Putting PDF/X-1 in Its Place

BY LINDA MANES GOODWIN

PDF/X-1 HAS been approved by ANSI (American National Standards Institute) as an accredited standard file format. Great. Now what? Like TIFF/IT-P1, will it take years before tools are created to read, write and verify PDF/X-1 files? And will it take even longer for the industry to adopt a PDF/X-1 workflow?

The answer is "No!" In fact, you can begin planning your PDF/X workflow now. Although it's only been six months since accreditation, there are already a host of PDF/X products in development. At the DDAP (Digital Distribution of Advertising for Publications) association annual conference in March, eight vendors participated in a PDF/X-1 developers panel: Adobe, Agfa, Harlequin, OneVision, Rorke Data, Scitex, Shira and Total Integration. Several other companies—Apago, DALiM and Enfocus—have since come forward, announcing their intentions to develop for the format, as well. This activity is a testament to vendor/user cooperation.

Go live

When are we likely to see a live ad exchanged as a PDF/X-1 file? We already have. Several months ago, D.D.B. Needham, the New York City-based ad agency, instructed Quality House of Graphics, Long Island City, NY, to create a Bayer Advantage ad as a PDF/X-1; the ad ran in the March 13, 2000 issue of *TIME* magazine. So, how did it go?

The CT and LW files were first converted to a PDF/X-1 using a Scitex Brisque equipped with Scitex's PDF2GO. Quality House delivered the file to *TIME*, where it was then checked for compliance to the specification, using the DDAP PDF/X-1 Verifier tool. Once verified, the file was then electronically routed to six of *TIME*'s plants.

This may seem like a curious method for ad creation, and many of you are probably asking, "Why bother converting a rasterized file to a PDF/X in the first place?". Those vendors that have equipped themselves to process raster workflows already have TIFF/IT-P1s at their disposal, after all.

According to Frank Scott, director of digital development, Time Inc., there are benefits to gain by moving from TIFF/IT-P1 to PDF/X-1. The main incentive manifests in workflow: "It should also produce a smaller file. Take the Bayer ad, for example. As a TIFF/IT-P1, it weighed in at 66MB, while the lighterweight PDF/X-1 measured 16.5MB on the scale. "[The PDF/X-1]," asserts Scott, "is easier to process, can be viewed by off-the-shelf programs, and it gives you the ability to adjust trim and bleed."

Living in a PostScript world

But what impact will PDF/X-1 have on the large community of graphic arts folks who work in the PostScript world? Will the new accredited standard address their needs? Patience, my friends. It will.

Adobe's InProduction is scheduled for release this month. It will offer an integrated suite of tools that work natively within Acrobat 4.05 and allows you to verify if a PDF file is compliant with the PDF/X-1 specification. Operators will be alerted if the file does not pass inspection, and InProduction even promises to enable on-the-fly fixes for basic problems.

As I mentioned, Adobe isn't the only developer addressing PDF/X-1 compliance. Apago's Piktor has a PDF/X-1 module in beta. It will, according to Apago, allow you to convert PostScript, PDF and EPS files to PDF/X-1. Again, a verification module will sound an alert when problems arise.

The production factor

Let's take a look at PDF/X-1 production options. The publisher receives a PDF/X-1 file. It can be verified by DDAP's PDF/X-1 Verifier. (*Editor's note: This is a free tool for DDAP members, available for download at www.ddap.org.*)

Within the next few months, there will be several more options for preflighting these files. Although the company is hesitant to label its products "PDF/X-1 Compliant," Enfocus' PitStop and PitStop Server both possess verification scripts that check for PDF/X-1 attributes. Adobe's InProduction will preflight, as will OneVision's Asura.

