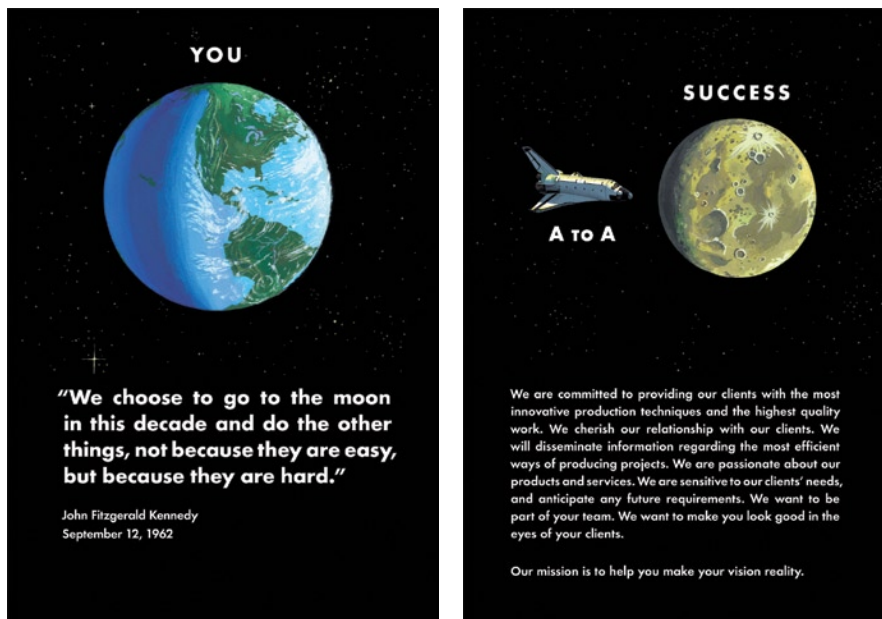# A to A Graphic Services Inc.

The fine art of printing

Specialty preflight and print service provider uses Adobe® creative and print solutions to produce award-winning materials for clients

A to A Graphic Services' client list reads like a "who's who" in business, including American Express, Bertelsmann AG, Disney, and other leading companies. The firm's success is built on its ability to respond on time and on budget to many of the creative industry's most challenging designs for credit cards, consumer packaging, book covers, and other items. "Our clients are true innovators that continually challenge conventional ideas about what is possible when bringing new products and services to market," says Adam Wahler, vice president of production at A to A Graphic Services.

> "Adobe Creative Suite 2 offers an integrated design and layout environment, so preflight is easier."

Adam Wahler,
vice president,
A to A Graphic Services

A to A's expert staff works with creative professionals to generate prototypes of items that marketing executives can share with consumer focus groups or that company managers use to win executive team approval on new design ideas. Without knowing it, many consumers are already familiar with several A to A projects including a number of Citibank and American Express credit cards with rich surface designs created by the firm. The company also creates covers for popular books and music CDs.

"Much of our work involves preflighting challenging design projects," explains Wahler. "We generally deal with complex, multi-layered design files that will incorporate printed effects such as embossing, fluorescent inks, or printing on foils." To streamline file preflighting and help ensure the most efficient production possible, A to A uses Adobe Creative Suite 2 software, the industry-standard design and layout application suite used by many of the firm's clients.
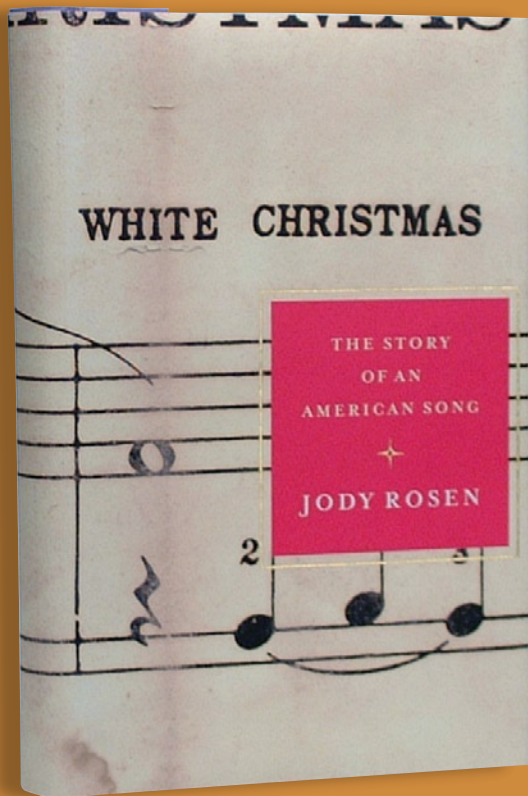
Improved collaboration with clients

