



# Secrets to soft-proofing

Does your monitor need a makeover? These simple colour management and soft-proofing pointers will cost you next to nothing

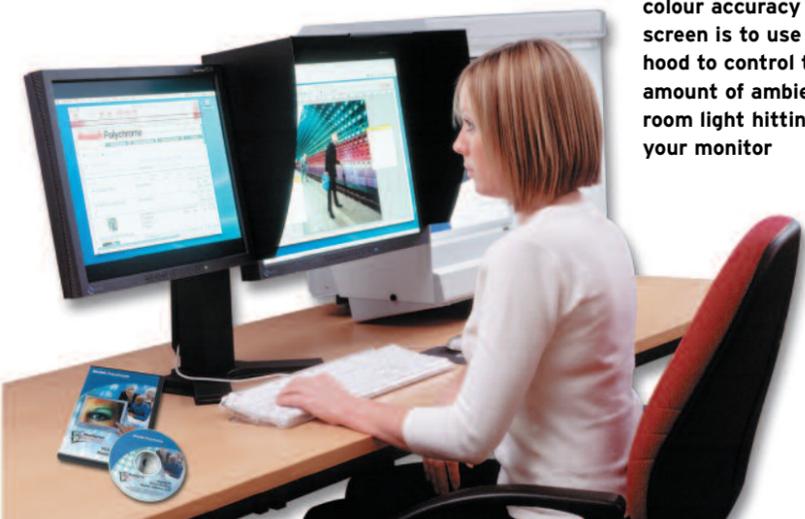
**DESIGN** and prepress proofing have come a long way over the past two decades. In the '80s, the only contract, or final, proofs were traditional overlay or laminate proofs produced from the same negatives that made the printing plates. High-end digital proofers showed up in the early '90s and many are still in use today.

These older proofing technologies have largely been replaced by large-format inkjet printers, a market dominated by Epson and HP. With proper maintenance and profiling, these devices are capable of producing highly accurate proofs in a few minutes, costing about \$5-\$15 per press sheet, and are now accepted as final proofs by many clients and pressrooms.

Now we're starting to take the final step to soft-proofing directly on a computer screen, either in your studio or at the client's location. While colour profiling and calibration of monitors has been around for over a decade, it's taken a while for the professional community to understand the process and for the required software and hardware to be both widely available and affordable. Today, many design and printshops are offering their clients instant and highly accurate on-screen proofs for collaboration and approval, whether the client is in the studio or three provinces away.

How do you get started with soft-proofing?

**One way to improve colour accuracy on-screen is to use a hood to control the amount of ambient room light hitting your monitor**



You begin by understanding the basics of colour management, a capability built into most professional graphic arts programs and the operating systems of both Mac and Windows. It allows you to attach a colour profile to each of your files (e.g. eps, tiff, page layout or illustration files) as you work. These profiles are designed to account for and correct the appearance of the image at any given moment, based on: i) the device that created it, such as a scanner or digital camera in the case of photos or other pixel-based original images; ii) the device you're viewing the image with (e.g. an LCD or CRT monitor, inkjet or colour laser printer); iii) the final destination for the file (e.g. press and paper type).

Through the course of its life, a file will have different profiles attached to it along the way. For example, an original photo file – whether from a scanner, stock photo service or digital camera – will usually have a source profile attached to it when you get it, accounting for the colour limitations or inaccuracies of the device that created it. When you open it in PhotoShop, that program will read that source profile and the profile for your monitor, using either Adobe's generic RGB monitor profile or one supplied by your monitor's manufacturer. By combining these two profiles and adjusting the monitor image accordingly, PhotoShop will show you the image as accurately as possible. The program also allows you to select a final destination (target) profile, taking into account the final printing process: press type, colour separation settings and paper stock.

To make this all happen, go to PhotoShop's Color Settings dialog box and choose an RGB Working Space, a monitor profile that will stay in place for all jobs – many people use Adobe's own generic RGB (1998) profile. Now choose a CMYK Working Space, a target destination profile based on what sort of press and paper this image will end up on. Then, to see how the image will look on-press even while working in RGB mode, select Proof Setup, then Working CMYK, all under the View menu. This is how you get PhotoShop, or InDesign for that matter, to give you a fairly accurate soft proof.

Most page layout and illustration programs – such as Illustrator, PhotoShop, QuarkXPress, InDesign – can read or assign both monitor and target profiles so the appearance of the on-screen image can be managed through the whole design and prepress cycle,

giving you the most accurate image possible at every moment, automatically. If you use Adobe's Creative Suite 2, you can automatically synchronize the key colour settings (RGB monitor and CMYK target destination) for all of the Suite's key programs – PhotoShop, Illustrator and InDesign – centrally from the Bridge program that comes with the Suite. It's a very handy feature to ensure colour consistency across all of these programs. You'll find it at the bottom of the Bridge Center tab.

## ONLINE EXTRA

Invest in a colorimeter, which allows you to run five-minute calibrations to create new, accurate monitor profiles.

– Bob Atkinson, prepress consultant

See Web Throws below for colorimeter suppliers and for more soft-proofing tips, visit Online Extra at [www.designedgecanada.com](http://www.designedgecanada.com)

Using colour management as described above will get you 75% of the way to accurate soft-proofing on-screen. To get the rest of the way, you'll want to take a couple more things into account:

i) While using Adobe's generic RGB monitor profile is a good start, different models display colours differently. It's better to use the profile supplied by your monitor's manufacturer – it will either come with the monitor on a CD or will be available from its website.

ii) Control the ambient room light falling on your monitor. While ideal viewing conditions are in a room with neutral grey walls and low-level 6500-degree lighting, you can do well with just a black monitor hood that extends about 10-12" out from the monitor screen on the top and sides, limiting the ambient light reaching the monitor. Some monitors come with these hoods or they can be purchased separately for \$80-plus. You can even make one from heavy black card stock. Now you're well on your way to accurate soft-proofing.

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