Gamut

The Colour Management Newsletter

Soft-Proofing [Part 2]

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Monitor Profiling & Soft-Proofing

Monitor profiling and soft-proofing has reached a level of maturity were it can be implemented into almost all areas of digital imaging. Personally, I don't understand why anyone involved in this business would dream of not using this technology. Given the choice to see on screen an accurate representation of how the document will print or to "go by the number" I know what I will choose.

Can monitor profiling and soft-proofing offer you new tools to improve your business and is it possible that monitor profiling will offer your customers a value added service?

Definitely. Shorter turn around times, reduced number of hard proofs, better client satisfaction, predictability and consistency are the significant benefits. Offering your loyal customers and an on-site monitor profiling service would do wonders to keep a customer in tough times. Setting up a customer so that they see what you print can have long-term rewards - the customer feels they are calibrated to your specific press. This creates and connection that is difficult to replicate.

What are the components of monitor profiling system?

A decent monitor is the first step. Options could be:

Apples' 23 Cinema Display, the Sony Artisan Color Reference system or a LaCie IV 22". The second component is the environment the monitor is used in. CRT's require low light and low reflections for the best usage. LCD's can operate in slightly brighter environments. A digital video feed to the LCD is essential. If you are considering an LCD also look into a decent video card.

Has this technology evolved to the point where we can approve a proof on the monitor?

At the recent IPA Digital Proofing Shoot-out high-end soft-proofing solutions were evaluated in their ability to compete with traditional proofing systems. In the visual scores the ICS - Sony 23" came in 11th out of 33 different proofing systems. The score was right between the Creo Veris and the KPG Digital Matchprint. These are respectable proofing systems and to think the monitor proof was judged to be more accurate than 22 other proofing options.

My prediction is that we will see large LCD monitors next to the press in the next 3-5 years and that we will be approving a significant amount of print jobs via specialized monitor viewing areas.

What are the weaknesses?

The biggest weaknesses are the reduction in the sense of touch; we need to hold and fold a proof to see how it will translate in the hands of the end user. I have never enjoyed reading the weekend newspaper on my laptop – it just doesn't feel the same. I think the same is translated to proofing. Another obstacle is spot-colours. The monitor does not, currently, have the gamut to encompass the full range of spot colours. I am hearing rumors of high gamut monitors on the horizon.

Monitor profiling is something you can implement with a low investment and a great ROI. The cost of the recommended systems has come down and the easy-of-use has gone up, you no longer need to be a colour management specialist to implement this technology.