Clients submit projects to A to A via the firm's secure FTP site. Designs for credit cards and packaging often arrive as native Adobe Illustrator® CS files, while many book or album covers are submitted in Adobe InDesign® CS. Design proofs are often exchanged on paper via overnight mail or courier, a process that Wahler says is costly and time consuming.

"Deadlines are a constant reality in our business," says Wahler. "One of our goals is to work with clients to accelerate and streamline exchanging and reviewing proofs." For A to A, Adobe Acrobat® Professional software and Adobe Portable Document Format (PDF) are instrumental in bringing more efficiency to these processes. By converting materials to Adobe PDF, clients can submit electronic versions of designs that contain easy-to-read, digital comments with instructions for preflighting and production. At the same time, A to A employees can include their own comments on Adobe PDF files that are returned to clients for review.

COLOR PROOFING

DIGITAL PRODUCTION

RUB-DOWN TRANSFERS

FILM SEPARATION

DIRECT IMAGING

With InDesign CS2, A to A staff can easily preview separated plates on screen in a single step to help ensure final printed book covers will meet clients' exact requirements.
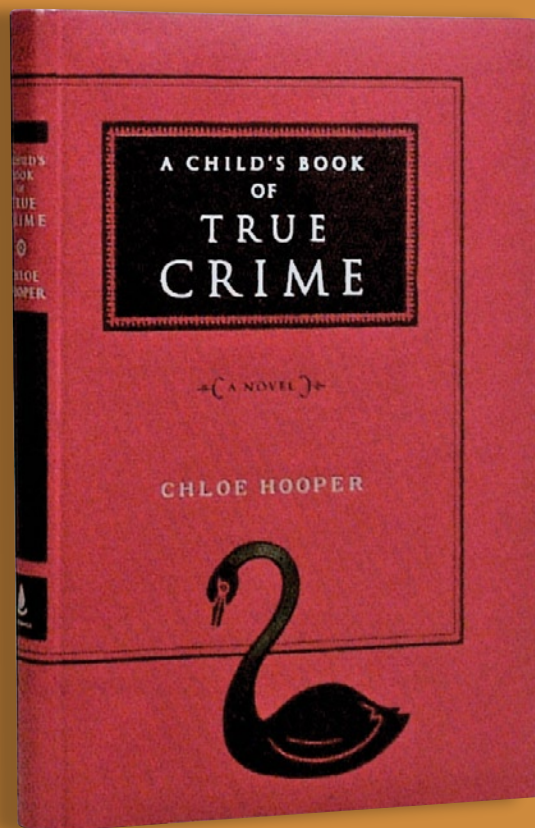
An integrated design and preflight environment

Currently, approximately 50% of the files A to A receives for book or music album jackets are Adobe InDesign CS files. For Wahler, one of the best preflight features in Adobe InDesign CS2 is the ability to preview separations on screen. In contrast, a design received as a QuarkXPress™ file requires A to A to make an Adobe PostScript® file of the document and then run it through Adobe Acrobat Distiller® software to check color plates on screen. "With InDesign CS2, we can easily preview separated plates on screen in a single step," he says.

