



Making good PDFs' - Press Settings For Acrobat Distiller - by Lerrick Starr

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I SPEND A LOT OF MY TIME ADVOCATING the use of PDF files for pressroombound print materials. In its ideal state a PDF has impeccable credentials and can truly claim to be the 'perfect' file format. It carries within all the requisite images, fonts and graphics needed for film or plate imaging and it can do so at a minimum size. PDF has been championed by major digital workflow manufacturers like Agfa, Creo and Heidelberg. They've constructed functional but complex workflow architectures. They sell pretty well. The creation of bad PDF files, by corporate content creators, is legend. But bad PDFs, created by those who should know better – meaning Mac and PC artists using mainstream applications – runs a close second.

Making a good PDF

What's it take to produce a good prepress PDF? – Adobe Acrobat 5. There are two relevant applications on the CD. Acrobat (not Reader) is the viewer application. Within you can make minor edits, open parts of the PDF in Illustrator or Photoshop, and print composite to an output device. The Distiller application is used to create PDFs from PostScript generated by your originating application and that's anything from InDesign to Word. Distiller has built-in preset values for PDFs destined for web, print or press. (The Print setting is meant for jobs headed to a desktop printer not presswork, Don't use the book setting either. It's meant for a digital book, not paper! Between Distiller and your application, you can theoretically generate an imageable PDF. But there's oft' a slip between the glass and the lip! The biggest way you can mess up is to mistake Acrobat PDFwriter for Acrobat Distiller.

Either route can generate a PDF that looks right. But chances are that the PDFwriter's output will be low resolution and lacking in other important elements.

What's in a PDF?

Everything including the kitchen sink can be embedded in a PDF file. But prepress people are only concerned that the PDF contains the elements required for successful imaging. Those items are:

Graphics: This includes any EPS files placed in the originating application but can also include clipboard items pasted into place. Graphic elements like boxes, lines or other shaped objects are included in this category.

Fonts: They should all be embedded.

Images: They should be at the minimum resolution required for printing ie. 250 - 300 ppi for 150 lpi printing or 200 - 266 or 133 lpi for less rigorous usages. Drop to 155 - 170 for 85 lpi newspaper work.

Here's the scoop on modifying the stock Press settings in Distiller to optimize your PDF for use in a prepress workflow.

Step-by-step

Open Distiller., Note the Job Options window. Make it say 'Press' by clicking on it. Go to Settings>Job Options>General tab and make it match the following choices.

Compatibility: Acrobat 4.0 (PDF 1.3), NO – Optimize for Fast Web View, YES – Embed Thumbnails, NO – Auto-Rotate Pages, Resolution 2400 and Default Page Size Width 612 pts, Height 792 pts (8.5 x 11 if you choose inches as units).

Compression tab: Leave everything alone **Fonts tab:** YES – Embed All Fonts, YES – Subset Embedded...With 100% in the value box.

Note: When Embedding Fails: click and choose Warn and Continue. Remove any fonts in the Never Embed box. Copy the Base 14 Fonts into the Always Embed box.

Color tab: Settings file should be None, Color Management Policies should be Leave Color Unchanged with the Intent at Default. Working Spaces won't be available. Device-Dependent

Data: YES – Preserve Overprint Settings, YES – Preserve Under Color..., YES – Preserve Transfer functions and NO – Preserve Halftone Information.
Advanced tab: Leave as is provided you are headed for a CMYK press. If you have created a two, three or five colour job (CMYK+1) then YES – Use Prologue.ps and Epilogue.ps.

So that's all there is to setting up for a press destined PDF.