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Using SNAP to qualify a printer and client

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The Specifications for Newsprint

Advertising Production, or SNAP, provides technical guidelines and references that help newspapers and coldset commercial printers achieve consistent, quality color reproduction.

With the consolidation taking place among and between newspapers and the expanding overlap among newspapers and printers in the printing of coldset work — newspapers, inserts, and publications — publishers, retailers, brokers, agencies and other print buyers often seek ways to qualify the newspaper or printer in order to assure that the desired printed results are optimized.

SNAP can help. The process outlined below calls for grading the newspaper/printer and the client, on a 100-point scale.

Note that the grading pertains to both parties since optimized printed results demands a process partnership between the organization supplying the images and the organization reproducing them.

High scores indicate a high probability that the newspaper/printer can consistently achieve client objectives. A low score indicates the likely increase in deviation between what the client desires and what the newspaper/printer can achieve. A low score should not be used to disqualify a vendor or turn away a client: It means only that one or both stakeholders should be aware of current process gaps and then strive to address these.

Initiated by either the newspaper/printer or client, the client/printer team should:

Step 1: Review SNAP

Meet to review the SNAP specifications (download the most current set without charge from snapquality.com), including the guidelines for:

- Design
- Photography
- Scanning
- File preparation (including Adobe settings) and transmission
- Proofing aim points
- Printing aim points

If additional orientation sessions with designs and photographers are needed, confirm this need at this meeting and set up these subsequent events. In all cases, all stakeholders need to understand that aim points and settings used to prepare images and pages for coldset printing are distinct from those used for work printed heatset on Coated No. 5 paper, which are defined in SNAP, and from those used to printed heatset on Coated No. 3 and 4 grades, which are outlined in GRaCOL.

While a coldset printer can reproduce these images prepared to these alternate specifications, the reproduction cannot be optimized and some aspect of the desired outcome will be compromised.

Scoring

If the newspaper/printer is conversant on all of these topics: + 10 points.

If the newspaper/printer is familiar with some but not all of these topics: + 5 points.

If the newspaper/printer is unaware of SNAP: 0 points.

If the client is conversant on all of these topics: + 10 points.

If the client is familiar with some but not all of these topics: + 5 points.

If the client is unaware of SNAP: 0 points.

Step 2: Confirm the proof

Confirm the proofing system that will be used to anticipate on-press reproduction and then test the visual and objective correlation between the proof and the printing.

The purpose of a proof is to predict how the file will be reproduced on press. A proof should not be used as a "stretch" goal for press operators to match; if this occurs, variation can increase since different operators will interpret what matching to the "stretch" visual goal should be.

Proofs that are intended to be used for evaluating content only (digital bluelines, color copies, etc.) are useful as content proofs and unreliable as color-match proofs. Even black and white photocopies supplied for black-only printing create risk since they may yield greater contrast, more detail, and greater tonal gradation than may exist with printed results. An effective coldset proof should provide:

- Backgrounds/substrates that mimic newsprint and are not as bright and white as Coated No. 5 or other grades.
- Solid densities that mimic printing coldset on newsprint versus the higher densities expected when printing heatset on Coated No. 5 or other grades.
- Tonal areas that mimic SNAP Tone Value Increase (TVI) dot gain values are not as sharp as imaged on proofs seeking to predict printing on Coated No. 5 or other grades.

- A color gamut that reflects printing coldset on newsprint versus heatset on Coated No. 5 or some other grade.
- A color bar in the non-image area that can be measured.
- Documentation (often on the reverse) indicating that the proof has been measured to verify that it has been produced correctly and within manufacturing tolerances.

Note that proofs should not be expected to image halftones; the proof can use any imaging methodology or colorant set (xerographic, inkjet, thermal, etc.) provided the above results are achieved. Further, in some cases the proof densities, TVIs, and colorants vary from what is expected when printing coldset, though the resulting visual appearance is similar. This may occur when the proofing system manufacturer makes objective adjustments to achieve a visually accurate result.

Once the proof type is confirmed, the client and printer should undertake a test whereby a proof of a past or current job is compared and measured to show the visual and objective similarities and differences. The images being evaluated would preferably come from the client, though proofs and printing could shared from a SNAP Certificate test or even some past job.

Scoring
If the newspaper/printer uses an appropriate SNAP proof for color prediction: + 10 points.

