10 Silly Production Mistakes
(and how to avoid them)

Mistakes will happen. Why not plan for them? Build safeguards into your workflow and fend off the following common errors.

1. IGNORING TEXT TROUBLE

So much typography has shifted to default settings that careful proofreading is in decline. Why not restore a proofreading stage into your workflow? Widows and orphans (a single word occupying the end of a paragraph or the top of the next column of text) are still worthy of our careful attention. Likewise, a sharp eye should be kept for the following typical typos:

- Unstyled apostrophes and quotation marks. (Find out the proper key combination in your layout program to produce the apostrophes and quotes that are built into your font family).
- Double hyphens used for em-dashes.
- The spacebar put to use in place of proper tabs.

2. SACRIFICING READABILITY

Publication design often makes use of type as abstract objects. The curve of an O can provide an organic touch. The weight of a bold-faced font can add needed emphasis to a corner of the layout. At times, however, this goes too far. Legibility is sacrificed for the sake of a daring design.

Pushing the design envelope can be fun. However, when presented with the option to err on the side of daring or on the side of legibility, the latter should always win. After all, the central goal is communication, not razzle-dazzle.

3. FORGETTING TO USE STYLE SHEETS

The fewer the actions required to reach your goal, the fewer the opportunities for error, right? If a job that takes 14 steps is transformed into a job completed in merely 8 steps, the workflow would, of course, require less time and energy. But let's not forget: this would also close the door on 6 opportunities for error.

Style sheets significantly reduce the number of steps in your workflow. If you know all 12 subheadings in an article should appear in the same font, at the same size, in the same color, why apply these text attributes by revisiting the menu items again and again? Create a **Subhead** entry in your style sheet. Place your cursor in the appropriate line of text. Hit **Subhead.** In two clicks you have applied font choice, size, color, leading, kerning, and a dozen other attributes.

4. OVERLOOKING EDITORIAL CONFLICTS

Don't allow your editorial to take on the dubious qualities of an "advertorial". Build a moment or two into your schedule to check the ads for any editorial conflicts.

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5. FUDGING THE COLUMNS

It was once a point of pride that the columns in a magazine article exactly matched each other. Overlay two pages on a light table and the columns would precisely overlap. To establish this subtle indicator of quality in your publication, create "master pages" for each article. Also, try using verticle justification so that the bottoms of your text columns line up rather than raggedly vary along the bottom.

6. FAILING TO UPDATE LINKED GRAPHICS

The fact that an image is visible in your layout program and in its proper spot would seem to suggest nothing more is required. However, the image you see in your layout program is a low resolution substitute for the real thing. A *link* connects this FPO with the actual high resolution file. Your printer will need the hi-rez file for quality print production.

If that hi-rez file is moved to another folder on your harddrive, the link is broken. Quark or InDesign no longer knows where to find the hi-rez image *even though the low resolution FPO still sits there on the page*. It is necessary, then, to verify links before shipping your project off to be printed. This is best accomplished via the "Collect for Output"or "Preflight" command. This will verify links status *and* gather copies of the hi-rez files into a folder which you can then burn to disk or upload to your printer's FTP site.

7. FORGETTING BLEEDS

Have you ever watched as a solid sheet of icing was draped over a wedding cake? There is always more icing than needed. It extends past the bottom of the cake so the cake can be trimmed without fear of coming up short.

A similar principle is behind the concept of "bleeds". If a color or graphic element extends to the edge of your page, your printer will ask you to extend it a little further. The image, like the icing, extends beyond the page to insure ink coverage does not fall short when the job is trimmed. An eighth of an inch past the edge of the page is usually enough.

8. PLACING ELEMENTS CLOSE TO TRIM OR GUTTER

In layout programs like Quark or InDesign, your page sits on an imaginary desktop. The desktop is usually the same color as the page: white. The result, unfortunately, is a false impression. The edge of the paper doesn't seem all that final. Items placed close to this edge give the impression of having room to spare. When the book is printed, however, the text is far too close to the trim. And sometimes part of the text has been trimmed off!

Similarly, text is sometimes placed too close to the center fold or "gutter" of a magazine.

A minimum of one quarter inch should separate the edge of the page from the "live area" which contains body text, ads, and so on. That's a minimum. It is more pleasing to the eye when half an inch or more is used.

9. ACCEPTING "BAD" PDF FILES

Not every PDF file is created equal. An advertiser exporting his ad as a PDF is faced with a multitude of settings—so many that he may simply shrug and hit "OK". The resulting PDF may be low resolution or may lack needed fonts.

Discovering such flaws during a deadline crunch is no fun at all. The answer: your client need not be versed in every bell and whistle Acrobat has to offer. Rather, "presets" are available. Choosing the preset for "Press Quality" will take care of most settings. The client can focus on the following: fonts are embedded, crop marks and registration marks are "on", bleeds are "on" and at the proper setting (usually .125").

We can supply you with a Panaprint custom preset, so that choosing the proper settings is no longer a challenge.

10. FAILING TO USE TEMPLATES

When working on a magazine or newsletter, there is no need to start from zero each issue. Take the layout file for the previous issue and whittle it down to the essentials: logo, issue number and date, masthead, department headers, repeated graphics, scanned signatures, folios, disclaimers.

Trash any redundant or unused elements in your style sheets, master pages, and color palette. For example, imported text sometimes brings unwanted style sheets with it. Begin the names of your style sheets with a bullet. That will set them apart. Then dump the rest. View the document at 50% and delete extraneous items from the pasteboard. Then save the document as a template rather than a regular document. When you double-click on the template, a new unnamed file will open—ready to be tweaked with the specifics of Vol. 12 No. 3.