



Mac Attack for RIPs?

THE MAC OS X JAGUAR RELEASE HAS REMOVED THE BARRIERS

by Dan Reid

Historically RIPs have been available only on the Windows platform. While, generally speaking, most designers and artists work on Macintosh computers, there hasn't really been a product with comparable stability and efficiency in processing postscript files. The Mac OS X Jaguar release has finally removed many of the barriers that prevented the Mac from being a professional print server.

In the last year, a number of RIPs supporting Jaguar came to market that were previously only available on Windows or Unix based operating systems. Jaguar (10.2) is the first release to have garnered acceptance by many RIP vendors, with the list growing monthly.

Mac OS X Print Architecture

So what's the big deal about Mac OS X that started this marathon among the manufacturers? Many have wanted to offer a product on the Mac platform for some time but concluded the Mac OS 8 and OS 9 architectures were incapable of providing the stability, efficiency and network connectivity to handle the workload.

Since Mac OS X is Unix-based, Apple needed to come up with a new printing architecture like every other Unix OS. Ironically, each Unix OS (Red Hat, Linux, OS X) have different print architectures. Easy Software Products took up the challenge and created the CUPS (Common Unix Printing System) architecture for Unix. The CUPS architecture unifies printing to all Unix OS and provides an easy way to communicate with Windows printers as well. Jaguar includes the new CUPS architecture in addition to their legacy system of 10.1.

All RIPs Are Not Created Equal

Some people see a RIP as merely printing software while others view it as software that processes (Adobe) Postscript files. Still others contend that some products are not truly RIPs per se, because they only accept pre-ripped imagesetter/CtP files, such as 1-bit TIFFs, and do not rescreen the file. Regardless of your definition, there is a RIP that meets your needs available now in Mac OS 10.2

Here are some of the Mac OS X RIPs available with different approaches to printing in OS X. The trick is to find one that will meet your specific needs.

Compatible Systems Engineering

Compatible Systems Engineering's xProof and xPhoto products have taken the best of their mature PC brethren and created a product that offers impressive calibration options. xProof and xPhoto are, at this point, targeted for the photography community and not prepress. Adobe Postscript 3 support is also in the works. xPhoto is RGB only with xProof allowing CMYK output.

Colorbyte Software

ColorByte Software, makers of ImagePrint, offer a rich feature set for imposition and support for Postscript but use a proprietary system for ink management. ImagePrint does support third-party ICC profiles but works best with their own proprietary ICC profiles and CMM (color matching module).

BestColor (EFI)

BestColor, now an EFI company, Designer Edition (DE) 2.1 builds upon their software still available for Mac OS 9. It is designed to process Postscript, PDF and EPS files. BestColor DE does not offer any layout options,

instead relying upon a page layout application for any grouping or nesting of jobs/images. BestColor DE also does not support any color calibration.

Perfect Proof

Perfect Proof offers the ProofMaster solution targeted to the prepress design industry. It too relies upon Postscript files (PDF, EPS) for proofing and support for standard ICC profiles for input source. Output profiles use a proprietary "Desktop Fingerprint" instead of standard ICC profiles. You can create a fingerprint from a standard ICC profile or use their system. ProofMaster also includes a PDF Editor and ProofMaster Viewer for correcting files prior to RIPping.

ESP

ESP Print Pro leverages the Unix CUPS print architecture for printing to both Mac and Windows. ESP Print Pro provides a GUI to configure and use the CUPS print architecture. It provides a method to print regardless of whether the printer is connected to Mac or PC. Since ESP Print Pro uses the CUPS print architecture there are hundreds of drivers for new and legacy printers, making this an ideal solution for older printers unsupported by other RIP programs. Installing ESP Ghostscript adds a postscript interpreter to work in tandem with ESP Print Pro.

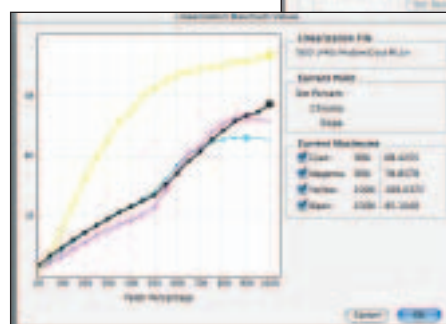
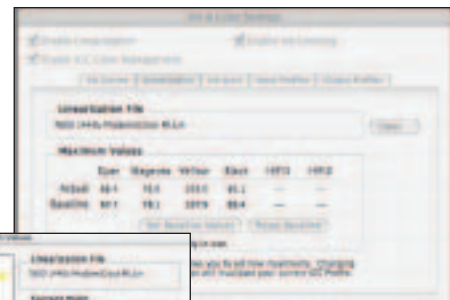
Electronics for Imaging

EFI has a long tradition of supporting Mac networks with their Unix RIP products available as stand-alone computers. There wasn't an option to connect a computer monitor to the system, which instead relied upon the font control panel buttons and LCD display or a web browser. There are several Splash RIPs that run under OS 9 but the Splash G640 is the first EFI RIP to be sold using a Mac OS X computer. The G640 is sold pre-configured as Dual 867 MHz or as an upgrade kit for other G3 computers. The requirements for the board kit are fairly nominal, only necessitating about 1GB of RAM with the G3 processor. The G640 has direct support for Photoshop, PDF and CT/LW files. A welcome addition is the support for using external ICC profiles, not available in some earlier Splash servers.

