Test Targets, An Introduction

From Content Creation to Digital Asset Management

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Abstract

Publishing is both a journey and a destination. In the case of *Test Targets*, the act of creating and editing content, paginating and managing digital assets, represents the journey. The hard copy is the result or destination that readers can see and touch. Like the space exploration program, everyone saw the spacecraft that landed on the moon. It was the rocket booster that made the journey from the earth to the moon possible. This article portrays the process of capturing ideas in the form of digital data. It also describes the process of managing digital assets that produces the *Test Targets* publication.

1.0 Introduction

There are two significant changes in the world of publishing. The first change is about tools used for writing. We used to write our thoughts down and draw figures with pencils and paper. Today, we write and draw with a microcomputer, a drawing program, and a word processor. The second change is about tools used for publishing. Before the days of microcomputers, tools used for publishing, e.g., typesetters, process cameras, were in the hands of journeymen and professionals. Today, these publishing tools are in the form of software packages, e.g., Adobe InDesign, Photoshop, Illustrator, and designed for microcomputer users.

Test Targets is an annual publication by the School of Print Media, Rochester Institute of Technology. It provides print media students and faculty members the opportunity to journey through various tasks from content creation to digital asset management with emphases on scholarship, aesthetic, and print production.

2.0 Technical Content Creation

The journey of transforming original ideas into a well-written paper begins with an author or authors. If the author is a student, he/she would have taken two or more courses in printing process control and color management. A final lab project from a higher-level course often serves as a starting point. The experiment may be refined and the paper rewritten with more depth and references cited.

Technical papers, submitted as Microsoft Word files, are peer reviewed. A co-op student coordinator was instrumental in carrying out the double-blind review process. Both internal reviewers (RIT faculty members) and external reviewers (industry experts) were asked to offer a decision to either accept or reject the paper. They are also asked to make comments and changes in the Word document via the "Track Change" feature. The coordinator then forwards reviewer's comments and the Word File with track change to the authors for revision. Revised manuscripts are then ready for editing. Finally, the peer-reviewed, revised, and edited manuscript becomes the contents for publishing.

Early versions of *Test Targets* contain only technical reports on process control and color management. Today, colorful visuals are included in the section, Gallery of Visual Interest, to add visual appeal to the technical material.

The Test Form section of *Test Targets* is a collection of useful test patterns with known input contents, e.g., standard CMYK characterization chart, Total Area Coverage chart, pictorial color reference images, etc. Starting from, we include a brief description regarding what each test form is and its key features.

2.0 Graphic Content Creation

Cover design and section head design also add to the aesthetic dimension of the publication. Tom Chung, an art director of an advertising agency in New York City, designed the first two issues of the cover. Later, we tried to encourage printing students to submit cover designs. We also tried to design the Test Targets cover by a committee of technocrats. None of the above creative processes is desired or long lasting.

Searching for a better cover design solution, *Test Targets 8.0* sought design input from RIT computer graphic design students. We asked graphic design faculty members to critique the submission. Members of the *Test Targets* team then singled out the cover design by voting. Indeed, it is much easier to vote for a good design than to create one! The cover design style is also used to create graphics for section heads in the publication.

3.0 Digital Asset Management

As a writer, he/she generates a digital file when writing something new. The writer then stores the document on a hard disk. This being the simplest case, the writer needs to know where the file was stored and how to retrieve it in order to edit it or share it with others. So, imagine for a moment that Test Targets authors are writing their papers from different locations. These files are stored and, later on, accessed by others for review, comment, editing, proofing, and prepress. Having the ease of accessibility and information security becomes essential.

We used to manage data files with the use of a sneaker-net and a multi-gigabyte hard disk. Now, we have password-protected Internet-based servers. In order to keep the accessibility and security of data intact, we need to address the digital asset management issues, i.e., where to store the assets and who has access to them.

Two separate servers are used to store Test Targets data. The first is the CIAS server, accessible by *Test Targets* team members on campus using their RIT computer accounts. It contains work-in-progress documents of *Test Targets 8.0*. The server also hosts digital assets of past issues of *Test Targets*. As a rule, we leave the legacy files locked. We would repurpose the file, update its content, and save it as a new file.

The second server is the Internet-based Xinet, accessible by registered users anywhere and anytime. It contains files that can be downloaded for peer review, and files or review feedback for uploading. It also contains final digital files, with strict naming conventions, for prepress operations. Both servers perform routine backup of all files to prevent data loss.

4.0 Summary

Test Targets, whether as a journey or a destination, has given us challenges, excitement, and rewards. It gives us a platform to practice what we teach and learn in the classroom. It motivates us to push the limits of our technical competency to a new height. We're the equivalent of fuel, consumed by the rocket booster, which pushes the space ship to its destination. In the end, it allows us to witness the effect of synergy and collaboration where one plus one plus one is greater than three. Indeed, *Test Targets* combines the disciplines of scholarship, graphic design, and digital asset management together. What a ride this has been. Oops… What a great lesson this has been.