Tips to prevent PDF problems in Acrobat

computer notes
by WILMA MELOT — *from the road*

If you ever have the opportunity to attend the Institute of Newspaper Technology in Knoxville, Tenn., I'd highly recommend it.

I was able to attend the Fall 2007 session in October and came back with all kinds of useful information that I'll pass on to all of you.

Kevin Slimp's sessions on PDFs was worth the price of admission. If you can't swing the institute, take one of his on-line classes for $69. To sign up, go to www.braincast.biz.
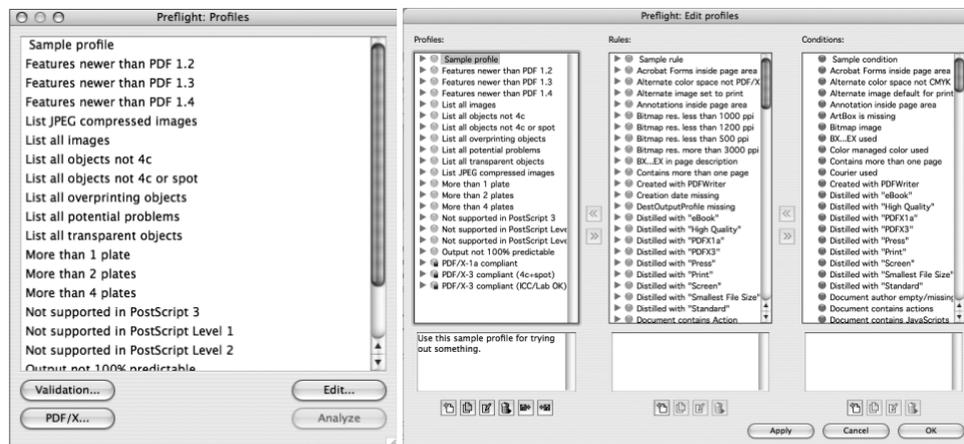
I'll share a small slice of what's available in Slimp's classes in this column, starting with the PDF preflighting process.

Many newspapers aren't familiar with preflighting. I know this because many newspapers have PDFs that won't print. If you' haven't heard of preflighting, the following information is priceless. It may prevent you from having to return to the office at 1 a.m. to re-PDF pages because the paper wouldn't rip to the imagesetter.

Using the preflighting process will help ensure that your paper will print.

The first step of the process involves opening the PDF and preflighting it with Acrobat 6, 7, or 8. Preflight, first available with Acrobat 6, is a little different in each version.

Pre-set settings help immensely when preflighting. The best way to set up your PDF preflight settings is based on what could go wrong. To pre-set settings, click on the 'preflight' feature found under a drop-down box at the top of the screen,

Two preflight boxes in Acrobat 6.

which opens a pop-up box. Under the pop-up box, click on the 'edit' button. This brings up a box titled "Preflight: Edit Profiles," which enables you to change your preflight settings.

Once in the "Preflight: Edit Profiles" box, you can change the rules and settings. However, the appearance of this box and the method of changing rules and settings differs from each version of Acrobat.

A standard set of rules and settings comes with all versions of Acrobat. These are close to what is needed for newspaper purposes.

The rules you need to add include:
• Images include RGB
• OPI comments
• PDF not equal to 1.3
• Web preview

Take some time to read through the settings and see what's available. It's well worth it.

Once you have the settings, make sure all staff members preflight every PDF. Be on the lookout for any potential problems.

One common problem arises when fonts aren't embedded. Another is when the PDF is made through a bad PDF export command. Export command features may embed font profiles that may not print later. To get around those problems, I recommend first creating an EPS file, then using distiller to create the PDF.

Preflighting also combats problems that arise when photos aren't converted to the right format (CMYK, for instance), or anything dealing with MM fonts.

If you find a problem, don't save the file in Acrobat. Instead, use the PDF optimizer to clean up the file. If it's a file sent from a client, explain the problem and ask them to send you a clean file.

By the way, I'm aware not all of you have an Acrobat version with the preflight feature. You might want to consider upgrading. The upgrade to Acrobat 8 from 5 is only $150.

