

Shaw Newspapers: QuarkXPress 6 to the Rescue

The staff at the Shaw News Weeklies in Sycamore, Illinois, thought they were making the smart decision when they opted to upgrade to Mac OS X® during their move to a new building in February 2004.

“So, they would be moved to a new building and have new machines running Mac OS X waiting for them, and the editorial staff would also run new QuarkXPress 6 software. A piece of cake!” said Brian Hurley, Computer Applications Instructor at Shaw Newspapers, the parent company of Shaw News Weeklies.

The upgrade was a “piece of cake” until hours from press time, when the group ran into problems with Adobe® Acrobat® Distiller®.

“We had no way of printing our pages in PDF to go to press,” Hurley said. “We had upgraded to QuarkXPress 6 but hadn’t committed to go live creating PDF files with it yet. In desperation, we used the QuarkXPress PDF engine, and it worked with no major problems. Quark saved the day!”

Upgrade Jitters

Shaw Newspapers, a communications company that focuses on publishing and distributing quality community newspapers, publishes 15 newspapers in Illinois and Iowa. Each newspaper group operates somewhat independently and has its own editorial, production, and printing operation on site, but Shaw Newspapers provides guidelines for design and supervises equipment and software purchases. The company strives to enlighten and entertain diverse readers, meet the changing needs of advertisers, and promote the interests of the communities its newspapers serve.

Shaw News Weeklies, one of Shaw Newspapers’ many subsidiaries that were upgrading to Mac OS X, uses products from Harris & Baseview for its editorial systems, but all pagination and advertising production is done with QuarkXPress. Hurley, who has been a QuarkXPress user since QuarkXPress 3, said he was not excited about moving users to a new version of the software. In fact, this group was still using QuarkXPress 4.11.

“We had grown comfortable with QuarkXPress 4.11 and had not upgraded to QuarkXPress 5,” Hurley said.

The upgrade to OS X necessitated the upgrade, so Hurley got ready to make the move with Matt Woodstrup, who manages systems at Shaw News Weeklies and the Kane County Chronicle, another Shaw Newspapers publication. All pages at Shaw News Weeklies are paginated with ad placement at the Kane County Chronicle. Staff at the Kane County Chronicle then ships the pages to the editorial department at Shaw News Weeklies, where staff adds the editorial content. Before the move to the new building, the Shaw News Weeklies staff would send PDF files or QuarkXPress EPS files back to the Kane

County Chronicle, where staff would send the pages to press.

After the upgrade to QuarkXPress 6, Hurley said everything ran perfectly. Well, almost perfectly.

“A glitch arose when we discovered that when opening a template, QuarkXPress was not recognizing the document as a template, but as a layout, which meant the changes were applied to the template, not a new document,” he said. “I called Quark and received an answer in about 10 minutes. The QuarkXPress 6.1 upgrade was out, and it fixes the problem” He downloaded the upgrade, and the template issue was resolved.

But the group ran into another problem: Staff at the Kane County Chronicle was still running QuarkXPress 4.

“Because of incompatibility between QuarkXPress 4 and QuarkXPress 6, the Kane County Chronicle staff could not open the QuarkXPress 6 documents,” Hurley said. The group decided to try a PDF solution. They created test pages in Adobe Acrobat from QuarkXPress EPS files and sent them to the Kane County Chronicle staff, who had no trouble readying them for production.

“Problem fixed. We were ready to go.” Hurley said.

Trial by fire

Production day dawned, and a really strange thing happened. Because Shaw News Weeklies had only one copy of Acrobat, Managing Editor Rose Ralston moved the EPS pages to the server to create PDF files from Acrobat.

When she did that, Acrobat Distiller created the PDF and displayed a path to the desktop, but the file wasn’t on the desktop. In fact, it wasn’t anywhere. Hurley created EPS files and PostScript files from a few different applications and had the same problem.

