

Case Study: BBC Magazines and Elpical's Claro

The BBC calls it SmartRepro, but Daniel Hargreaves, Reprographics Manager for BBC Magazines, just calls it the right thing to do.

Hargreaves joined the BBC in 2006, in a newly created position where he was tasked to manage the BBC's extensive reprographics processes, **which is dominated by often complex, very high resolution images**. Up until then, the work was outsourced to a variety of vendors.

The effort wore the working title "SmartRepro", and focused on helping the iconic organization's 400 staff produce 40,000 to 50,000 editorial pages a year in a way that was... well, smarter. **And smarter included finding an image processing solution that could bolster and retain the variety of imagery that was part of each publication's pictorial brand trademark - portraying an expected, predictable level of quality and the "look" of that particular publication.**

Time + Quality

SmartRepro sought to maximize in-house talent to improve processes and final product quality. A new infrastructure included the establishment of publication-specific repro hubs that would, for example, address timeline bottlenecks within and across publications (such as reduction of proofing cycles). Each hub is connected across the network, making it easy to move work around when necessary.

Specific strategies included training design staff to better assess images and print-ready work, as well as understand colour space and conversion fundamentals to recognize colour problems and correction requirements.

Cultural Change

The broad thinking underlying the approach was to provide best in class resources to fit the needs of internal magazine clusters, including staff equipped with the expertise to address each publication's particular creative requirements.

"It meant a fundamental culture change," says Hargreaves, who designed the internal repro team to be flexible and able to juggle any of the work that might come up, thereby balancing the load with the publications' creative teams and creating a fast, effective, and quality process.

"We created a hybrid of the design teams and the repro team," he said. "That meant winning hearts and minds in the beginning, negotiations, and carefully structuring how we rolled this out, with a constant eye on how we would safeguard quality. We started in May 2006 - and a year later we successfully incorporated the process with all of our titles.

Tools for the Job

Picking the right tools and adapting them over time has been key to the effort, as well.

"We invested in workflow tools to insure that we had a robust, industry standard workflow," said Hargreaves.

Best of Breed

The BBC then layered a few key "best of breed" tools on top of the workflow. One standout choice? Elpical's Claro.

Claro's image tools have their roots in the high quality Hasselblad imaging technology. Building on that base philosophy of quality photographic output, the Claro analysis tools individually analyze images to ensure sharpness, contrast, brightness, colour balance and other parameters. The results are consistently superb image quality.

Tick Tock

"We are increasingly pushed for time, and with the schedule backloaded on a monthly magazine – we can have chaos!" Hargreaves says emphatically.

"There is frequently a need for us to standardize what we get in," he explains, "But because of those time and budget constraints, we often have to work with what we've got -- and that's where Claro can optimize and standardize in automated ways."

"As time constraints grow more severe, quality expectations remain high, so we've got this balancing act to achieve quality levels while simultaneously having less time to do it. I was looking at automated solutions and found Claro."

Top ... Gear

The hit automotive show Top Gear and its popular magazine must shine like an Aston Martin Vantage Roader gliding through the S curves to Monaco. In fact, one of the first tests Claro passed was the editors' eyeballs at Top Gear.

"Top Gear has to be very current and topical, with a very short amount of time to turn around -- and Claro brings big benefits there. Top Gear was really into it when I showed them what it could do," says Hargreaves.

Alan Dixon of Workflowz, Elpical's UK partner, joined Elpical's John de Jong in going to the BBC to set up an in-depth demo. The two went on to install, train, and deploy Claro within the BBC, with Hargreaves' guidance. "We threw lots of different images at the software, tweaked it, and got proofs that

achieved what I felt was a significant difference, and once I showed the editors here at Top Gear what can be achieved, it was met with such enthusiasm that it drove sign-off on the investment," Hargreaves says.

Great Greens!

The system also shines in the challenging areas of greens, blues, and skin tones - and that's something that the BBC's Gardeners' World magazine need to get "Just Right".

Not surprisingly, the plant photography across this well-known gardening publication contains a lot of greens, not to mention highly varying levels of subtlety from green to green. Hitting the quality bar while meeting a rigorous production schedule was challenging.

"With Gardeners World we're using the new green tones setting, and getting great results," Hargreaves reports. This achievement was made possible by his decision to give each publication its own, unique profile.

Integration

Integration also makes for success. For example, Hargreaves says the BBC integrated Claro with its workflow to take advantage of Claro's sharpening function.

"When our pages are submitted to the workflow, it makes calls to Claro. The ICC conversion happens in Claro and images are sharpened there as well, so it's a two-pronged, integrated approach," he says.

As an added benefit, Claro insures that all images are analyzed in some way. Claro analyzes the CMYK profile against the gamut of the image going in. If the image is out of gamut by more than 20%, Claro applies a perceptual conversion. This, says Hargreaves, brings a whole new level of consistent quality to the process.

The Payoff

"This is one of our greatest successes," Dixon remarks. "BBC is unforgiving when scrutinizing production quality; and knowing that Claro can meet their rigorous requirements makes it (Claro) one of, if not the only, best in class image processing solution. We can bring Claro into any operation with complete confidence

"Visually, the results speak for themselves," says Hargreaves.

"There's a definite quality improvement in images across the board. We wouldn't have had time to make all these sharpening and other enhancements. This approach lets us have those benefits while working to our tight deadlines. If we

didn't have Claro, we might not be able to achieve the results we have been able to, in certain titles."



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