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Designers dish on software



Software — you either love it or you hate it (or both!). Either way, though, software is a tool that can have a huge impact on your magazine, provided you find the right fit.

Jim Darrow is the art director for National Publishing Co. in the Chicago area. The software he works with the most is Adobe, particularly Adobe Illustrator and Adobe Photoshop. “We used to use QuarkXPress desktop publishing software, but then Adobe came out with InDesign,” Darrow said. “It was better to use because it was part of Adobe’s Creative Suite, so we left QuarkXPress behind. The Creative Suite makes our work more efficient, and it has the tools we need.”

Darrow acknowledges that it was a bit of a challenge to make the transition from Quark XPress to InDesign. “We had to recreate some things, but it was worth it. What we have now is easier to use.”

Darrow also uses Filemaker Pro database software to track advertising, including sizes and color configurations. He creates a new database every year. “I’m using it at a very basic level, but I was able to create what we needed,” he said. “When my boss asks about an ad, I can say when it ran and how it was designed.”

Troubleshooting tools

Because National Publishing exclusively uses Apple computers for production, Darrow also has devoted time to finding effective diagnostic and repair software for Apple products. Currently, he uses Techtool Pro, a troubleshooting utility, and DiskWarrior, which can be used to recover files,



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folders and documents, along with data from a failing hard drive. "They work great, and they solve problems for us when we can't figure out why the computer isn't booting up," Darrow said.

Another product in his arsenal is Drive Genius, which he uses for the defragmentation of hard drives. Over time, he explained, the data on a hard drive can become scattered and bog down its operations. Defragmentation pulls the data together and speeds up the computer.

Darrow uses Drive Genius to make monthly hard drive clones, too. "So if the hard drive fails, we have a clone. It's a mirror image of the computer when we do that. I've been doing this kind of work for a long time. You're going to get bitten at some point. This has saved us a lot of trouble over the years."

Looking ahead, Darrow would like to find some good software for Web content development.

Like Darrow, Production Manager Steve Thorakos of Testa Communications in New York is a fan of Adobe products. "Applications like Photoshop are a staple in the industry," he said. "Dreamweaver, Adobe Premiere: all Adobe products are pretty strong." Thorakos added that he'll look to Adobe products in the future, too, as Testa's publications develop a greater digital presence. "We all need to drift from strictly two-dimensional to multi-dimensional content that can be used on pads, even phones."

Thorakos said the software market is somewhat limited for smaller operations. "There seems to be a real lack or hole for good management tools outside of Microsoft Office and Outlook," he said. "There are customized products, but they're too big for an office our size."

"You're going to get bitten at some point. [Having a clone of the hard drive] has saved us a lot of trouble over the years."

— Jim Darrow

Software certainly has come a long way since Thorakos started his career. He has witnessed the evolution of desktop publishing firsthand since the 1980s. "I was working on 386 to 486 PCs running Adobe and Aldus Page-Maker before it was bought by Adobe," he recalled. "It was a Mac world back then. Imagine doing things with a 486 with 8 megs of RAM, but we did it."

Thorakos would advise others to resist the urge to go with the latest and greatest products unless it's clear they meet a specific need. "Don't be so quick to upgrade," he said. "It's not always worth it. Stay consistent with your product."

A customized solution

When *Springfield Scene Magazine* needed tracking software for production management, the Springfield, Ill.-based publication created its own solution. "It's very challenging to find a software package out of the box that's going to meet a company's needs," said Publisher Bill Stokes.

Stokes opted to look for an open source product. Most software on the market is very difficult to modify. But

open source software is easily modified and can be customized to meet the user's needs. Stokes went with SugarCRM Software (customer relations management) and fine-tuned it specifically for his publication. "It's an unusual thing for a magazine to do unless they have an IT expert," Stokes said. "We had people on staff who could do that work."

Stokes considers advertisers the magazine's primary customers, followed by subscribers. The customized, Web-based SugarCRM Software has allowed the magazine to maintain detailed records of every ad it runs, including customers' notes and uploads of the ads themselves. "The biggest challenge we had was getting people to input data as policy and procedure," Stokes said. "It was easy to get people to search it."

"I'm only as good as the information in front of me. If the information's not there, it's not good to anybody."

Despite the challenges, having the right tracking software has been invaluable, Stokes said. "The alternative is the information is dispersed among many people's desks. I just got a call from a photographer who did a profile for us four years ago. The photographer had lost it, but he knew we would have it."

"Some people would argue, 'What's the chance I'll need that item again?' But the process of entering it is not laborious. It's priceless when it's there when you need it."

Priceless may not be everyone's first choice of words when it comes to describing publishing software. But even those who grumble about it more often than not will admit that it is a useful tool when it comes to magazine production. 

One on one

JPA profile: Debbie Carroll, pre-press specialist

Number of years with JPA: 17 years

Why she loves JPA: "At JPA you know everybody's name and what department they work in," Carroll said. "We pull together and help each other out. For instance, when the bindery has lots of hand work, everyone pitches in to help."

Family life:

Carroll and her husband, farmer Steve Carroll, have been married for 24 years and have three children. Daughter Amber Whalen is married to Jay Whalen, and they have two children, Noah, 12, and Tyler, 3. The Carrolls' younger daughter, Kaity, recently graduated from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where she studied animal



Top photo: Kaity, Steve, Stevie, Debbie
Inset photo: Tyler, Jay, Noah and Amber

science with a concentration in equine and companion animals. Now she's working at a local veterinary practice. The Carrolls' son, Stevie, graduated this summer from Pontiac Township High School and plans to study agriculture at Joliet Junior College. When the family is able, they enjoy getting together for outings. "We like to go camping and hiking, and we go to Florida for vacations in the winter."

Hobbies: Carroll says she loves camping and especially enjoys making summer trips to the Great Smoky Mountains. She's also an avid gardener. "I love my flower beds," Carroll said. "Back when my mom was alive, we always had big gardens. We had them as far back as I can remember."

One cool fact: Carroll helped JPA develop its pre-press area. "When I came to JPA, we didn't have an electronic pre-press department," she says. "I had a background in computers and came from a service bureau. I was hired to assist in the start-up of the department." The area that became pre-press was just an empty room when Carroll arrived. She and a co-worker got busy cleaning and painting. "We got the space ready for the computers to be installed," she said, adding that the first pieces of equipment were an image setter and a processor. "We started outputting films. During the last 10 years, we went directly to plate. Things here really have changed." 



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RECIPE

Chocolate-covered peanut clusters

2 pounds of white almond bark
12 ounces of chocolate chips
1 square of unsweetened chocolate
24-ounce jar of dry roasted peanuts

Melt all the ingredients in a crockpot on high, stirring frequently, and then turn off the heat. Add the peanuts. Stir well, and then drop by teaspoon onto wax paper. Let them set until they are hard.

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