

‘Chocks away’ at the Hybrid Huddle

At RAF Cosford in Shropshire, Hybrid Software held its annual user conference on 3 April, where it gave flight to many new ideas for its modular pre-press software and gave guests demonstrations on some of its latest updates. By *Michal Lodej*.

In a RAF museum hanger, surrounded by weaponry from the Cold War, Hybrid Software brought out some big guns of its own.

Unlike during the Cold War however, these inventions are ready to be fired. There are currently 2500 of the company’s PDF editor, Packz, out in use today and as of December last year there 569 live licences of its graphics production workflow program, Cloudflow.

Paul Bates, sales manager for UK and Ireland, welcomed guests, he said, ‘This is a technical event, it is not a sales tool, and here we hope to plant the seeds to let you know where we are going with our technology. As you know we are a software partner for industry 4.0 for the label and packaging industry, supporting automated processes beyond pre-press, helping to develop total solutions for your needs.’

Customer needs drive most of the company’s developments, taking from their users what functions or changes they want the most. A customer survey at the end of the last Hybrid Huddle led to one of the newer modules being demonstrated at this one, a variable data printing (VDP) module.

Common usage

When current users were asked what they used Packz for the most common answers were pre-flight of delivered files, quality check and version comparison, creation of technical structure for many products, production of graphics and preparation of graphics in a variety of processes.

New for the latest version of the



The RAF museum proved to be a striking venue for the event

editor, Packz 5 is the VDP module, pre-flight reporting, waste numbering, file templates, sharpener and Packzimizer SSL for Cloudflow.

Pascal Wybo, product manager at Hybrid Software, gave live demonstrations of the software, showing visitors how to use the new functions.

He said, ‘You can set a preflight ability to make the checks you want at the first instance of uploading the file automatically. This creates a report which allows you to view the job to see if there are any errors, in the file itself, this allows users to prevent finding errors after the plate is made, these

can be personalised to look out for what each user wants to be checked.’

The user can even decide in which way they want the information to be displayed to them. These checks can include if the die-cut marks correlate with the cuts which will be made in production.

Users can position text in any area allowing them to add variable data which can position order IDs or gluing barcodes for finishing machines.

There is also the ability to save press dimensions and so there is no need to continuously retype the information. You can switch between presses automatically if there is a change in

production at the last minute and the job will be run on a different machine.

One of the biggest announcements was the company's variable data module. Current solutions for variable data printing modules are press vendor specific, and not executed in prepress.

Mr Wybo explained, 'If you have a mix of presses this causes problems, VDP is more than just barcodes and numbering so a universal VDP is required. This solution will eliminate downtime from the printer waiting to prepare the job, leaving the presses idle. The ability was there in the previous version but it was clumsy and it needs to be easy, so by building a wizard this can be done in just three steps; prepare, execute and output.'

Within the module, Patchworker can create unique variations of a design, linework or images and this is allocated with random placement with scale, mirror, rotate, move and quantity. This can be used in security applications as it can generate unique patterns.

The software helps to increase the speed of processing PDFs with variable data by changing the way the RIP reads the PDF. It creates a new layer structure for the RIP, as Mr Wybo explained, 'We tell the RIP which element of the PDF is dynamic and needs to be interpreted for each variation and which is static and so does not.'

Variable data printing is obviously most used in the digital printing sector; however the module does have its uses in the conventional printing too.

One example given was for cigarette boxes. These designs have health warnings, which vary from pack to pack. The software can speed up the artwork process where the designs are almost identical but can identify dynamic information and repopulate the designs with different images, helping to create a plate with changes in the design for each packet. With Packz these are all delivered in one program in a PDF solution, less time waiting for the pre-press. VDP belongs in pre-press whether it is used for digital, conventional or hybrid presses. This could be a new market for plate suppliers by providing press ready files.

Up in the clouds

With Cloudflow, Mr Wybo again looked at what current users were using the software for. The cloud based system is used in the main for file delivery and preflighting, quality checking and version comparison, file management and asset search.

The program also offers users pre-press automation, online approval, job management and output plate or delivery of prepared files. It has functions for accessing existing jobs, online ordering, tracking changes to synchronise files, production planning and control. It can create workflows and user interfaces and provide customers proof access and web to print capabilities.