When proposed designs incorporate multiple colors, A to A staff can quickly check individual color plates without converting the files and printing them to disk. Staff can also easily correct errors on Adobe Photoshop® CS or Illustrator CS files by launching the applications directly in InDesign CS2. "Adobe Creative Suite 2 offers an integrated design and layout environment, so preflight is easier," says Wahler. "When working under pressure and with complicated designs, the integration across the Adobe suite of tools is essential."

An important advantage of using Adobe Creative Suite 2 is reliable color matching across applications, which is critical to ensuring A to A can produce final printed pieces that meet clients' expectations. For instance, the same color settings can be applied across InDesign CS2, Illustrator CS2, Photoshop CS2, and Acrobat software. As a result, designs moved from one application to another retain the exact color and richness intended by the designer.

A to A achieves further efficiencies in its production processes through its participation in the Adobe Solutions Network (ASN). "ASN provides our staff with quick access to the latest print news and with insight into upcoming releases of Adobe solutions," says Wahler. "It's an excellent resource for us."

Speed and quality combined

Once preflighting is complete and all overprints and traps are set correctly, A to A staff creates film and begins the skilled process of hand printing one or more design prototypes for a client. Colors are laid down by hand in the exact order as would happen on a printing machine. "Because our clients still need to get internal approvals on their design concepts they need to have prototypes of exceptional quality," says Wahler. "Adobe software enables us to accurately prepare a design, and hand printing lets us accomplish the rest."

A to A often receives client print jobs in Adobe PDF, including the files used to produce the trade show display boards shown above. Staff preflight and make changes to files directly in Acrobat. A to A created settings in Acrobat to reduce the size of final files so that only necessary data is sent to the printer. The streamlined processes result in faster RIP times and a reduction in the time required to print materials.

Company
A to A Graphic Services
New York City, New York
www.a2a.com

Challenge
- Accelerate production of highly complex client designs
- Facilitate more consistent, efficient collaboration between the firm and its clients

Solution
Adopt Adobe Acrobat Professional software and other Adobe Creative Suite 2 applications for faster, more efficient production of design prototypes

Benefits
- Minimized errors on production files submitted by clients
- Improved collaboration between A to A staff and clients
- Increased customer satisfaction with use of best-in-class technologies
- Accelerated turnaround on customer jobs

Tool Kit
- Adobe Creative Suite 2. Components used include:
  - Adobe Acrobat Professional
  - Adobe Illustrator CS2
  - Adobe InDesign CS2
  - Adobe Photoshop CS2
- Adobe PDF
- Adobe PDF Workflows
- Adobe PostScript 3™
- Apple Power Mac G4 and G5 computers running Mac OS X
- Epson 4000, Epson 9000, and Epson 9800 printers
- Scitex Smart 340 Scanner
- Scitex Imagesetter

For instance, A to A will deliver to a financial client an exact prototype of a credit card that the company's marketing group would like to introduce to customers. Other examples include proposed book covers for publishers or CD jackets created for record company executives. Even with the variety of prototypes A to A produces, all materials share some common traits, such as being complex designs printed using inks and materials that can be challenging for printers.

"We do the up-front production work for clients and ultimately for the print house that will mass produce the prototype," explains Wahler. "Our goal is to deliver a prototype to our clients that is ready for approval and preflighted files ready for printing by a production facility."

Extraordinary results

For each job A to A completes clients receive a perfect prototype of the proposed design as well as a preflighted native application file. In addition, the firm creates an Adobe PDF file with color separations so print house staff can compare the plates they generate with the correct colors in the Adobe PDF file. If the generated plates do not match the PDF, they know the mistake is on their end.

"Having staff trained on Adobe software is a big advantage for us," says Wahler. "Given the tight deadlines and complexity of our projects, clients understandably want as few surprises as possible. With Adobe Acrobat and the other Adobe Creative Suite 2 applications, we have a proven, familiar design and preflight environment for producing materials that are anything but ordinary."

"Adobe Creative Suite 2 offers an integrated design and layout environment, so preflight is easier."

Adam Wahler, vice president, A to A Graphic Services

Adobe®