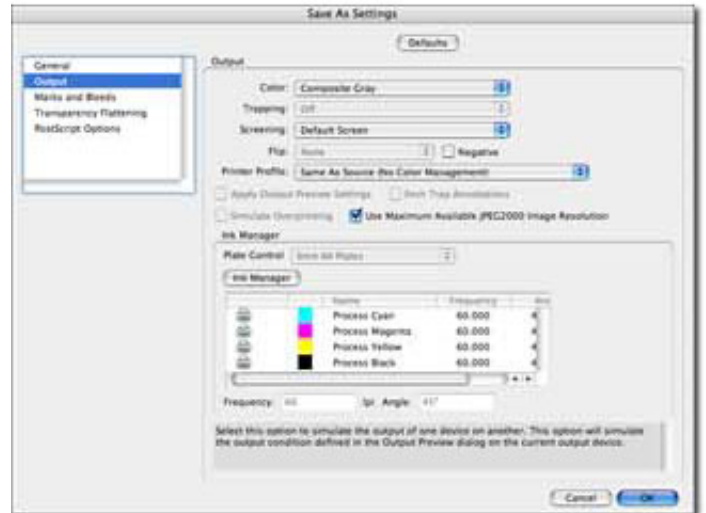
I also learned that text was separating onto all four plates because they were using an export filter in QuarkXPress to create the PDF file, rather than saving the page as a Postscript (or EPS) file first. After five minutes on the phone, they were creating PDF files with text on the black plate only and all fonts embedded.

From Chuck in Alabama: *"I attended your class in Birmingham recently. You said to send you this problem file. It looks OK to me, but Quark crashes every time I try to place the file on the page."*

There were a couple of problems with this file, Chuck. First, it was exported directly from InDesign to PDF. The result is that the file contains CID fonts, which can cause significant problems in some applications and printing environments.

The chief problem with this file was that it was saved

fixes many problems associated with OPI information.



Acrobat's preflight marks problem areas with an "x"

as an Acrobat 1.6 (Acrobat 7) file. Most applications don't know how to handle this level of PDF. I fixed the file by opening it in Acrobat Pro 7, running it through PDF Optimizer (found under the ADVANCED menu), then re-saving the file as an Acrobat 1.3 (Acrobat 4) file.

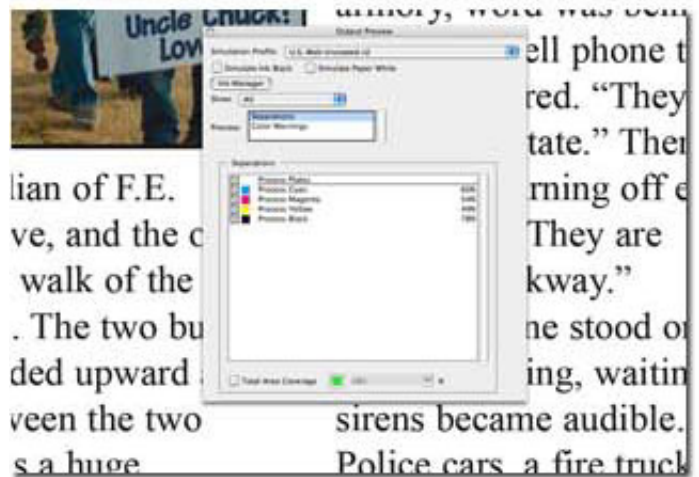
From John in New York: *"This PDF file seems OK, but keeps crashing when I send it to my RIP. Is it a problem with the file or my RIP?"*

Don't go buying a new RIP yet, John. The problem with the file you sent was the amount of information on the page. Apparently, the person who created this file decided it was a good idea to take a 17" x 30" photo and shrink it down to two columns on the page. Some RIPs could have handled the file. Most couldn't. I simply saved this file as an EPS file, then redistilled it. The file size was reduced from 23 Mb to 660 Kb.

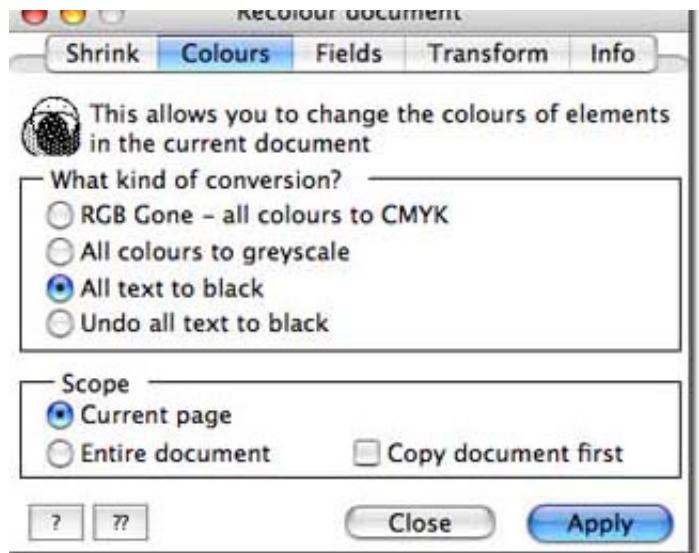
Enough! No more PDF columns for a while.



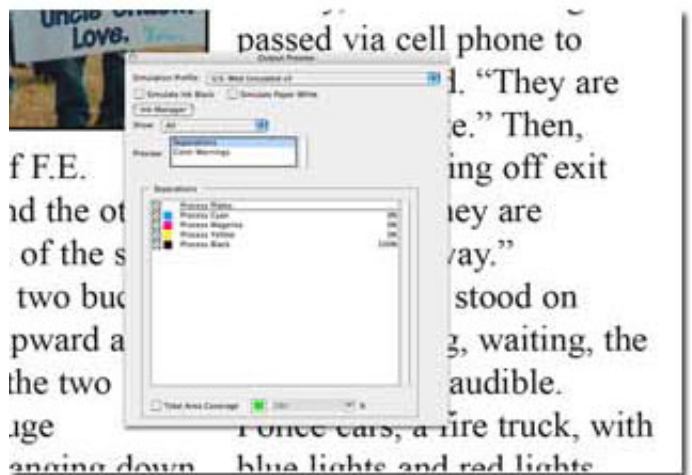
PDF Enhancer, by Apago, offers one method of removing OPI elements from PDF files.



The Output Preview indicates the black text will print out on all four color separations



The Quite a Box of Tricks dialog window allows options for converting colors in a PDF file.



After processing this PDF through Quite a Box of Tricks, the text is back on the black plate, where it belongs.