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Remote possibilities

Signing off on consistent inkjet proofs

Think ink

Epson's Ultrachrome K3 is an eight-color, pigment-based ink system. The high-density pigments enable a wide color gamut. Color reportedly is stable immediately after printing—there's no short-term color shifting.

Ultrachrome K3 also features three-level black ink technology, which improves the printer's gray balance while eliminating color casts.

Epson introduced the Stylus Pro 4800, 7800 and 9800 with UltraChrome K3 ink technology in 2005. The 4800 prints images as wide as 17 inches, while the 7800 and 9800 print up to 24 inches and 44 inches in width, respectively. Epson's new high-performance, one-inch-wide printhead has 180 nozzles per channel and can achieve resolution levels up to 1,440 x 2,880 dpi with variable-size ink droplets as small as 3.5 picoliters. The 4800 can output a 16 x 20-inch, 720 x 1,440-dpi print in six minutes, 41 seconds. The 7800 produces the same quality at 24 x 30 inches in 14 minutes, 18 seconds; the 9800 at 44 x 60 inches in 42 minutes, 30 seconds. See www.epson.com.

At Graph Expo 2006, Epson America (Long Beach, CA) teamed with ColorSciences (Austin, TX) to showcase its Print-Certification solution. The goal: to deliver a remote proofing package that would satisfy printers, print buyers, designers and other decision makers.

"Epson always has been [a leader] in mission-critical printing," says Mark Radogna, Epson America group product manager, professional imaging. "We gravitate toward the demanding end of color proofing."

Successful contract-quality remote proofing, according to Radogna, requires consistent ink and media, reliable RIPs, and a quick verification and adjustment process. The complete system also should be scalable for customers of any size.

While those requirements might sound daunting, Radogna says the rewards loom large. "Proofing is one of the biggest areas where a commercial printer can save money, if [the process] is properly implemented. The fact that all of the parties involved with proof analysis and approval phases of prepress production can now view certified proofs instantly and from virtually any location worldwide will dramatically speed up the entire workflow, while reducing dependence on courier services, travel and on-site visits from proofing technicians."

How it works

The Epson component encompasses printers from the Stylus Pro line (3800, 4800, 7800 and 9800), as well as its UltraChrome K3 pigmented inks and proofing media. Users have a choice of third-party RIPs from CGS, ColorBurst EFI and GMG.

The system also features advanced Web-enabled color process control software from ColorSciences to ensure uniform certified output and remotely manage multiple proofers at multiple locations. The color accuracy of an Epson Certified Proof is determined by printing an Epson PrintCertification color bar that is read by an industry-leading spectrophotometer. A RIP then verifies the accuracy of the print based on the color standards defined within the RIP color management interface. If passed, a print can be affixed with an Epson PrintCertification label.

ColorSciences' CrossMatch Enterprise continuously monitors remote proofers, measuring color output, identifying any variances and adjusting the printer as necessary. CrossMatch Enterprise provides Web-enabled statistical process control capabilities that support real-time color monitoring and maintenance.

"ColorSciences installs, sets up and calibrates the printers to the standard the commercial printer wants to match," explains Radogna. "[The printer] can see all of the [remote] printers from one Web page. It's a very cool system and one that's attractive to many large commercial printers, because they're not on their own figuring out how to make all this stuff work."

Two tiers

To get the Epson PrintCertification solution, customers buy the appropriate Stylus Pro printer and third-party RIP. ColorSciences' CrossMatch is sold on a consultative basis.

Epson's PrintCertification strategy targets two tiers of customers. On the first level, graphic designers and other users can opt for



a Pro Edition printer bundled with a ColorBurst RIP. Users can connect a spectrophotometer to the RIP, make a print and check the color. “The RIP will tell you if the proof is hitting the color standard,” says Radogna. “We’re not just giving the user a RIP, we’re providing an easy way to verify the color is hitting [the desired] standard.”

The second tier includes large commercial printing companies that use many Epson inkjet proofing devices throughout their entire organizations, across the United States or around the world.

Using the Web page, users can keep an eye on any proofer and take corrective action as required. For example, a Chicago supervisor might notice a problem with proofs being made in Atlanta and suggest the operator in Atlanta relinearize the machine or check for a clogged

nozzle. The CrossMatch Enterprise solution also continuously monitors remote proofers in all locations, measuring color output, identifying any variances and adjusting the Stylus Pro as required.

Printers that haven’t evaluated remote proofing solutions in a few years will notice one key difference. “Now we have printing devices that can be physically verified with spectrophotometry to provide immediate feedback,” says Radogna. “We’re not only printing colors that can match the press, we’re also letting clients verify color on the fly, in real time. That’s the big difference.”

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