Linking Standard Modules

1 As we get closer to the goal of having all data in digital format as jobs enter the output phase of production, the focus has shifted to the various stages in the output process. Before the imaging step, several key functions need to be included in the workflow. In particular, preflight checks, trapping and imposition are well suited to incorporation in digital workflows. Another function—OPI image replacement—has become a critical component of these workflows. OPI functions are used not only in swapping high-resolution and low-resolution images, but also in manipulating pages of a document. For example, as part of the imposition task, an OPI facility makes it possible to transmit and work with small page files and then image the full-resolution version on the image- or platesetter.

2 In addressing the need to link these processes in an efficient way, several vendors have developed workflow products that incorporate their own software with third-party products to provide a reasonably complete solution. From a workflow standpoint, the key is the way they link the processes into a workflow, which is generally done through hot folders or Apple Events and some degree of load balancing to optimize the process. The processes to be included in the workflow are generally set up by dragging and dropping tasks into their sequential position in the flow. Jobs are ithen nserted into the flow through similar drag-and-drop functions.

3 Some workflow products also provide data conversion, compression or other services as they perform these various tasks.

4 An example from this group is the latest product from IPT, called the Prepress Factory. IPT has long had its own OPI software, but more recently it has added proofing software, a CPSI RIP from Adobe and third-party imposition software to complete its new suite. Similarly, Ultimate Technographics has developed preflight, trapping and imposition software that is in widespread use. These modules are now linked with UltimateFlow, which uses hot folders, drag-and-drop functions, etc. Shira Computers includes conversion of files from CEPS systems and an innovative proofing product in its workflow solution.

5 Note that these companies are software vendors that try to make their software compatible with a variety of hardware systems and data formats—even the formats of legacy systems. This is an area of intense activity. We'll highlight here some of the new developments among this group of suppliers.

Archetype enhances InterSep efficiency

1   Archetype showed version 2.3 of its InterSep OPI server, set for release in the fourth quarter. New features, which focus on efficiency, include support for "pooled" printers (so the next available printer gets the next job), faster location of high-resolution images for OPI merging, better tools for managing the jobs in input and output folders, integration of color management, support for Linotype-Hell images, and preflight testing of DCS and Eskofot images.

2   Archetype also released a new version of its MediaBank for managing assets, which we cover in *The Latest Word (see p. 32)*.

Graphic Enterprises adds 4 packages

3   Graphic Enterprises has expanded its Image Express line of OPI products to include four specialized packages:

- *RipLink* is designed to enhance the performance of Harlequin's NT RIP by adding OPI capabilities. It resides on the same Intel Pentium or DEC Alpha platform as the RIP, adding preflight checking, job priority levels and time-activated release queues. High-resolution files are spooled directly into the RIP.

Graphic Enterprises uses the Web. Among the newest workflow products is a suite offered by Graphic Enterprises, including a means of adding OPI functions to a Harlequin RIP and facilities for supporting a wide variety of data formats in the workflow. It also enables the Web to be used for monitoring output, as in this display.

- *Desktop* is an entry-level OPI module with eight input queues and support for two devices. It includes Web-based remote administration and has full OPI capabilities.
- *PrePress*, which is server based, supports a wide range of image formats, including TIFF, EPS, DCS, JPEG and Scitex CT. An unlimited number of queues and output devices are also supported.
- *Gold* is designed for high-volume prepress departments. It includes FTP output communications, Eskofot image support, concurrent image sampling, high-speed image retrieval and direct TIFF printing.

IPT Prepress Factory offers RIP, imposition

4   IPT's Prepress Factory for NT is aimed at automating the workflow for systems that include PCs, Macintoshes and Unix workstations. It includes facilities for load balancing among the various devices and functions. The Factory comprises four modules: OPI (CanOPI), scatter proofing (ImageProof), imposition (ImpozeIt) and the

RIP (the TurboRIP, based on Adobe CPSI, PostScript 3 and PDF).

IPT's Prepress Factory. IPT has developed a workflow system aimed at tying together OPI functions, imposition, proofing and rasterization. This is from the RIP module, with various windows showing output queues, font information, etc.

1 CanOPI needs no introduction, having been one of the oldest OPI server products on the market and having supported Unix and Macintosh platforms prior to the NT version.

2 ImageProof displays images from multiple folders, without explicitly opening each one, and groups them into a single file.

3 ImpozeIt accepts files in PostScript and PDF. (PostScript files are converted into PDF to facilitate assembly of jobs containing files of mixed origins.) Pages from different applications can be mixed within the same signature. ImpozeIt supports partial imposition so that completed flats can be output before all the pages of other flats are ready. ImposeIt handles bottling, shingling, and customizable color bars and printers' marks. It comes with 27 templates of commonly used folds, each of which can be customized.

4 The TurboRIP has a Java user interface for managing the RIP from any local or remote location. Print queues supporting a wide variety of imagesetters can be manipulated to control workflow.

5 The Prepress Factory package, which was introduced at Print and featured at Seybold San Francisco, will be available starting in November. The prices of these modules, which are available individually or as a suite, start at the following levels: CanOPI, $3,995; ImageProof, $399; ImpozeIt, $3,995; TurboRIP, $11,400; and the entire suite, $18,995.

6 Besides introducing its Prepress Factory at Print '97, IPT teamed with Apple to unveil ColorTouch color-management software for integration in a variety of workflows.