If the newspaper / printer does not use an appropriate SNAP proof for color prediction: 0 points.

If the client uses an appropriate SNAP proof for color prediction: + 10 points.

If the client does not use an appropriate SNAP proof for color prediction: 0 points.

Step 3: Confirm customer expectations and file preparation
With file preparation guidelines explained and requirements confirmed, and assuming a SNAP proof has been confirmed as the proof to be used to predict color, the third step calls for the client to create one or more pages with a range of images.

These pages can then be proofed and the images and page layouts reviewed in a collaborative manner to assure that:
- Customer expectations for reversed type; margin widths; print contrast of images; key images and colors; logo colors; the important of banners and solids versus images and how any trade-offs should be handled if in-line of other conflicts arise, etc. are understood.
- The newspaper/printer can offer suggestions at this early stage on ways to better achieve the desired results and/or potential barriers and solutions that may exist with image or page preparation.
- If a proof that does not meet SNAP is being used, a press test is suggested, recognizing that this demands resources that may not exist. This is also a good stage to discuss and agree on desires and realities pertaining to product lap, folding, and trim requirements, especially if this is publication work. Discussing and confirming skidding and skid labeling expectations is also useful.

Scoring
If the newspaper/printer can offer specific guidance and solutions to the customer to address any file shortcomings: + 10 points.

If the newspaper/printer can offer some but not all guidance to address any file shortcomings: + 5 points.

If the newspaper/printer is unable to offer the client guidance on how to address file shortcomings: 0 points.

If the client files meet SNAP requirements: + 10 points.

If the client files meet some but not all SNAP requirements: + 5 points.

If the client files do not meet SNAP requirements: 0 points.

Step 4: Confirm the prepress/ printing process
Determine is the newspaper/printer is SNAP Certified.

Achieving a SNAP Certificate means that the facility's prepress, pressroom, and maintenance teams have been able to print a test form that meets all SNAP requirements.

This indicates that the facility understands the print production process and is also capable of documenting it can print to SNAP densities, TVIs and also create tones that anticipate these on-press conditions.

To see which organizations have obtained SNAP Certification, visit the SNAP Web site (www.snapquality.com).

If the newspaper/printer has not yet achieved received a SNAP Certified designation, download the test form and instructions from the site. A nominal fee is charged to have the results measured by a third party.

Scoring
If the newspaper/printer has a SNAP Certified designation: + 10 points.

If the newspaper/printer is pursuing being SNAP Certified: + 5 points.

If the newspaper/printer does not have and will not pursue being SNAP Certified: 0 points.

If the client wants the newspaper/printer to already have a SNAP Certified designation: + 10 points.

If the client wants the newspaper/printer to pursue a SNAP Certified designation: + 5 points.

If the client does not care if the newspaper/printer has a SNAP Certified designation: 0 points.

Step 5: Confirm the working agreement
Advanced clients and newspapers/printers recognize that even after this pre-production planning is completed that processes will change, marketplace demands will emerge, and that new requirements will manifest themselves. For this reason the partners should agree to meet on a regular basis to review:
- SNAP information with any new stakeholders in especially within the client's organization.
- Objective and subjective feedback to the printer on proof-to-print correlation — including good correlation and, if it occurs, not so good correlation. Folding, laps, trimming, and skidding can be included in these discussions.
- Feedback to the client on file preparation.

Meetings can be monthly, quarterly, or less frequent. Attendees can include all or a rotating set of representatives of production team members from the client's staff as well as from the newspaper/printer staff.

Meetings should occur on a scheduled basis and not just when an issue arises. Also, these are technical meetings and should be kept separate any discussions that the client and newspaper/printer sales team are having, though these important stakeholders could also attend them.

Scoring

If the newspaper/printer supports having these regular technical meetings: +10 points.

If the newspaper / printer does not support having these regular technical meetings: 0 points.

If the client supports having these regular technical meetings: + 10 points.

If the client does not support having these regular technical meetings: 0 points.

Keep in mind that these areas and scores are suggested and not standards. The client and newspaper/printer can add categories and modify these areas to reflect specific business needs. The goal: a structured outline of important process areas — drawn on the proven information in SNAP — that the team wants to review, understand and follow as the relationship between printer and client starts and evolves. ▲

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