Fusion Systems International

Fusion Systems International's DigiPage uses a Harlequin RIP engine with automatic raster object trapping. DigiPage 4.0 is designed to create a plate-ready file and use the same file for dot-for-dot composite proofing on an inkjet.

DigiPage can create a file virtually any Imagesetter/CtP system can use. A 1-bit TIFF/IT-P1 file and PDF/X-1A and PDF/X-3 are supported along with transparency of PDF 1.4 as input files for



xProof and xPhoto from Compatible Systems Engineering offers calibration routines using spectrophotometers. Notice how after 50% both the Cyan and Magenta abruptly shift upward. This can be minimized by further refinement of the ink blending properties.

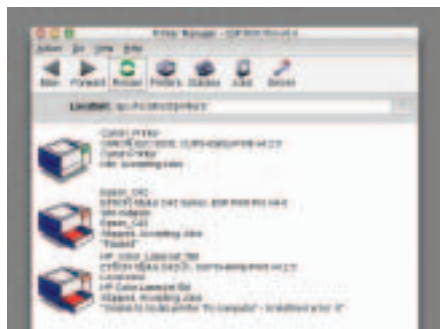
pre-ripped files. DigiPage is designed to “RIP once, output many” (ROOM) to minimize time processing files.

Gimle

AbsoluteProof from Gimle is the first product to provide true Hexachrome proofing to inkjet printers. Other proofing vendors require the Hexachrome separated file be recombined back to a RGB file for color proofing. Obviously this is not graceful and doesn't allow for checking of trapping, fonts and overprints, etc. AbsoluteProof accepts separated Postscript files up to six channels and can color manage a proof to a six-channel (Hexachrome) inkjet proofer. AbsoluteProof is not a true RIP per se.

Microspot

Microspot is a Mac OS X print driver solution that also uses hot folder schemes to manage print jobs. The process is pretty seamless to the operator as the file is handed off to the Microspot program for rasterization. Microspot X-RIP does not support Postscript printing. X-RIP is targeted for raster-based imaging workflows. Microspot X-RIP, like



ESP Print Pro v4.4 provides a Graphical User Interface (GUI) for the CUPS (Common Unix Printing System) developed by the folks of ESP and now the printing architecture included in 10.2

ESP Print Pro, supports a long list of legacy non-postscript printers.

iProof Systems


iProof Systems's iProof-X is another non-Postscript print software for OS X using the CUPS architecture. iProof-X uses the ColorSync System control panel for input profiles and selects the destination ICC profile based upon the PPD and resolution setting. iProof-X does not support Postscript files so there are two options. You can either use “Save As PDF” in the print driver and then open the “PDF in Preview” to

print or you can install ESP Ghostscript to interpret the Postscript file before sending to iProof-X.

Creo's PS/M

The latest version of Creo's Mac-based workflow software solution is PS/M 8.0 for printers who want the flexibility of using their existing Mac workstations but want a full suite of prepress workflow tools including RIPing, trapping, and exposing files. PS/M can also be installed on as many different workstations as needed. Running native on Mac OS X with an Aqua UI, this latest version boasts improvements in performance including a new Adobe RIP and G5 compatibility.

Global Graphics

Global Graphics' Harlequin RIP Eclipse Release, introduced support for Mac OS X in 2003. Features of the original release include improved color control, native compatibility with PDF 1.4, improved trapping options through a new Global Graphics developed engine, and, as you might expect, support for additional operating platforms. 

Mac RIP List:

Compatible Systems
Engineering xProof and xPhoto
www.compatsys.com/mac_osx/index.html

BestColor Designer Edition
www.bestcolor.com/index.php?sv=148

Fusion Systems International DigiPage 4.0
www.FusionSystems.com

PerfectProof Co. ProofMaster
www.proofmaster.net

Gimle AbsoluteProof
www.absolute-proof.com

Easy Software Program ESP Print Pro
www.easysw.com/printpro

ESP Ghostscript
www.gimp-print.sourceforge.net/MacOSX.php3

CUPS
www.easysw.com/cups
www.cups.org

Creo PS/M 8.0
www.creo.com

Global Graphics Harlequin RIP Eclipse Release
www.globalgraphics.com

iProof Systems PowerRIP X v7.0
www.iproofsystems.com

ColorByte ImagePrint 5.5
www.colorbytesoftware.com/imageprint.htm

GIMP-Print
www.gimp-print.sourceforge.net/MacOSX.php3

Microspot Microspot X-RIP 1.6
www.microspot.co.uk/products/xrip.htm

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