

Digital Technology Trends *Pro & End User*

by Howie Fenton, Consultant NAPL

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▶ **Macintosh G5 “world’s fastest personal computer”**

At Apple’s Worldwide Developer Conference, June 23-27 at San Francisco's Moscone Center, Apple introduced the Power Mac G5 as “the world’s fastest personal computer” and the first with a 64-bit processor. The new Power Mac G5 throttles past both the fastest Pentium 4 and a dual-processor Xeon workstation when tested using industry standard SPEC CPU 2000 benchmarks. The “SPEC rate” metrics, which recognize multiple processors, more accurately demonstrate the performance of a dual processor system. The results are illustrated below.



<http://www.apple.com/powermac/>

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▶ **TWGA says 2003 another tough year for creative pros**

TrendWatch Graphic Arts today released their Creative Forecast 2003 Report, in which TWGA predicts that creative professionals should expect 2003 to be another challenging period in terms of business activity. In the TWGA Summer 2002 report, only 14% of ad agencies reported excellent business conditions, and TWGA Business Conditions Index for nearly all creative businesses hit record lows.

According to the Creative Forecast 2003 report, here are some of the top sales opportunities cited by creative professionals:

- Collateral print projects, are the #1 sales opportunity, as cited by 61% of respondents, down slightly from six months ago, but it marks the second-highest percentage TWGA has recorded;
- Web page design is still a top sales opportunity, (cited by 40% of respondents) though it wasn't too long ago that Web design was the number one by a long shot.
- The bulk of the work has transitioned from new site development to basic maintenance, updating, and expansion of existing sites, about which creative professionals seem less enthused;
- Digital photography is at an all-time high: 39%, up from 31%, making it the #3 sales opportunity. This is especially high among commercial photographers;
- Corporate identity, which was at an all-time high of 39% six months ago, fell to just 31% this time. Corporate clients simply don't have the budgets for this type of work at the moment.
- Cross-media communications campaigns was the number one sales opportunity for publishers in Summer 2002;
- Increasing XML programming capabilities," is an opportunity for 18% of Web creative;

<http://www.architosh.com/news/2002-09/2002a1-0926-twga-creative.phtml>

▶ **Online Shoppers Indicate Satisfaction is Key to Repeat Business**

The smoothness of the ordering process, a Web site's look and feel and the ability to browse through product listings are keys to online shopping satisfaction, according to The American Customer Satisfaction Index.

While these three elements were ranked highly (at least seven in ten online shoppers cited them) customers were less taken with their experiences returning merchandise online, and information privacy assurances.

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Among those surveyed, 63% are likely to shop online again within the next two months, while only 11% are not. More than seven in ten said they would do so during the next holiday season, while one-ninth said they wouldn't.

But when the population is broken out into those who were "highly satisfied" with the shopping experience, the desire to shop again is magnified. Eight in ten plan to do so again within two months, while only 40% of those not "highly satisfied" plan to do so.

<http://industryclick.com/magnewsarticle.asp?newsarticleid=2666377&magazineid=151&SiteID=2>

▶▶ **CMR BOOSTS 2003 AD REVENUE FORECAST**

Citing surprising gains made by some media, including cable, syndicated and Spanish-language TV, analysis firm TNS Media Intelligence/CMR boosted its full-year forecast for U.S. ad revenue growth.

The new findings were released June 24 at the "AdWatch: Outlook 2003" conference at the Grand Hyatt New York. *Advertising Age*, AdAge.com and TNS Media Intelligence/CMR are sponsors of the event.

In January, CMR had predicted ad spending for 2003 would rise 3.3% from 2002, to \$117.5 billion. The company now puts that figure at \$124.7 billion, an increase of 4.3% from a year ago.

