

The Lost Art of Pre-Press

I'm going to sound like an old codger here. I suppose since I retired after 30 years in pre-press I really AM an old codger, but I don't feel like one.

The thing is, while pre-press is still alive and well in the print production process, we have pretty much lost the ART of pre-press. There was a time when working on a job in the pre-press department meant putting a little of yourself into each job. Technicians would go in and brighten the colors of scans, touch up unwanted artifacts, maybe boost the contrast of an image. We'd seek out widows and bad-hyphenation and poor text wraps. If something didn't look right, we'd question it and we usually knew what had to be fixed. We wouldn't just "let it go."

We worked on profiling our proofing equipment to make sure everything was standardized and repeatable. We would convert the RGB images to CMYK with minimal loss because we knew how to tweak the image to get it as close as possible to the original.

Now we are constantly hearing that no one should ever have to touch a file in pre-press. Any minutes spent "futzing" with a job means lower profits.

That may be true, but back in the 70's, I worked part-time for a small mom and pop enterprise that made its name and reputation by "futzing." People came back to Cardinal Press in Fredericksburg VA because they knew the folks there would treat each job as though it were their own creation. That was partly because each job WAS there own creation. They always put that little extra art into each piece they printed. And the company still flourishes: I hope because they still offer the personal touch.

OK, I'm an old fogie, but I really miss that.

And I'm not so sure we haven't lost more than we've gained.

I'm all for new technology and automation. But let's not lose the art of printing completely.