A 'Common Language' For Color Ads

BY RANDY WOODS

AS QUALITY ASSURANCE manager for The Washington Post, Kevin Connor is charged with transforming digital ad files—that are created and saved in a variety of ways—into print ads that conform to what each advertiser has envisioned.

But "a good chunk of my day is spent dealing with agencies that send over PDF files that are way too large or have the wrong dot gain," he says.

The recent release of the coldset newspaper color management profile by the Specifications for Newsprint Advertising Production, or SNAP, committee could go a long way toward helping advertisers address the variations found in newspaper color management.

The SNAP software profile, based on International Color Consortium specifications, defines the standard color space for all coldset newspaper advertising—including free-standing inserts—enabling advertisers to design files with an accurate color gamut for newspapers. Other parameters in the standard profile include information on correct gray balance, ink density and dot gain.

The specifications were created from tests at 74 different SNAP-certified printing sites, providing advertisers with a "full cross-section" of the newspaper marketplace, says Dennis Cheeseman, vice chairman of the SNAP committee and director of customer service for US Ink in Carlstadt, N.J. "It creates a decent starting point and gives advertisers a common language to work with."

The chief goal of the profile, which was recently posted on www.naa.org, is to provide accuracy and consistency of ad color reproduction, says Michael Brady, NAA's director of production operations. "It allows you to create a file on a proof printer that will match what you have on the...press," he says. "You can define a specific gamut of color and demonstrate to advertisers what the color reproduction will look like."

The profile also can be used for color management, says SNAP Committee Chairman Peter Brehm, who is also director of training and development for Vertis, an advertising and marketing firm in Baltimore. Brehm says Vertis is in the process of integrating the profile into all of its newspaper advertising operations within the next 12 months.

Annette Giaco, director of print quality for Gannett Co. in McLean, Va., says 53 of her company's 99 newspapers are printed at SNAP-certified sites that have been included in the new ICC profile. By the end of 2005, she says, Gannett expects that about a dozen more of their print sites will become SNAP certified.

"Before this, there was no standard profile for newspapers," Cheeseman says. "It was up to the newspapers to work out the color management, and the advertisers typically created [ads] with the wrong profile. We've seen a lot of bad profiles that were based on bad standards."

The next step is to integrate the profile into the next update of Adobe's Photoshop software, which Cheeseman says will be one of the main topics discussed at SNAP's next scheduled meeting in December.

The Washington Post's Connor says the new profile is "not an end-all, fix-all solution, but it can only help.

"We have to remember that the image can only be as good as the person doing the color balancing," he says. ◘

The new customized color management software profile will help newspapers maintain quality and consistency in the reproduction of advertisements.