

Prinergy and the Politics of Proofing

FAQ for Sales and Service on Incorporating 3rd Party Proofers

FileName
Pgy_proofing_politics

2001-01-16

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Revision History

Revision	Date	Author	Comments
1.0	July 11, 2000	DJ Dunkerley	First draft
1.5	Jan 16, 2001	DJ Dunkerley	Offshoot of another document



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1. INTRODUCTION

In the year 2000, there were hundreds of installations of Prinergy systems where the customer used non-CreoScitex equipment to generate contract proofs. A list of non-CreoScitex equipment that is presently hooked up to Prinergy systems would include: Kodak Approval, Polaroid Polaproof, EPSON family, Roland Hi-fi, HP 5000, Fuji Pictroproof, and many others.

While Prinergy has demonstrated unparalleled connectivity to third-party output devices, the sheer number of different set-ups has led to confusion in the field both among support and sales. Creo (and now CreoScitex) has been an industry leader in making "open" workflow systems, dating back to the days of iMPAct and PlateMaster. Veterans of CreoScitex will readily acknowledge that working out the logistics of connecting to other companies' equipment has always been difficult, with the "politics" of the situation looming as large a factor as the technical obstacles.

2. THE GOLDEN RULE OF CONNECTING TO SOMEONE ELSE'S (EXPENSIVE) EQUIPMENT

"The more expensive the proofer, the easier it is to connect to it."

The main competitors in the workplace of the Spectrum (the current halftone proofer offered by CreoScitex) and Iris 4Print are the Kodak XP4 and the Polaroid Polaproof. Fuji is also expected to be aggressive in marketing the Finalproof in the coming months. Every one of these machines can costs ten of thousands of dollars. And with every machine, the customer can spend ten of thousands of dollars on consumables each year.

Therefore, it can be extremely useful to phone the local distributor and courteously inform them of the install date of Prinergy in order that they may send their own representatives to assist with the connection. The local vendor also tends to be more helpful when a consumable contract is at stake. Both CreoScitex sales and service should be very aware that consumables contracts are usually very lucrative to the "other" organization, and leverage this knowledge to demand free software upgrades and better RIP boxes for the third-party proofers that we have to connect to. There are countless instances in the field where CreoScitex personnel has wasted hours and days trying to improve the performance of someone else's proofer when it's been hooked up to a box that has less CPU power than the $500 computer I gave to my nephew last Christmas.

Much more rare is the instance where CreoScitex personnel try to calibrate third-party halftone proofers without assistance from the third-party vendor. This is really dumb, because even the laziest local distributor will calibrate thier own halftone proofer. Indeed, they will probably accuse you of trying to sabotage their machine. A better procedure is to let the local vendor create the proper calibration curves and then import them into the Harmony database in Prinergy. With a bit of luck, the vendor rep will do that step for you; it's amazing how many of them know how to operate Harmony.

3. CONNECTING TO CONTINUOUS TONE PROOFERS

Both the Dupont Digital Waterproofer and the Fuji Pictroproof fall into the continuous tone proofer category. Connection is easy, often just pointing an unscreened TIFF file to a hot folder monitored by the RIP of the third-party proofer. Unlike half-tone proofers, you do not use Harmony for calibration. Instead, you have two options: either adjusting the ink densities via controls on the third party RIP or by ICC color profiling the proofer to match the press. The first case should be vigorously resisted by CreoScitex personnel, for two reasons: One, you are just guessing. Two, we aren't making any money off the consumables and somebody else is. The second case is easier to manage. Since we don't provide any training to our field application specialists in color management, there is zero chance they will be able to profile the device.

Fortunately, both Dupont and Fuji tend to be aware of the importance of calibrating proofers so as to not lose the consumables contracts. Over the last year, Dupont was especially aggressive in North America in sending out knowledgeable representatives who knew a thing or two about color management.

4. THE SIX-COLOR PLOTTER SCENARIO: RUN AWAY! RUN AWAY!

Proofers in this category include the Epson 5000/7000/9000, the Roland Hi-fi Jet, and HP 5000. To attempt to reach contract quality, all these proofers print with six colors (C, M, Y, K, light Cyan, light Magenta).

The most important thing to remember about these proofers is that they are very, very cheap, costing about $15,000 with the RIP box or even less. If you remember the "Golden Rule," you realize this is not a good thing. For example, phoning Epson to ask them to send a representative to the customer site, for assistance with a Prinergy hook-up, is just not likely to get a positive response. In many cases, even attempting to get the consumables vendor to "own" matching the proof to press a futile endeavor. In the past year, oftentimes the consumables were in such short supply that it was even difficult for the customer to stock into the shop!

After more than a few painful experiences, it was finally determined that the best way to ensure a successful Prinergy installation (and in the long run, customer satisfaction) was to insist that the customer seek independent color management services. Depending on what part of the world you are located, this may be easy or this may be hard. In the Americas, Pre-Press Consultants (www.prepresshelp.com) has been certified by CreoScitex as officially sanction 3rd party color management consultants. There is no equivalent in Europe at this time.

For more information on dealing with six-color plotters, you can refer to the technical document *Prinergy and the EPSON 5000/7000/9000*.