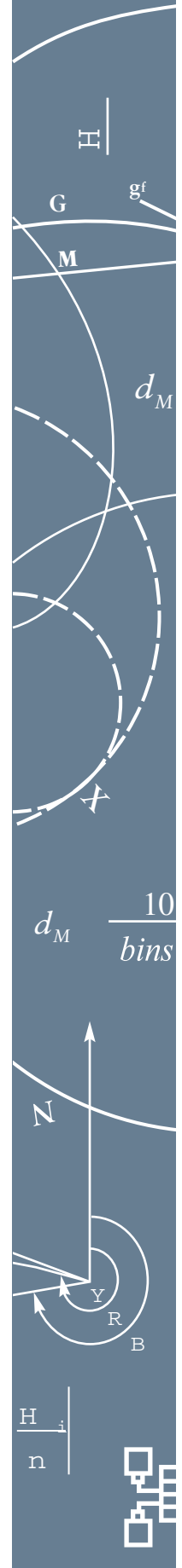
“It was crunch time,” he said. “It’s time to send pages to the Kane County Chronicle, and we can’t make a PDF.”

And remember that the group couldn’t send its QuarkXPress 6 documents to the Kane County Chronicle because staff at the Kane County Chronicle couldn’t open them

“As the sweat began beading on my forehead, I called Matt Woodstrup, who was at KCC,” Hurley said. “As we talked, we hit on the solution.”

“Quark to the rescue”

Did Hurley really say that Quark would come to their rescue?



“Yes, I really said that,” Hurley said. “QuarkXPress 6 has its own PDF engine, allowing high-quality PDF files to be created without Acrobat.”

He said that although the group had been planning to test the QuarkXPress PDF engine before using it as an output method, they had no time to debate now.

“It was trial by fire,” Hurley said, adding that they immediately saw an advantage to using the QuarkXPress PDF engine — if it worked.

“In the previous workflow, one or two people made PDF files, creating a backlog at output time,” Hurley said. “With the majority of editorial staff now having QuarkXPress with PDF capability, they could all make PDF files.”

The plan worked, and staff at Shaw News Weeklies sent PDF files to the Kane County Chronicle right on time.

Assessment after crunch time

Hurley said that in the move from QuarkXPress 4.11 to QuarkXPress 6, his group didn’t need to learn a substantially different application, but they acquired a bevy of new tools that helped them automate repetitive tasks.

“Just look at the scripts folder in the Mac version of the QuarkXPress menu to discover automated tasks that will make your repetitive tasks automated, such as drop shadows, making fractions, and linking selected text boxes,” he said. “And if you highlight some text and choose Option F9, the text will scroll through the Font menu. This has been a feature of [Adobe] Photoshop for a few versions, and is a welcome addition to QuarkXPress.”

According to Hurley, QuarkXPress 6.1 has proven to be a stable application that runs well on Mac OS X. He plans to upgrade the Shaw News Weeklies staff to QuarkXPress 6.5 as soon as possible

Quark's Attitude

According to Hurley, the new PDF engine feature in QuarkXPress 6 alone has increased productivity at Shaw News Weeklies significantly. In his experience with Quark, Inc. though, he said it’s not only the software that has improved over the years.

“Quark has changed,” he said. “It’s not just the software, but more important, as a company.”

In the past, Hurley had not only experienced his own difficulties reaching Quark technical support, but he’d also read and heard horror stories from peers. He’d heard about people being on hold for hours only to encounter a major language barrier and support that didn’t fix their problems.

His experience since the QuarkXPress 6 installation? Support has improved dramatically.

“I can honestly say that I have been on and off with problems fixed within 15 minutes in most cases.” Hurley said.

He gave an example. When he and Dorine Peterson, another Shaw Newspapers’ employee, were upgrading the Creston, Iowa, offices to QuarkXPress 6, the two ran into a problem with a machine that was printing incorrectly. Peterson called Quark technical support.

She said that although she was on hold for a lot longer than the usual 15 minutes, she was not on hold listening to “dead air.”

“The support is in India, and it was 4:00 a.m. there, but the support person never left us,” Hurley said. “I actually e-mailed support with a question at one time, and they called me. That would have never happened in the past.”

Quark is improving overall as far as communication, too, Hurley said. He said that representatives and program developers from Quark have visited some of the Shaw Newspapers sites, and he has been invited to major rollouts of upgrades and features. It’s a new attitude for Quark, and it’s working for Hurley, who said he is looking forward to dealing with Quark for many years to come.

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