As a modular system users can adapt it to their needs. Giving access to critical information, you can also build a workflow engine to automate file management to erase duplications.

Jobs is a new feature, which combines DTA files and folders, built around a concept of production environment, where you have products that are held in a data base or reused. When a job is created and the same job is already in the system, it will auto fill the rest of the job details.

Viewing online is a popular function which allows users to create an approval portal or to start an approval cycle.

Future launches

One thing that can not be said of Hybrid Software is that it stops moving. Moments after demonstrating the new features of Packz 5.0, it announced some features of 5.1 and 5.2 and the next generation of the software Packz 6.0, which is to be released before drupa.

In 5.1, which is in beta testing but has already received 80 user requests, users can limit the resolution of viewing to a maximum zoom, giving a level playing field with a set pre-set zoom level. There will be updates to barcodes including the addition of M&S barcodes, as well as an improved text tool for Asian and Arabic languages, and the ability to make measurements for the structure of the packages.

A smaller but very welcome change

coming in 5.1 is the ability to copy and paste directly from Packz to Adobe Photoshop and back again. The objects in the file become smart objects and complex backgrounds in a design are exported as images, which can run better, as you lose layers, enabling a switch between the two programs.

So far there is less known about the updates that will be seen in 5.2, but Hybrid already knows it has to implement 30 user requests to keep up with partner announcements and updates.

And other user base enhancements such as text and background clashes will be made as well as a tabular step and repeat function for seamless cutting bar width reduction pre-sets.

The biggest task for Hybrid in 5.2 has come from Silicone Valley, after Apple announced the production of 6k displays. These beautifully crisp screens will require 64 times the amount of data per pixel than the current top range of displays, and so the company is working to speed production inline with them.

Brothers in arms

The Huddle draws in input from users as well as other technology partners who give their own presentations.

Paul Bromley, business development manager at GMG, spoke about the

Pascal Wybo demonstrated some of the latest updates



usefulness of GMG OpenColor, and in particular spectral data. With the software printers can test and experiment with their colour choices, looking at the effects of different substrates, in order of colour strength online, before the press is used. The system uses spectral data which Mr Bromley said is far more accurate than LAB values.

Mark Hardaker from Creative Edge Software gave a demonstration of the company's IC3D program. The real time all in one packaging design software designs 3D mock-ups on the fly. It is able to recreate any packaging type and the 3D vision helps to avoid vey silly obvious mistakes.

Mr Hardaker said, 'Printers, you can add it to your value chain as a service, it enables your customers to see the label in new light. It can give your customers new ideas and pre-press companies can get a good ROI from using it to trouble shoot problems.'

Existing artwork from illustrator can be added to models in the program and quickly create a realistic mock-up with the ability to add different lighting and environmental effects whether its studio lighting of store lighting.

It can drop the images into photographs of storefronts to see how it displays on the shelf, using real life photos of real stores. The latest development will be able to simulate holographics, embossed foils, holographic foils, fresnel lens effects.

Martin Bailey, Global Graphics CTO, spoke about the next PDF standard, PDF 2.0, which he described as a post Adobe standard. Mr Bailey explained, 'It has taken more than 10 years to get to this PDF, and it is no longer an Adobe product, but is approved by ISO.'

With the new PDF will come new features such as output intent, which means it will take into account the substrates being used, even if this is on multiple substrates.

Other features include black point compensation, which will be possible to switch on or off per

job/page. This can also be turned on or off per graphical object for better reproduction of photographic images. Colour space inheritance means that when making multiple jobs ganged together, this can now construct a file that can honour the output intents even for different jobs.

Mr Bailey added, 'Half tone changes will also be made, historically, you can render an object with a particular screen, but what we find is that people want to use propriety half tones, these needed different files for different pre-press but now you can have a list,

and the pre-press will use the first name it recognises. And with drop shadows, the halftone you should use is the default halftone, but this now lets you use the one specified for that particular graphic'

He concluded, 'I'm sure you would all want print to be the driving force of PDF 2.0 adoption, but it won't be. What will drive PDF 2.0 adoption is the new encryption, but this won't work with old RIPs or DFEs. Another driver is the expanded accessibility support for printing elements such as braille.' ■



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