Plug-ins and standalone applications promise to support our efforts to implement PDF/X-1 workflow. Still, it's not the end-all be-all solution. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could create PDF/X-1 files natively from our favorite design applications, like QuarkXPress and Adobe InDesign? I predict that developers of these solutions are working to make that a reality.
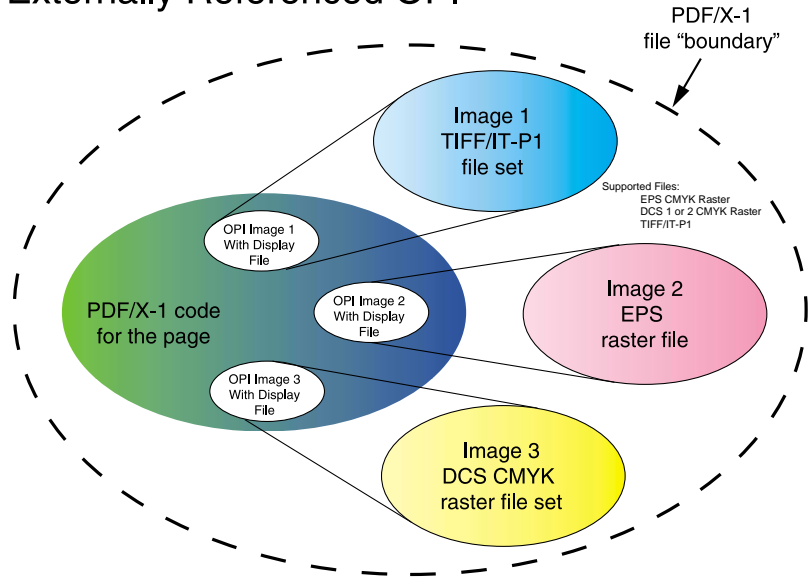
As for imposing these files, there promises to be several forthcoming solutions. But these have limitations, you see. PDF/X-1 files may include raster data, because there are publishers who will continue to receive ads in TIFF/IT-P1 or CT/LW format. There are even more publishers who will continue to receive ads as film; those require copy-dot scanning. Fractional ads will, of course, need to be merged into editorial pages. All of these instances require that PDF/X-1 allow for raster data to be included.

There are two ways to do this. First, you can integrate the raster files directly into the page, so that they are encoded as PDF/X-1. Or, you may place a low-resolution proxy file within the page—also encoded as a PDF/X-1 file—and have the raster files externally referenced within its body. (*see diagram*) For some developers, the second option poses a problem.
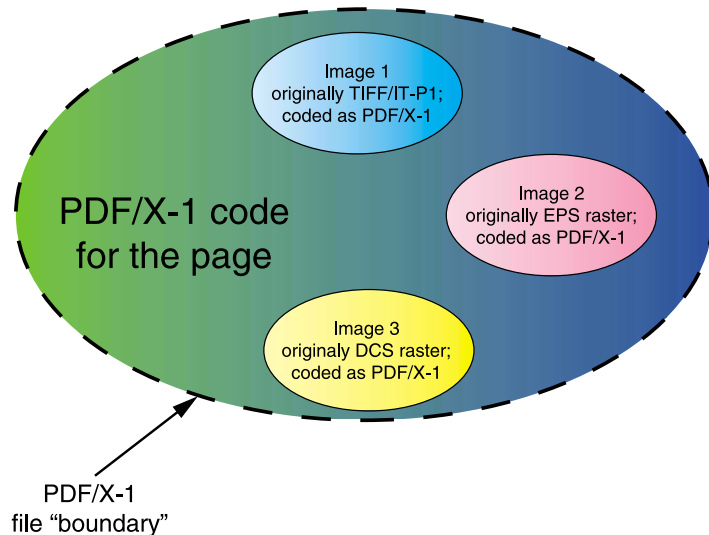
According to Alan Darling, COO, Western Laser Graphics, Valencia, CA, and Chairman of the DDAP, the situation "is being addressed by standards organizations, by defining a compliance level of PDF/X [that] specifically excludes externally referenced OPI engines."

So, for those of you interested in adopting a PDF/X-1 workflow but need to included copy-dot DCS, TIFF/IT-P1 or CT/LW files, if you place those files directly into the page, you can move forward now.

Externally Referenced OPI

PDF/X-1 file "boundary"

Image 1
TIFF/IT-P1
file set

Supported Files:
EPS CMYK Raster
DCS 1 or 2 CMYK Raster
TIFF/IT-P1

OPI Image 1 With Display File

PDF/X-1 code for the page

OPI Image 2 With Display File

Image 2
EPS
raster file

OPI Image 3 With Display File

Image 3
DCS CMYK
raster file set

No Externally Referenced OPI

Image 1
originally TIFF/IT-P1;
coded as PDF/X-1

PDF/X-1 code
for the page

Image 2
originally EPS raster;
coded as PDF/X-1

Image 3
originaly DCS raster;
coded as PDF/X-1

PDF/X-1 file "boundary"

For publishers who plan to continue working with rasterized data in an OPI environment, make your needs known. Vendors are professing that they won't invest time in creating new products unless a demand becomes clear. Most developers with whom I've spoken tell me that they're not hearing any compelling rally cries for PDF/X-1 files that can handle externally referenced raster files. So, if you fit into this category, speak up.

Of course, those of you who don't deal with rasterized files, there is little standing in your way. But, as with any new production procedure, confer with your vendors, put all the pieces in place, and test, test, test. ■

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