

## TECHWATCH™

## Electronic Color Proofing Re-emerges



Vill soft proofs match the final run? Maybe. But nothing truly behaves like printing.

**C**olor proofing technology has come a long way in a short time, and it's still not fully settled down. The definition of a "printer's proof" in *Webster's New World Dictionary* reads: "A trial impression pulled from composed type for checking against the original manuscript."

That proof, product of a bygone day, was based on an image in physical relief, from which the page was printed. In those days, proofing and printing used the same process to produce the final product. As technology has progressed, every possible method has been attempted for color proofing, with new methods adopted several times in a decade. We've moved from photographic proofs, to thermal, and now to inkjet proofs. In some respects, the move to real ink on paper brought us back to the inked impression described by *Webster's*.

Just as we are becoming comfortable with inkjet proofing, here comes another upstart, possibly even the end of the line: "electronic proofing," aka "soft proofing." A great chance exists that nothing comes after electronic proofing, which, in reality, is more than 20 years old. (Hazeltine and Hell both had Vidicon tube-based proofing systems rooted in early TV technology.)

In soft proofing, today's higher resolution and

manageable display technology, software and computer processing strengths have met low-cost storage and telecommunications.

Today, the vast majority of printed pages begin life on screen as additive transmitted Red Green Blue (RGB) colored light. Though materials begin in electronic form, they are destined for paper, where subtractive CMYK inks will print the work. To make an additive transmitted light system in RGB impersonate a subtractive reflective light system built on CMYK—as today's soft proofing systems do—is a real trick.

Electronic proofing is exciting. It has a vastly broader color range than print and can be digitally controlled to simulate a printed sheet. It can use the same screens that the original design was created with, can be real-time and shared over distance without the cost of transportation, and can automatically record a viewing history. For simulating paper as the "fifth color," e-proofing systems can store a library of all papers, rendering an unlimited range of digitally simulated sample runs.

But will they really match the final printed sheet? Maybe. I give that qualified assessment because, in truth, nothing behaves like printing. However, in today's business climate, if you have agreed with a customer that an electronic proof is a contract proof, then it becomes one. Price, too, (figure about \$10 per electronic proof today for an all-inclusive cost) for the printer—and free for the printing requestor—makes electronic proofing financially appealing to customers.

One big user is Time Inc., which has endorsed SWOP-certified digital proofs and is using Remote Director from Integrated Color Solutions ([www.icscolor.com](http://www.icscolor.com)). The solution also has found a warm reception at Brown Printing, based in Waseca, MN, with facilities in East Greenville, PA, and Woodstock, IL. Lee Edberg, Central PreMedia B. Direct manager for Brown, has been working with ICS since July. "We believe in this technology," he says. "We want to help it progress and are excited." Edberg now has electronic proofing at press-side, located right next to the control console.

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