week::one
Defining Preflight & Responsibilities

What is Preflight?

Defined
- o   The inspection of project files at an early stage of a job to find content and construction errors that might prevent the file from printing as the customer intended.

What Preflight checks for:
- o   Makes sure all linked graphics are included
- o   Image format, color mode, and resolution
- o   Document geometry, including trim, bleed and margin specs
- o   Color separations and coverage
- o   Font inclusion, corruption and compatibility
- o   Potential issues with transparency
- o   Overflow text
- o   Removal of non-printing data
- o   …and more.

What Preflight does NOT check for:
- o   Spelling and typographic errors
- o   Good design and color choices
- o   Alignment of page elements
- o   Solid typesetting and character kerning
- o   ..and much, much more.

Who Performs Preflight?

The Client

Graphic Designer

Customer Service Representative
(or Graphic Arts Service Provider [GASP])

Prepress Operator

What About the Blame Game?

Bridging the Communication Gap

There is, to put it simply, a lack of communication between the various people involved in the print production process. And despite the creative element to every design piece, commercial graphic output is a manufacturing process. No other manufacturing process allows each of the departments to work independently of the others. So why does the graphic communications industry perpetuate this obviously inadequate model?

The Culture of Blame

The designer blames the printer for a bad printing job that is delivered late. The CSR blames the production crew for not looking at the customer's supplied proofs. The prepress operator blames the designer for creating files incorrectly. The designer blames the prepress operator for not following the supplied inkjet proof. The prepress operator blames the CSR for not making sure the designer supplied all of the necessary fonts. The CSR blames the prepress operator for not making the press date.

This may seem like an exaggeration, but it is, sadly, more common than you might think. Constant "blame-throwing" only creates a hostile environment where, frequently, no one is happy with the results. Many of the problems in the prepress and production departments, however, can be avoided through communication and training.

Customer files containing significant errors are routinely output to film before errors are found. This leads to rework, missed deadlines, and added expense. This can be especially embarrassing and expensive if the error is not caught until the job is on the press or even finished and delivered. It would be more constructive and productive to educate customers about proper file creation. This does not mean that the service provider should tell designers how to design (you won't be successful if you try this). Rather, we suggest explaining the technical elements that designers need to be aware of when building their desktop files, and why those things are important for the designer to know.

Preflight exists primarily because content creators consistently prepare electronic files incorrectly. A professional service provider should never get in the habit of blaming clients for errors. If a particular client continually supplies files with serious and time-consuming problems, the GASP should set aside some time, have them come in, and train them in proper techniques. Preflight can't prevent all of the potential problems associated with digital file output, but customer education can address the largest single problem area: poorly prepared files from customers who are often untrained. Every dollar invested in training customers is a dollar saved in the preflight department in the performance of this highly skilled and labor-intensive chore.

Summary

You should now have a basic understanding of digital workflow and the preflighting process. As this course progresses, we will discuss the three levels of responsibility within that process: the designer, the CSR, and the prepress operator. Each section in this course will explain these three levels with regard to one specific element of the electronic mechanical. The sections detail what needs to be done within each level and why; numerous illustrations, examples, and exercises also offer training in how to perform these checks.

To reiterate, education and communication between all involved parties are fundamental to an efficient preflight process. Rather than learning only the information relevant to your role in the process, we recommend that you move through the entire course for all three levels of preflight responsibility. If you understand what the other people involved are doing, you will be able to do your own job more effectively.

Except from Preflight and File Preparation, pages 13-14.