

Color Management from a Designer's Point of view

The art, photography and design providers have seen a dramatic change in the tools available during the last decade. As the world becomes digital, many of us now have digital proofing devices. This helps companies to respond more quickly and have more control over the elements not historically handled by the creative group. This desktop technology adds a new level of control, responsibility and communication required by all parties. Although these tools are necessary part of everyday life, they must be controlled in a predictable and repeatable fashion so they accurately depict the results expected at the end of the printing press.

Digital photography, like television and computer monitors, work in a red, green, blue (RGB) world while all printing presses and digital proofing devices live in a cyan, magenta, yellow, black (CMYK) world. Understanding these two color spaces is paramount in maximizing the results you achieve. RGB is the color space used by all digital cameras and has a much larger color gamut than CMYK. Although it may appear that the conversion process is as simple as the click of a mouse, it is the first place where detail, color fidelity and contrast can be significantly compromised. Once this information is lost in the conversion process, changing back from CMYK to RGB will NOT restore the lost data. Even when saving an image in RGB and sending it to a digital proofing device, there is an automatic conversion. What is actually being viewed is a CMYK version run through a default look-up table. Therefore, the proofs generated must conform to the labeling and communication requirements of the specifications.

There is a third specification for color and that is the CIE Lab colorspace. In the event that a known output source is identified prior to the creative stage, the photographer/design firm may contact the supplier and request a color profile for the output source (printing press). This is often referred to as ICC profile. With this profile, a spectrophotometer and a color management program, your digital proofing device can be manipulated to simulate the expected results from the printing press.

All proofs should be identified in one of the following manners:

CONCEPT PROOF: this proof is NOT profiled and is NOT to be used for color matching.

COLOR TARGET: this proof is NOT profiled using the output source profile, however it represents the customers color expectations.

CONTRACT ANALOG PROOF: this proof is made to manufacturer's recommendation for exposing and processing by (brand name of analog proofing system) and has been profiled according to "FIRST" specifications.

CONTRACT DIGITAL PROOF: this proof is to a (brand name of digital proofing system) and has been made according to "FIRST" specifications.

PROFILED CONTRACT PROOF: this proof is profiled using a color management system and is prepared based upon profiles provided by (brand name of proofing system). It is to be used as a contract proof.

(From FTA's "FIRST" Book)

For additional color information please contact your representative or visit the Flexographic Technical Association at: www.flexography.org

Or for more information on PMS (Pantone® color Matching System) colors visit: www.pantone.com