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Article

Real-World ROI For CTP

By Kathy Sandler

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Ask an audience of publishers if they have a computer-to-plate (CTP) workflow, and most will respond positively. Ask that same group who saves money with CTP, and you'll get a lot of nervous laughter. Although more and more publishers are implementing CTP workflows, few are actually saving or making money with it. However, going CTP and saving valuable production dollars is not an impossible task for publishers — and it is increasingly easy if you follow a few, simple steps.

I learned of one such frugal publisher at the Best Practices for Print Publishing Conference at Seybold San Francisco 2001, where I was chair of the Return On Investment (ROI) track. John Dunn, production director for Wizards of the Coast Periodicals, told me that he has seen significant savings with CTP — and he has some tips on making the most of a CTP workflow.

know your roi

Before making any technological investments or workflow changes, be sure that you are protecting your company financially. Dunn's company, for example, did prepress internally before going CTP. For a full, digital CTP workflow, he determined that it also needed to invest in a digital front-end and new digital proofer. Expenses were cheaper for the digital proofer than they were for the analog proofer (costs were \$3.50 and \$16 per page, respectively), and the cost of film was eliminated entirely. The printer did, however, increase handling costs by about \$150 per invoice.

Dunn estimated total savings for his company to be \$2,672 per issue, or \$32,067 per year. And he calculated a two-year ROI for the new digital front-end system. His advice: Look at the prepress and printing invoices line by line to determine where you will save. Also, to discourage advertisers from submitting film, implement a minimal surcharge for ads not sent in digitally.

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START-UPS**the secret of bill curtis' success**

By Diane Cyr

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?Five Years Post Launch**stick to your specs**

If you have to add staff to deal with bad digital files from mom-and-pop advertisers, CTP savings will evaporate. "We used to reject advertisers' film, but now we've become everyone's service bureau," Dunn says. "We're giving advertisers an option: We'll charge you to correct your file. If it comes in and we can't use it, we'll reject it."

Plus, he is planning to change two magazines to PDF/X-1a workflows for both advertising and edit, which he estimates will save an additional \$12,400 next year.

When putting together specs, then, a publisher should ask himself several important questions:

Can I afford to stand up for these standards? Or perhaps more accurately, can I afford to receive files out of spec?

Do I have the staff to keep correcting these bad files and catching them in time to avoid having a magazine printed in courier font?

Can I afford to generate a proof every time an ad comes in without a SWOP proof — or without any proof at all?

What happens if the budget crunch gets worse and I have to cut expenses or staff size?

Consider each question in your workflow analysis, ROI calculations and provision planning process.

enforce deadlines

Even before making the transition to CTP, be firm with your magazine's staff about schedules. Dunn says that his department operates under the motto that they have a "professional obligation to meet printer deadlines." So if they are running late, he invokes the "death or lawsuit" clause — he will allow a change only if not doing so would kill someone or incur legal action. He says he tells art directors and editors: "Your pre-proof is your opportunity to make a change. Once you hand it off, I own it, so — do-or-die — we're making our ship date." The tighter, more locked-down or "bombproof" files are, he says, the more money a publisher can save.

Kathy Sandler (ksandler@hearst.com) is assistant director of publishing technology at Hearst Magazines.

ask the expert

What advances are on the horizon for computer-to-plate? — **Tricia Houston, Production Manager, ST Media Group International**

Linda Manes Goodwin, executive director of digital production consultancy Manes Goodwin Associates, answers:

Going computer-to-plate is just the tip of the iceberg. Once the production process is completely digital, a whole world of seamless operation and enhanced communication opens up. Computer

integrated manufacturing will allow data, both informational and operative, to travel with your files. E-business will allow production to be monitored and managed via your Web-browser, both intra-enterprise and inter-enterprise. It will also allow advertising data, financial and administrative, to be exchanged electronically between agency and publisher. Digital asset management will enable publishers to maximize the use of content for various media. And if they are designed and implemented properly, these programs should result in dramatically reduced costs and improved productivity.

Please send your Ask the Expert queries to Caroline Jenkins at cjenkins@mediacentral.com, or call 212-332-6276.

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