If you do upgrade, remember that OSX 10.4.3 or greater or Windows 2000/XP/Vista is required to run Acrobat 8.

Leopard operating system takes Tiger by the tail

Leopard is now king of the jungle. The computer jungle, that is. And only if you're on a Macintosh.

Apple's latest operating system has replaced Tiger and made upgrading much more complicated.

For starters, Leopard does not run on G4 or G3 machines – and you can't run in Classic mode with the new operating system. Leopard requires a Mac with an Intel, PowerPC G5, or PowerPC G4 867MHz (or faster) processor. This makes the silver-doored G4 the lowest end model that works with the new operating system.

With Leopard's system requirements, the few unsold copies of Tiger might be worth gold to those of you who want to keep older machines for a few more years.

For those who have been waiting to upgrade to OSX, it's now more expensive.

You're probably better off buying a new machine but if you're still using PageMaker for the Mac, your software also needs to be upgraded.

This can be a very expensive venture.

If you're considering a used computer to run Leopard, consider this: An older machine with 876MHz that still runs Power PC and System 9 or Classic costs as much as a new computer. It's just as cost-effective to buy a new machine.

Let's look at software. One alternative to save some money is upgrading from PageMaker 6.5 or 7 to InDesign for around $200. That's a lot less than the $1,200 standard edition of Adobe Creative suite, which includes InDesign, Acrobat, Photoshop and Illustrator.

The bottom line is that you may need to prepare yourself for the outlay of big money if an older machine goes down

or you have to update for compatibility reasons.

Many newsrooms I visit are using G3 Macs on System 9. These machines are no longer able to properly run the Internet and are going down a rapid rate. After all, most are at least seven years old and hard drives don't last forever.

Even with all this bad news, this cloud has a sliver lining. Leopard has what I like to call a 'way back machine.' Leopard can run backups to an external hard drive and you can set how often you want them to run.

Does Leopard have bugs? The reviews I've read are split on this issue. If you can wait a couple of months to buy Leopard, some of those bugs will be worked out. And as we all know, the fewer bugs in the software, the less time I spend scratching my head.

plugged IN

Word to the wise

Several of you have asked about making PDFs from the new Microsoft Word on Windows.

First, I would advise you to keep in mind that the new version isn't anything like the old one. There's a new menu system and a new way of doing almost everything.

Microsoft's attempt to make Word more user-friendly requires learning a new system.

To assist your Word PDF-making attempts, navigate your Internet browser to www.microsoft.com/downloads.

Look for the search entry field to the right of "Search: All Downloads."

In that entry field, type in "Microsoft Save as PDF or XPS."

This takes you to a download page, which requires your validation code to prove you're a genuine Microsoft Office user. Once downloaded, it will let you create PDFs from Word.
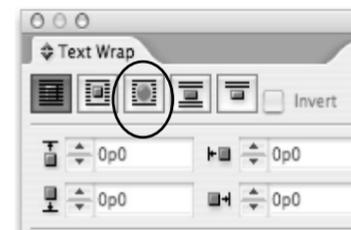
Cutting out elements

Someone recently asked me to explain how to cut out elements of a photo and apply text wrap in InDesign.

First, isolate the element using Photoshop. I use the Polygonal Lasso tool with a feather of about 5 pixel. Surround the subject and click 'Inverse' (under 'Select'). Now hit the delete key.

If you hit delete more than once it increases the amount it deletes by 5 pixels each time. Make sure to hit the 'D' key on your keyboard to set the background color back to white.

Now save, go back to InDesign and place the photo. You can do this by clicking command+D.

With the photo selected, click on 'Object' at the top of the screen and then select 'clipping path' and pull down to 'detect edges.' This cuts the white background out and gives you a wrap for placing type. If you click on the photo with the direct selection tool, you'll be able to edit the clipping path.

You can also use the pen tool to add and subtract anchor points from the clipping path. Once done, go to the text wrap box (shown above) and choose the third setting to complete the process.