<http://www.adage.com/news.cms?newsId=38135>

▶▶ **Print Buying Made Simpler**

Creativepro recently wrote a story about a presentation made by Dick Gorelick, president of Gorelick and Associates on print buying. Here are a few excerpts:

Standards? What standards? There may be trade customs for mailing and fulfillment houses, but don't expect to see any industry-wide standards written up for the printing business, despite the fact that it's a multi-billion dollar industry. "There just aren't any," said Gorelick. It's up to you to understand the terms and conditions set by each individual printer for such critical possibilities as an under print, delayed print, errors, and more. By taking the time to understand terms and conditions, you can save yourself headaches later.

Avoiding invoice surprises. "Who authorized this charge?" That's a question asked all too often in the printing business. To stop asking it, "Consider a provision in your purchase order that says you must be informed of all extra

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charges and that all charges must be approved before production can continue," Gorelick says. Pretty strong language, but it works to knock down charges.

There's another invoice surprise that print buyers often face -- the late invoice. Most of the time you can be happy when an invoice is late, but if you need that invoice to bill a client, you want that invoice sooner than later. The answer to the problem? "Demand one," says Gorelick. "Buyers should never accept the explanation that the printer is waiting for invoices from outside suppliers, like prepress shops or binderies. Most often it's pure laziness or bad business practices that delay an invoice."

Price is an important aspect of every print job, but there's no substitute for quality, value and dependability. We'd like to think that these desirable results come from our design acumen, but just as often they are negotiated in the fine print of that contract we love to ignore.

<http://www.creativepro.com/story/feature/19716.html>

► **Acrobat 6 Review**

Creativepro.com contributing editor Susan Glinert recently took Acrobat 6 out for a spin and here is an excerpt of her review:

Adobe is releasing three versions of Acrobat 6. The simplest and least expensive Acrobat offering is Elements, a plug-in for Microsoft Office Suite that allows one-click creation of PDF files from the Microsoft Office Suite. This PC-only application is available exclusively to large-volume (i.e. 1000 seat) corporate licensees (Acrobat Reader remains available as a free download; as before it's a read-only application).

Next in the offerings is Acrobat Standard, aimed at business professionals who need to circulate documents for review and commentary. As available in version 5 Acrobat, the Standard saves individual Web pages or entire Web sites to PDF with a single click, while retaining hyperlinks embedded on the pages. Available for both Mac and PC, this version includes a comprehensive set of features for commenting and tracking document reviews. The Review Tracker automatically creates a list of document recipients and logs feedback.

The high-end version is called Acrobat Professional, which adds industrial-strength features for creating, editing, restructuring, and preflighting PDF files. Here you'll also find tools for: creating PDF forms; automatically generating layered PDF documents from engineering applications such as AutoCAD and Visio; previewing color separations; setting crop marks and bleeds; and embedding preflight information directly in the PDF file.

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Most importantly, Professional includes the Distiller printer driver for creating Pdfs from any application, so you don't have to trek to the separate application if you don't want to.

Each new version of Acrobat also introduces a new "PDF specification". Acrobat 6 introduces PDF 1.5, a format that supports layering and tighter file compression (wavelet aka JPEG 2000), additional security and formatting options, plus the ability to embed multimedia.

The first thing you'll notice about Acrobat Pro is the new interface from Acrobat 5. The old toolbar of icons has been replaced with a simplified array of buttons that function as drop-down menus. If you click on the Review & Comment button, for example, its toolbar appears. If you are protective of screen space, you can click on the arrow at the edge of the button to pull down a menu with further options -- show toolbars, send by email for review, track reviews, export comments, and so on.

You'll also notice that Adobe has added more help features to version 6. When you first load the program, the right side of the screen sports the How To Window containing links to the major features in Acrobat. Most of the buttons in the new toolbar also display a context-sensitive help option, for example, How To Add Comments or How to Secure a Document. Clicking on these items brings up the appropriate help file in the How To Window. You can, of course, hide this panel to maximize screen space.

