Roland's ColorChoice II Pro: More Horsepower and Functionality

Affordable PostScript 3 RIP Saves the Day

By Jeff Dorgay

While most guys are thinking about buying a Harley, I've had a picture of the new Roland Hi-Fi JET Pro II up over my desk for some time now. My dilemma is twofold: I don't have an extra 20k for a new printer this year and I really could use some of the added functionality of the new machine. To make matters more complicated, my current two Hi-Fi JET printers have worked flawlessly for the last few years and are still in "like new" condition, thanks to the awesome build quality that Roland puts into their printers. So, if you face this problem, help is only about $2,000 and a call to your friendly Roland dealer away.

Roland ColorChoice II Plus will save the day. Like previous versions of ColorChoice, it is a software PostScript 3 RIP that runs the Windows platform. It is compatible with Windows 2000, but like just about everything else, runs the best on XP. It also req using the enclosed hardware key to run, which plugs into your system's available USB port.

One of the biggest differences about RCC II Pro is that it will control up to three Roland printers from one workstation and will interface with any of the ColorCAMM printer/cutters. This alone is worth the upgrade, because in the past, you had to have a separate version of ColorChoice running on its own PC for each of your Roland printers.

Multiple Options

ColorChoice II Plus only runs on the Windows platform, but you have options for Macintosh clients, so that your Hi-Fi JET can used as a network printer in an office with both platforms. I did not get a chance to test the Macintosh client option. Minimum system requirements for the RIP are a 350MHz Pentium II computer, but if you are going to print large files and access multip printers, the biggest Pentium 4 you can get with 1–2GB of RAM and as much hard drive space as you can buy will give optim results. I installed RCC II Pro on a 2.6GHz Pentium 4 with 1.5GB of RAM, and 1TB of hard drive space and had no problem running three printers at once. Now that hard drives have become so inexpensive, the extra space is nice because you can sa the Roland native files after printing. This eliminates the need to re-RIP the file, should you need to print it again later.

My older Hi-Fi JET printers (an FJ-42 and FJ-52) only have parallel ports for data transfer, but a pair of print servers from Inte allowed me to integrate my older printers into my Ethernet network. The IC-105 print servers that I used for this test cost $199 and worked great. These tiny print servers connect right to the parallel port and need no external power source. Just keep you addresses straight and you are off and running.

The IC-105 works with just about any other parallel device, so if you are trying to put some older printers on your network, the are a great, inexpensive solution and they work with Mac networks too!

Consistent Color

Once you are up and running, RCC II Pro works very similarly to older versions of ColorChoice, but with a lot more horsepow welcome feature for users that print a lot of photographic prints, Roland has added another quality setting, KF diffusion. This i level above the previous error diffusion screening that was available. The manual mentions that this setting requires a bit long process, but I did not notice this. Most files that I used to run in ColorChoice 4 RIP'd at about the same speed, even on the hi quality setting.

Another bonus with RCC II Pro is color consistency. With a fine art studio to run, my biggest panic was that the 500 images in catalog would now all have to be adjusted to work with the new software. Not to worry with RCC II Pro. I tested about thirty of images and the color balance was right on the money. Thanks to the KF diffusion setting and the new RCC II profiles, my prin had more definition and a bit more color fidelity.

RCC Pro II now allows you to tile smaller prints together to take maximum advantage of large rolls of paper. The lack of this function was my only complaint with ColorChoice in the past, so this is a welcome upgrade. When you have to print an image

larger than the width of your printer, RCC Pro II can also perform tiling, so that you can print multiple pieces and assemble the[...] later. I gave this a try with some inexpensive media and I made some pretty incredible wallpaper! Once you choose how the j[...] be tiled, the pieces are automatically nested for you.

RCC Control
The ability to create multiple "setups" with RCC Pro II will save you a lot of time if you are working with many different media t[...] When you enter the print setup boxes and choose which type of media, print quality mode, etc. you can now save each one o[...] these as an individual setup, accessible from the top of the main screen. Now all you have to do is choose which media you a[...] printing on from the top of the RCC II screen and everything is set the way you want it. This was another feature I found very [...] useful, as we now print on six different watercolor sheets alone! Even making test prints with the RCC Pro II has become a lo[...] easier. Roland has added a crop function, so that once you have an image loaded and in preview mode, you can just choose [...] small area to make a test print.

Third Party Paper…Invited
While I have always been very impressed with the color accuracy of Roland's profiles for their own media, many of us use a f[...] types of paper that are made by third parties. This was always a hit or miss option in the past, but no longer. RCC Pro II has a[...] profiling wizard that allows you to create your own profiles for whatever media you are using. You can also control ink optimiz[...] and linearization to take your prints to the next level. Usually, testing new media is about as much fun as going to the dentist, [...] the profile wizard made this an easy task.

Roland ColorChoice II Plus is by far the best investment you can make for your legacy Roland printers. It adds so much functionality to your workflow; it's like getting a new printer for $2,000. I still want a new FJ-540, but this will help increase my profitability enough to put one in next year's budget.

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