

Markzware Software and GoodToGo Systems Inc.

By Debra Lovelady

When someone asks for a Kleenex® rather than a tissue, or requests a Xerox® instead of a photocopy, he has fulfilled a merchandiser's dream. In the consumer's mind, the brand name has become the generic reference.

To the credit of Markzware Software (Santa Ana, CA), its technology is similarly shaping our digital-printing vernacular. The verb "preflighting" describes the essential step of electronically checking native documents prior to printing. It's not uncommon to hear people ask if a file has been "flight checked," a term derived from FlightCheck®, Markzware's flagship product introduced in 1995 to facilitate that process.

Printers and graphic designers know too well the perils of electronic printing and publishing. Many elements can be incorrectly identified or selected, thus delaying deadlines, or worse, disappointing customers. FlightCheck assumes the mundane task of checking all native applications for up to 150 problematic prepress possibilities. Designed for content creators in the graphics industry, it works with all major desktop-publishing applications.

This isn't breaking news. FlightCheck is often acknowledged as setting the industry standard for preflighting software. In fact, Markzware has developed a growing family of pre-press products.

Not surprisingly, the visionary of Markzware's products, Patrick Marchese, was formerly a designer at a major ad agency. Although the inherent problems arising from working with digital files constantly irked him, they also provided inspiration.

"There are so many things that can go wrong with digital files, it's just unbelievable," Marchese says. "Our solution to those problems, and our technology, allow people to have confidence that the correct fonts will be there, and their images won't be jagged, have an incorrect resolution or be from low-resolution JPEG or GIF images off the Internet."



Markzware Software created the now common "preflighting" and "flight-checked" terms for its FlightCheck® software that electronically checks digital documents prior to printing. GoodToGo Systems, working as a systems integrator with Markzware, has introduced its GoodToGo, a similar software for smaller shops producing digital prints.

MarkzNet

Last year, the company introduced MarkzNet, a product that uses the Internet to transfer print-ready files. Its customizable technology allows communication with clients via the printer's Website.

The receiver, typically a printer or service bureau, sets a list of specific guidelines (called Ground Controls) against any incoming file. Only files meeting these specifications will be received for printing. Any files that trigger error messages are returned to the sender, notating essential corrections. When the job is accepted, it's automatically confirmed.

A printshop looking to build a custom solution using the MarkzNet technology can expect to see a price tag in the \$25,000 to \$30,000 range, inclusive of the development tool kit (\$15,000), and the labor and development time of a system integrator. Printers or bureaus in the \$5 million and up revenue category can typically justify such an investment.

Testimony

Five years ago, in rural Cornwall, England, a thriving 25-year-old printing business, named Atelier Data Services Ltd., began converting to digital. By electronically filing jobs, the remote company has grown. Today, it handles the ad and editorial content of

approximately 400 magazines and provides general reprographic work. The company unabashedly credits MarkzNet for its ability to manage such a diverse volume. As the company converted to digital-printing processes and spent so much time fixing problematic files, it began questioning its decision.

"You spend a lot of money on sorting other people's problems out, and you begin thinking, 'Why are we doing this?'" recalls Steve Michaels, projects manager. "We really needed to find a way to automate that process."

A company that's confident all files received are print-ready works more efficiently. Additionally, it markets its superior service.

According to Michaels, "Clients don't have to worry about getting a phone call at two o'clock in the morning to hear that their file isn't working, or that we can't run their ad on time. All problems are sorted out long before we go to press."

Atelier Data Services gradually customized its system in-house, without the assistance of a system integrator. Creating the appropriate codes for each publisher was a challenging process, but the results have been rewarding.

"We can accept any number of files and then convert them to PDF. We don't have to worry whether our customer has this software or that software; just send it to us, and we'll deal with it," Michaels says.

Until recently, smaller print shops could only envy this level of networked automation. Now, for a few hundred dollars, some have purchased FlightCheck for their customers. Absorbing the product's cost is worth the guarantee of receiving preflighted files. However, the incentive to designers isn't as great as to printers. They still must save the work to a disk and courier it, so they don't see any benefit of doing extra work on a file so printers will have less to do.

GoodToGo

Now there's good news for the smaller-sized printer. A product called GoodToGo has leveraged Markzware's patented technology and provides affordable, on-line preflighting solutions. Erik Ohlin and Robert Lucier, the product designers working with Markzware as system integrators, envisioned a simpler, boxed solution at an affordable price.

"We were looking for a good, robust, development tool kit we could customize and offer as a workload tool," relates Ohlin, president/CEO of GoodToGo Systems Inc. (Carlsbad, CA). "Preflighting has always

been a big part of the labor burden in prepress and printing production, but, at the same time, it's something that's barely predictable. We're always looking for the same things over and over again, but there hadn't been the tools to help streamline and automate that. We saw a lot of potential in the MarkzNet development tool kit and decided to build a good Web-based solution by using that software."

GoodToGo's user-friendly interface is simple enough that print- and signshops can administer the solution on their own. Also, an artist can automatically collect all images and fonts, whether they're on Mac or Windows. The software compresses them into a single archive and then FTPs them to the printshop, all at the click of a button.

GoodToGo offers two different packages. The Managed Solution is a subscription service that runs on GoodToGo Systems' server. The subscriber receives individual branding on the Website, so, as far as their customers are concerned, there's no intermediary. In addition to a nominal set-up fee, a subscription fee is based upon varying levels of transactions per month, similar to a cell-phone plan.

The second plan, the Enterprise Solution, provides buyers with a full, unlimited license of the MarkzNet development and tool kit, developed with GoodToGo's administration interface and user front-end. It's a complete package with the server box residing at the printshop.

Catching errors in advance also enables printers to charge for extra work they previously absorbed.

"They're using it as a marketing tool," Ohlin explains. "When they notice the clients' files are RGB, they can tell them they'd be happy to convert them to CMYK for \$50. This is something they wouldn't have probably been able to bill for previously because the salesperson wouldn't have discovered the problem until after the job was quoted, or maybe even after the job was delivered. At that point, it's impossible to go back and ask for more money."

Markzware's solutions have set not only a standard for the industry, but also, have provided a springboard to new innovations in preflighting software. Headquartered in Santa Ana, CA, with a European office in the Netherlands, business partners Ron Crandall and Marchese are uniting the world of graphic design and electronic printing by facilitating the most basic of elements — communication.

You can reach Markzware Software at www.markzware.com or call (949) 756-5100.