Although more feature packed for the PC version than the Mac there are new commenting tools in Acrobat 6 Pro. There are a number of new stamps that include the name you used when registering Acrobat -- Accepted by, Rejected by, and so on. These are useful for personalizing your comments. The Commenting toolbar lets you add highlights, strikeouts, underlines, and sticky notes, which show a snazzy dynamic spotlight when you click on a note icon.

Another impressive feature is the new Text Edit feature, which opens a separate Note window for changes. The visual result depends on what type of edit you are making. If you highlight text and choose Replace Selected Text, the highlighted text is struck out and a caret appears after the strikeout to indicate a textual addition. When the cursor runs across the Inserted Text window, a colored indicator shows you where the caret is located. Anyone who spends time collaborating via PDF comments will go nuts over these gorgeous visual cues, which make locating and interpreting changes so much easier.

<http://www.creativepro.com/story/review/19639.html>

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► **Digital Do's, Don'ts: An Interview with this author,
By Dennis Mcgary for Print Solutions magazine**

You recently made a presentation for the DMIA. How did you prepare for the presentation?

HF: This wasn't the first time I worked with DMIA. I did work for the association before, but it's been a few years. To get up-to-date, I had the folks at DMIA give me a list of attendees. I spent time calling and interviewing these people about the issues they were facing and the solutions they provide.

During your phone interviews, what did you discover was the biggest prepress challenge for DMIA members?

HF: The biggest problem they're facing isn't unique to the printing industry. The problem centers on working with and training customers to prepare files correctly. A critical part of digital workflow is communication between the customer and the manufacturer about proper file preparation. The manufacturer has to give the customer feedback about which fonts to use, which file formats and programs work well, how much resolution is needed for scans, how to create PDF files, and a host of other issues that determine if, and how well, files will print. Without communication and feedback, the manufacturer may not be able to print a file correctly. Actually, calling it "communication" is a bit of an understatement because it's more of a collaboration in which there's an ongoing conversation about how the customer can prepare files to reduce mistakes and enhance the quality of the product.

What solutions can help overcome this problem?

HF: In my presentation, I discussed two communication alternatives. One is to allow the customer service representative (CSR) at the manufacturer to talk directly to the customer creating the file. An alternative solution is to train the person working at the distributor facility to act more like a Digital CSR. They would work as a liaison between the CSR at the manufacturer site and the final customer. The Digital CSR has to understand the details of proper file preparation and tactfully explain issues to customers without hurting their feelings.

There's also a technology solution known as "online preflight." Online preflight allows a customer to submit a file to a web site to have it analyzed automatically. The site sends the customer feedback about proper and improper file creation. This may work well for DMIA members because it overcomes the issue of the manufacturer speaking directly to the customer, which often is frowned upon.

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What's the No. 1 mistake that digital printing newcomers make?

HF: Underestimating the importance of an experienced and well-trained staff. Often companies expect people with little experience, no training or limited background to work with sophisticated "digitally savvy" customers or with digital applications. This results in customers questioning the digital abilities of those companies or taking submitted files and making them worse. Ironically, it doesn't take that much time and effort to train people. I find that one or two days annually of focused training can greatly improve customer satisfaction, productivity and profitability.

What's the biggest difference between digital and offset printing that traditional offset printers often don't understand going into the process?

HF: The cost-per-page for certain run lengths. Costing is rather complex, but generally the differences tend to focus on issues that exist in offset printing but not digital printing such as makeready, offline finishing and warehousing. As a result, it costs less to print run lengths of less than 2,000 units with a digital (toner-based) press than with offset technology. On the other hand, there are advantages to offset printing, too. In general, offset printing offers better color fidelity and consistency than toner-based printing.

How should traditional offset printers evaluate one vendor's equipment versus another when they don't have any experience?

