Distributed 5th April, Ipex, Brimingham 2006

Interoperability between Soft Proofing Solutions

Introduction

Following the meeting held at the FT offices on Monday 27th March, it was agreed that a document be produced for distribution prior to IPEX. The purpose of this document is to endeavour to summarise what was discussed at the FT meeting, to identify the key points of agreement and to gather feedback on what is being proposed so that this information can be relayed and discussed at the DAL meeting on Wednesday 5th at IPEX.

Summary View

In essence it was agreed that the objective was to find a way in which different soft proofing solutions should be able to work together. It was agreed that the likelihood of getting all solutions to display exactly the same colour for the same file in the near future was slim, but that the belief was that soft proofing solutions per se are now more than capable of displaying colour accurately (within a level of tolerance that is believed to be more than acceptable).
It was decided that it would be beneficial to the market for these solutions to be able to 'share' data (i.e. be able to write and read the same data sets). The discussion is therefore about what that data should be and how technically it should be 'shared'.

The Metadata

Below are the suggested 'fields' that should be 'shared': As much as possible, we seek to automate the collection of this data and avoid adding another layer of admin.

a) Approved? Yes or No (compulsory)

b) Approver – some detail about the company, the individual user and possibly some contact details, so could be 4 fields:

- i) user, (not compulsory but highly recommended)
- ii) company, (compulsory)
- iii) phone, and (not compulsory but highly recommended)
- iv) email (not compulsory but highly recommended)

c) System Used: which soft proofing system was used to soft proof & approve the file (compulsory)

d) Calibrated?: i.e. was the system correctly calibrated when the file was approved? – Yes or No (compulsory)

e) Colourspace: probably broken down into three fields:

i) ICC profile name (e.g. bigspace.icc) – n.b. this is the name of the ICC profile not the profile itself (compulsory)

ii) output intent – which output intent should be used with this profile (not compulsory but highly recommended)

iii) the known printing condition that the output intent was characterised to (not compulsory but highly recommended).

The objective is that each soft proofing solution vendor be able to incorporate all the above data into (or alongside) the supplied file in an automated way. However, this should not be a mandatory condition for any solution vendor – as long as their solution provides a way for that data to be incorporated (i.e. it might be a manual act).

It should also be stressed that the above does not prohibit partners within a specific workflow making different fields compulsory. However we suggest that some fields are not made compulsory to populate on all occasions for the following reasons:

Approver details: in our view it should be possible for all the vendors' solutions to be able to enter the company details (as these will be required to be completed when setting up the solution) however they may not all as yet have the info about the specific user and that user's email and telephone number.

Colourspace: We can foresee workflows (advertiser to publisher for example) where the receiver will only be able to specify the colourspace in terms of an ICC profile and will not have the information about output intent and print characterisation. We do not want to limit the adoption of this Interoperability Mechanism through insisting on all three pieces of data being specified and mandatory.

Technical considerations

As an overview, the points made were as follows:

i) XMP would seem the most applicable technology to use to contain the metadata,

ii) the XMP could be embedded within the file or attached (as a 'sidecar'),

iii) embedding the data within the file would cause the 'last modified' date to change which might be an issue,

iv) JDF was viewed as one likely mechanism for 'attaching' the XMP to the file and keeping them 'connected',

v) a new XMP plane would need to be created and agreed,

vi) the solution should take into account the need for multiple file formats to be passed around – TIFF, EPS, PDF (various flavours), etc.

Our view is that it should not be necessary to restrict the technical solution to one option and that it would be feasible to have, for example, three options:

a) JDF–based solution with XMP file and proofed file (any file format);

b) XMP sidecar file and proofed file;

c) proofed file with XMP embedded.

The advantage of this approach would be to allow the proposed Interoperability Mechanism to fit with multiple existing workflows. It would require the vendors to incorporate at least one of these 'output options' and to understand all three. Preferably, of course, all solutions would be able to generate and understand all three options.

The downside of this multiple 'output options' route is that it adds some complexity. More feedback from the vendors on this area in particular would be very welcome.

It was also suggested that at the same time as getting the market to adopt this set of protocols that we should issue a set of guidelines on such things as best practice for the viewing of colour, in particular, drawing on the draft proposal ISO 12646, which is about LCD monitor proofing.

The Digital AdLab Soft Proofing Committee

31 – 03 – 2006