

# Remote Proofing—Goals and Solutions

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The need for remote proofing comes from competitive pressures in the graphic arts printing industry. Customers expect faster, cheaper and smarter printing—and more of it!

In the ideal world, print producers would like to provide their customers with full color proofs which:

1. Can be used as a contract
2. Can be created quickly (Speed)
3. Are inexpensive (Cost)
4. Look just like the in-house proof and final print (Quality, Color Management)
5. Can be *verified* to look just like the final print (Verification)
6. Can be delivered across any distance quickly (Transmission)

In many cases, traditional methods of proofing can address only one or two of the above ideal world criteria. Thus that's why you're seeing the current arms race for best remote proofing applications and technologies—many industry analysts consider remote proofing to be the “killer app” of prepress and print for the next few years.

## What's a Contract Nowadays?

Print providers are beginning to push the envelope on what is considered a contract proof. At its most basic, a contract proof is whatever the customer will accept as a representation of the final printed piece.

At the far end of the spectrum, there are large national publishers who have printing done with *no proofing at all*, either because they trust the print provider implicitly or because economics force them to. At the other end, there are designers who require astonishingly accurate color and go through long evaluations processes.

Nevertheless, customers usually want some sort of visual representation. But what? If a printer can guarantee a proof most customers will sign off on something less than a high-cost digital dot proof or an analog. It's the *guarantee* that the customer is looking for.

Given that need for a guarantee, convincing production folks of the validity of something less than the high-cost dot proof may be a larger challenge than convincing the customers. Both parties need to be satisfied, so look to get quality criteria from both inside personnel and customers before final equipment decisions are made.

## Speed

Everyone wants things done right now. Traditional methods of print proofing are not very time-efficient. What more can be said? Minutes, at most, for a good proof is the order of the day. The technology exists—and it's not going away.

## Cost

The days of high equipment, labor and consumable costs for proofing are drawing to a close. Advances in monitors, paper coatings, drop-on-demand (DOD) inkjets, color management tools, and high-bandwidth data transfer are rapidly maturing to meet the goals of remote proofing.

Soon, an inkjet printer (or even display) which is capable of receiving, printing and verifying remotely will be easily affordable for even small commercial printers and their primary customers. We'll certainly see solutions less than \$1,000 for each installation in the near future.

The real issue will be for agencies and designers to figure out where to put all of the remote proofing units from their local print providers! Every printer in the land will want to try and tie up their large customers by dropping in a remote unit.

## Quality

File accuracy is also an issue. Make sure the proofing RIP will handle data from your prepress RIP. Alternatively, there are solutions which adhere to the new PDF standards for standardizing or “normalizing” incoming data which guarantees same output. This eliminates the varying interpretations of postscript RIP's.

PDF itself is very useful already in the design concept approval workflow. Look for it to start greatly influencing the back end, as well.

It's in color management where quality can get dicey. We're back to defining what's a contract. For some customers, the fact that the proof is *in color* is enough. For others there's more.

Here are some things to look for on the color side, as if you weren't color critical enough already:

- Calibration of measurement devices
- Calibration for consistency on both the in-house and remote unit
- Accuracy, *without tweaking*, of color
- Capabilities of tweaking tools (just in case)
- Paper simulation accuracy

- Measurement, and minimization of drift –caused by either the printer or ink and media.
- The dot, the trap, the imposition

Nobody really hits all of these perfectly yet. Pick your battles wisely when choosing a solution. Don't write off the technology over something which may not be as important as you think (like a true representative dot).

### Verification

Verification is the confidence builder, the nirvana of remote proofing, and what is still in development at many manufacturers. It's really what defines the difference between remote printing and remote proofing

Simply put, providers want to know that the "in-house" and "remote" proof are the same. In fact you want some kind of *measured verification* of that fact.

Some things to look for include:

- Remote measurement device calibration verified
- Remote printer calibration verified
- Remote print settings verified
- Remote color measured and verified after each print

### Transmission

High-speed data transfer is coming into its own at just the right time for effective remote proofing. Although sometimes you can't beat the bandwidth of a station wagon full of SyQuest disks going down the highway at 65 miles an hour ...

Some manufactures will tie high-bandwidth technologies into their solutions, others will require an existing internet or other high-speed connection to work with. In any case, you'd sure like to see the files get there fast.

The transmission interface may vary as well. It's possible to have effective remote proofing with email or FTP sites. However, there are products which simplify and speed up the process. Some will use a hot folder approach and send the file automatically, while others treat the remote printer just like a local printer connection.

Look for:

- High speed
- Guaranteed up time
- Verification of transfer
- Flexibility to interface with your proofing solution

The best remote proofing solutions will come close to the ideal world scenario laid out here. Products which are easy to use, elegant and flexible would just put the icing on the cake!

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### Biography

Will's GIA responsibilities include technical training on color, large format, proofing workflow and other graphics technologies. He also develops curriculum, markets, and writes articles for many trade magazines.

Will has a degree in English Education and Technical Writing from Purdue University.

Will's resume includes what he calls "doing time" in PR and marketing, prepress scanning and production, as well as technical support and training for a graphics reseller.