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Pandora Plus vs. PowerStepper

Background

There are three major participants in the area of software solutions for creating step-and-repeat layouts for packaging printing. Esko-Graphics and Artwork Systems both offer expensive, single-platform solutions. Creo's Pandora® is a PDF-based, platform-independent and cost-effective package printing layout solution. This document will focus on the comparison between Pandora and Artwork Systems PowerStepper™ software.

Artwork Systems was founded in 1992. They develop and distribute prepress software to the packaging, label, commercial color, and publishing industries. ArtPro™ has many modules and complicated pricing schemes, but the one that deals with creating layouts for package printing is ArtPro PowerLayout™. PowerLayout has two optional modules: PowerOptimizer™ and PowerStepper™. ArtPro runs only on Macintosh® operating systems.

Pandora uses industry standard file formats such as PDF, PJTF, and JDF and has been integrated with Prinergy Powerpack® and Agfa® Apogee. Packaging designs are imported from PDF files, and die-cut data from CFF2, DDES, and DXF. Pandora output can be PDF, PJTF, CIP3 PPF (cutting data), and JDF.

Written in Java®, Pandora is platform independent and runs on Apple® Mac OS® 9, Mac OS X, and Microsoft® Windows® 2000 and NT® operating systems.

The price, feature set, short learning curve, and use of industry standard file formats make Pandora an attractive solution for both the converter and the commercial printer.

Different Types of Step and Repeat

Three types of step and repeat are most commonly used: manual, automatic from CAD die files, and automatic by optimizing the printing surface.

The table below explains which applications address the three types of step and repeat:

	Pandora	PowerStepper	PowerOptimizer
Manual step and repeat	X	X	X
Automatic CAD step and repeat	X	X	
Optimizations			X

Manual Step and Repeat

Typically the user manually chooses a set of parameters (number across, around, step distance, and so on). Both Pandora and PowerStepper include this functionality. PowerStepper has additional functionality that allows more options when creating layouts, such as the ability to control the stagger and other features for label and flexible packaging layouts.

Automatic CAD Step and Repeat

In this type of step and repeat, a die file is imported in one of the industry accepted CAD formats and used to create the layout and bleeds automatically.

The Pandora feature set is comprehensive and includes automatic layout creation, automatic bleed path generation, automatic bleed overlap resolution, die-station numbering, and automatic step and repeat of 1-up marks. Pandora also gives you the option to filter unwanted line types when you import die files, and you can easily rotate artwork, marks, and dies when creating a layout. Users say that Pandora's handling of bleed overlaps and automatic die-station marks is superior to that of PowerStepper. The process of resolving bleed overlaps is not automated in PowerStepper; the user must identify overlaps and then use a tool to manually draw the area of the overlap to resolve it. Pandora can automatically apply the bleed-overlap resolution to all affected artwork in the layout. You can also manually edit bleeds to mask portions of the artwork by adding and deleting points to the bleed path, or dragging points to the desired locations.

SmartMarks

Pandora offers SmartMarks that position and resize themselves in relation to the objects to which they are anchored: the press sheet, film, plate, or die. If you replace the press sheet, the mark repositions itself automatically. Pandora comes with four types of SmartMarks: color bars, take-off bars, bearer bars, and position marks (center marks and side guides), and you can easily change any simple mark into a SmartMark. You can also create SmartMark sets and apply them to jobs; SmartMarks included in the mark set retain their smart functionality and position themselves automatically.

Feature Comparison

Feature	Pandora	PowerStepper
Price	$9,995 USD	€19,000 (ArtPro plus PowerStepper (€12,500 + €6,500)
Platform	Mac OS 9.x, Mac OS X, Windows NT and Windows 2000	Mac OS 9.x and OSX
Localized	French, Spanish, German	Unknown
Artwork import file formats	Composite and separated PDF	PDF, EPS, PS
CAD import file formats	CFF2, DDES, DXF	CFF2, DDES
Output file formats	PS*, PDF, PJTF, JDF	PDF, PS, PJTF, JDF
Adobe® CPSI PostScript 3 RIP for preview	X	
Automatic positioning to die	X	X
Automatic detection of die outline	X	X
Die-station numbering	X	X
Manual bleed edit	X	X
Automatic bleed overlap detection from CAD	X	
Automatic mark placement (SmartMarks)	X	
Equipment and consumables database	X	
Output CIP3 data	X**	X

*PS output is not supported in Pandora version 2.6. **CIP3 output will be available with Creo workflows in Pandora 2.7.

Main advantages of Pandora against PowerStepper:

1. Pandora is PDF native and does not convert the imported artwork to a proprietary file format like ArtPro. This retention of the PDF format allows Pandora to be used in a variety of workflows and promotes better communication between consumer product companies, their designers, and the converters.
2. Pandora's bleed overlap detection and resolution is automated, while PowerStepper users must perform several manual tasks to achieve the same result. The Pandora automation in this feature reduces time significantly, particularly in the case of large step-and-repeat layouts.
3. Pandora offers SmartMarks that position and resize themselves in relation to the objects to which they are anchored. You can create and apply SmartMark sets to jobs; SmartMarks included in the set retain their smart functionality and position themselves automatically.
4. Pandora is very intuitive and easy to use, with minimum number of dialog boxes, pop-up windows, and other intrusive UI elements. Typically Pandora does not require a formal training course and customers are generating plates or film within the first hour or two after installing.

About Creo

Creo is a world leader in solutions for the graphic arts industry. Core product lines include image capture systems; inkjet proofers; thermal imaging devices for films, plates, and proofs; professional color and copydot scanning systems; workflow management software; and proofing and printing consumables. Creo is also an original equipment manufacture supplier of on-press imaging technology, components for digital presses, and color servers for high-speed, print-on-demand digital printers. Creo trades under the symbols CREO on NASDAQ and CRE on the Toronto Stock Exchange. www.creo.com

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