HF: There are a number of strategies you can use to help you make good equipment decisions. One easy way is to ask each manufacturer for names and phone numbers of a few customers who are happy with their equipment. Call each of those customers and take notes, as you talk to them. In addition, the Internet offers some great ways--such as online forums and newsgroups--to gather information. Some of the best online forums can be accessed at www.printplanet.com. Additionally, www.news2mail.com/comp/publish/prepress.html is a newsgroup that focuses on electronic prepress.

Before making purchases or signing contracts, what should traditional offset printers investigate?

HF: Contract negotiations usually are missed opportunities. In many cases, equipment vendors make promises they may or may not be able to deliver. Once you've beaten them down on price, you should make sure those promises are included in the contract. If the equipment fails to live up to those promises and you're dissatisfied, you'll have a legal leg to stand on. There would be fewer legal battles if claims and expectations were included in contracts.

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What's the biggest problem area digital users face today? Do you have suggestions for solving those problems before they slow down an operation?

HF: When working with digital files, the biggest issue is that file problems aren't discovered early in the process. They're not discovered by the file creator, the CSR or anyone else until the file reaches the prepress or production area. This usually stalls production by several days because the production staff has to repair the files or find missing elements.

For most companies, I recommend a strategy that I call "fast response preflight." Using this method, 75 percent of problems are discovered within a few hours of entering the plant. When the plant finds a problem, it immediately calls the customer and offers to fix the problem for a price or allows the customer to send a new file. This has several benefits. First, you capture some of the time and costs associated with fixing files, and second, you're opening a dialog with customers about proper file preparation and even training them to submit proper files. Some companies offer customers one day of file preparation training annually. Companies that use fast response preflight motivate customers to prepare accurate files and achieve better on-time delivery because problems are fixed before files reach production. Plus, the job now is more profitable because you're charging for services you previously gave away.

Are there common output problems that can be avoided?

HF: The same output problems we have today existed a decade ago. Most deal with fonts and graphic file formats. First, customers aren't sending us their fonts. Unless they're sending a PostScript file or a correctly prepared PDF file, customers need to send us their fonts as well. Second, customers aren't sending file formats such as TIFF or EPS files. Programs like QuarkXPress and PageMaker embed low-resolution versions of these high-resolution files, but printers always needs high-resolution files to print. In addition, customers often send bad file formats. This is especially true for PC users who often send GIF, BMP and WMF files.

Even when customers send TIFF files, often they're too low in resolution (less than 200 d.p.i.), in a wrong color space (sRGB) or too highly compressed (JPEG low quality). These problems aren't going away, because they're the same problems we're finding with PDF files even though they were supposed to overcome many of the problems associated with customer-submitted files. So now there's a whole new set of concerns about printing files. As a result, I'm spending less time training customers and staffers to prepare, preflight and fix application files (Microsoft® Word, QuarkXPress, PageMaker) and more time training them to prepare, preflight and fix PDF files.

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What advice can you provide for avoiding or bypassing common problems in the future?

HF: Everyone needs to find independent sources that can provide good digital printing information and advice. The online sources I mentioned are good sources, as are books and magazines. Most importantly, good support organizations such as DMIA and NAPL are invaluable.

▶▶ On the road again ...

Your author is sharing keynote responsibilities in a free seminar series on digital printing sponsored by Xerox. I have presented it in Orlando and Denver and I am scheduled for Toronto and Atlanta. It is filled with great content, I recommend checking it out.

<http://www.innovate03.com/main.asp>



Adding or Removing Names

- To add someone email HowieAtPre@aol.com and write "add to End User list" or "add to Pro list" in the subject
- To be removed from either list - email and write "remove from Pro" or "remove from End User list" in the subject line
- To switch write "switch from Pro to End User" or "switch from End User to Pro" in the subject line



Questions about the alphabet soup of digital technologies?

- CSR (customer service)
- TCTPFB (training customers to prepare files better)
- PDF (Portable Document Format)
- CMS (Color Management Systems)
- STEPs (Increasing productivity with staff, training, equipment, or procedural - changes)

Drop me a note: HowieAtPre@aol.com