Luminous supports PDF

7 The main workflow announcement made by Luminous was support for PDF workflows within its PressWise imposition software, version 3.0, which will be available in November. Luminous earlier had announced PDF support for its OPEN production workflow environment and its Media Manager database system. OPEN, which continues to be the key workflow approach, uses drag-and-drop functionality to route jobs along "pipelines" to handle trapping, color proofing, RIP'ing and other functions.

8 One of the new features in the current version, OPEN 1.1, is automatic conversion of files from PostScript to PDF. A pipeline is used to send a file to the Acrobat Distiller for conversion to PDF, after which it is opened in Exchange for

optimization. Then it can be imposed or trapped and previewed on the screen without operator intervention.

Another Luminous option is to perform color separations on PDF files, since Acrobat is unable to do separations.

Pre-Press Image offers PowerGate OPI

One of the new competitors in the RIP-workflow arena is a small company from Concord, NH, called Pre-Press Image Technologies. Its product line includes a full-function RIP, which we discuss later under RIPs, but it also provides a workflow product with much broader functionality than the RIP. Called PowerGate OPI, this product incorporates OPI server technology with preflight checking, format conversion, color proofing, an interface to imposition software and a load-balancing feature when the job is sent to an output device.

The most interesting component is probably the Purifire, a conversion utility that accepts files in PDF, PostScript or EPS (TIFF/IT will be added in the next release) and converts them to any of the following data types:

- Neutralized PostScript, which provides a much smaller, more compact file by compressing images, removing any portions of images that have been cropped, optimizing text through minimizing the number of font calls, etc. This neutral PostScript resembles what some other companies have done to optimize raw PostScript, for example Creo, with its PreScript.
- TIFF 6, in which case the operator chooses the number of bits per pixel, compression, antialiasing, etc.
- Other options—EPS, run-length-encoded files, LZW-compressed, etc. If desired, the system will generate a preview version of these files. In the case of EPS, the file carries font data and text is editable in Illustrator or FreeHand.

The workflow functions of PowerGate include running a preflight check and data conversion, plus a link to any imposition program that produces a PostScript file. The workflow is set up by dragging and dropping elements into the workflow. The procedure can be set up to run fully automatically or to generate a preview and stop for operator approval.

We'll say more about the Pre-Press Image products under RIPs and imagesetters, below.

Shira shows TIFF/IT, Trapeze, Impostrip, 5D

Shira Computers made a few announcements as it continues its effort to put together a complete set of functions within its workflow environment. It announced that it is licensing Trapeze and Impostrip from Ultimate to create a raster workflow based on TIFF/IT. It claims TIFF/IT provides a "cleaner" alternative to PDF. TIFF/IT Stream is a workflow product based on hot folders and the TIFF/IT workflow.
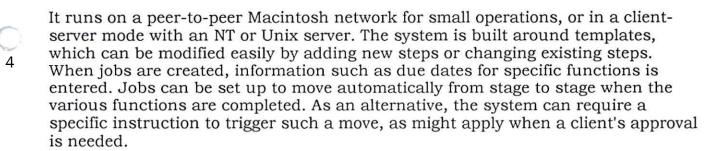
1 Shira has added an NT RIP, called Dual RIP2, that is based on the 5D Solutions Jaws interpreter. It outputs CT, LW and HCT files in TIFF/IT, TIFF/IT-P1 and Handshake formats to provide a more predictable output production path. Dual Rip2 is undergoing beta testing. The SmartProof option for optimizing scatter proofs, which isn't new, will add a descreening option soon.

2 The latest version of Image Server is NT based, uses an Oracle database for managing job elements and has a browser client for remote tracking and control of additions or deletions to the server. The SQL-compatible software has an automatic script generator, so users don't need to know SQL to customize their systems. Other server features include user access to a set of rules, support for version control with check-in and check-out of stories, and the ability to recognize CEPS formats. A Netscape client will provide customer access to the database.

Torque unveils flexible Traffic product

3 Torque Systems, which exhibited at Seybold San Francisco, not at Print, has added a workflow management system to its existing line of proofing, archiving and other products. Called Traffic, it has been designed for easy setup and management of workflows in a production environment, regardless of the size of the shop. It appears to have a relatively low price for the functionality it offers.

4 It runs on a peer-to-peer Macintosh network for small operations, or in a client-server mode with an NT or Unix server. The system is built around templates, which can be modified easily by adding new steps or changing existing steps. When jobs are created, information such as due dates for specific functions is entered. Jobs can be set up to move automatically from stage to stage when the various functions are completed. As an alternative, the system can require a specific instruction to trigger such a move, as might apply when a client's approval is needed.

5 At this point, the system doesn't provide a link to applications that would automatically update the status. Instead, an operator must indicate when a function has been completed. We presume Torque is working on such links.

6 Development is under way to enable operation through a browser interface.

7 Torque has an interesting approach to pricing. The software is likely to be free for shops where fewer than 25 jobs are processed concurrently. Beyond that level, the peer-to-peer version with support for two clients will cost $895. Each additional client adds $200. The NT or Unix server version will cost $2,995 for two clients. Windows, Mac or Unix clients can be added for $200 each.

UltimateFlow imposes, traps on Mac

8 Ultimate Technographics, which developed the first electronic imposition program many years ago, has been adding output utility modules since then. The latest is a

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