

# 10

## How to spot little problems that cause

If you're like most Canadian print shops, you receive at least half your work as electronic files. Most of your clients will tell you the files are complete and ready to output. Just hit the print command and out comes perfect film or plates.

I wonder what colour the sky is in their world.

Typically, only about 15% of client-supplied files are actually ready to output without problems. The other 85% have one or more problems—some are minor and hardly noticeable in the final piece; others have more serious problems that will jam your imagesetter or other output device or, worse, produce an unacceptable print job that the client won't pay for. The earlier you find these problems, the better. You can decide who should fix the problems: you, for an additional fee, or the client, and deal with them before you waste materials or miss a delivery date.

In an earlier column I covered some popular pre-flight software designed to auto-troubleshoot digital prepress files and identify, but not fix, problems. These programs can be real time-savers, but you

still need to understand the most common problems and how to fix them to avoid angry clients and wasting time and money.

With that in mind, these are the most common prepress problems you will encounter.

**1 The problem with fonts** This is far and away the most common trouble area. Jobs can contain from two to a dozen or more typefaces, and page layout or illustration programs do not automatically include the fonts with files they create. Therefore, it's the client's responsibility to include these fonts with the



job so you can temporarily load them to output the files. If the correct fonts are not included, they will be missing or substituted in the output, usually with unfortunate results. This means clients must include the Mac or PC screen and printer font files for all PostScript typefaces used, even if they

seem like common fonts. There are over a dozen similar, but not identical, versions of something as common as Times or Helvetica out there, for example.

For TrueType fonts, just the main font file is required—it includes both screen and printer resources. Although TrueType can be problematic, especially on older image-setter RIPs. Adobe's Multiple Master fonts can also be a problem—clients must remember to include any special instances of MM fonts used in a job.

Other fixes? Well, Illustrator and FreeHand can convert all type to outlines in their files—you won't need the font files to output the work, but you will not be able to edit the text. Adobe's excellent Acrobat Distiller can open files from almost any program and convert them to PDF, embedding font resources in the these files, solving the font problem and other potential issues. All you need to print them is a copy of the free Acrobat Reader, although every print shop should own the full Acrobat package—it's a real swiss army knife for graphic arts files.

**2 Tricky graphic files** With the widespread use of low-cost digital cameras and scanners—some are as low as \$69, but you get exactly what you pay for—and the avail-

# prepress troubleshooting

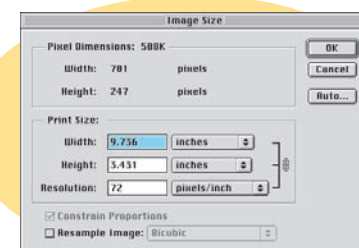
# tips

## big headaches



ability of powerful image-editing programs like Photoshop, many clients create and process their own photos or other pixel-based graphic files. Predictably, there are many things a client can get wrong, and a full discussion of these is much too big for this article. The most common errors are incorrect resolution (they should be 1.5 to two times the planned output line screen; I see more and more incredibly bad 72 dpi GIF or JPEG files from the Web included in print jobs these days), wrong colour mode (CMYK, not RGB or any other mode) or improper file format (TIFF or EPS are best).

Other common issues are bad colour balance or contrast/density problems (improper monitor settings and calibration are the biggest culprits here, and not understanding



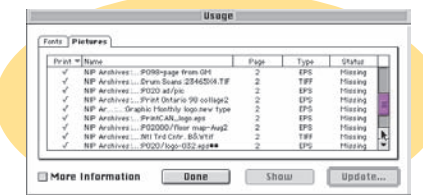
Low-quality 72 dpi GIF or JPEG files are making it into client files far too frequently these days

what the density numbers in Photoshop's info palette really mean), incorrect total dot gain assumptions when processing the images (18% to 25% for sheetfed presses and 25% to 35% for web presses, depending on paper used), incorrect CMYK separation parameters for maximum black and total ink level settings, attaching an incorrect CIE/ColorSync output profile to the image or doing type effects in older versions of Photoshop (they will come out looking rough at all but the largest sizes, because pixel-based graphic files are only about one-tenth the resolution of real imageset type).

This is a big topic in itself, and unfortunately it's difficult to determine the Photoshop settings a client might have used in any given file. The best thing I can sug-

gest is that if a client wants to prepare his own images he should make sure he understands your exact image requirements and gets some professional prepress Photoshop training. Most Photoshop courses are taught by people who know how to create cute buttons or drop shadows but have little solid knowledge or experience in professional prepress. Find someone who does—she'll be expensive, but a day of her training can save a client or a printshop a lot of time, money and trouble.

**3 Missing graphic files** Many page layout and illustration programs allow clients to place or import graphic files—typically EPS or TIFF—into them, and these placed files should always be included with the main file when sent to the print shop or o



Placed graphic images should always be listed in the main page layout file