

Q & A:

Opening customer-provided files

“Oh—no problem. I’ll give you the file on a disk...”

By Jason Fairless

In this past year of writing about FlexiSIGN, I have acquired a whole new list of friends in the business. Some of them have been making signs for years; others have just started. Regardless of skill level, some issues keep rearing their ugly heads, asking for an explanation.

One hot topic is the whole issue of file types for exporting, importing, etc. FlexiSIGN gives us many options for working with many different file types across both PC and Macintosh platforms. If you use different software, much of what we cover here will still apply.

To work well with these files, we must first understand one thing: most of the graphic

arts world has no idea what FlexiSIGN is, who makes it, or anything else, for that matter. That’s true of all sign-making software. FlexiSIGN is designed to make your life as a sign maker easier so that the graphics you design can be manufactured via machinery that is exclusive to our industry. Exclusive is the key word here. The sign business is far different from many of the other types of media that the rest of the graphic arts world uses.

With that in mind, we have to conform to their standards and not expect them to conform to ours. This is not generally a problem if you know some of the basics. It doesn’t hurt to educate yourself as to some of the processes and standards that the rest of the

continued...



Q: I use a Mac. I sent a PC user a file and even though I thought I did everything right, they still cannot open it. I know I converted the fonts to outlines, and the file opens fine on my computer. What do I do?

A: (Don’t feel left out PC users—you’re next.) You probably just need to add the proper file extension (EPS, JPEG, etc.) after the file name. PCs differ from Macs in that they must see an extension to know how to handle the file. Make sure you add the proper extension, and PCs and Macs will work better together—and there will be a lot less name-calling!

Q: I just received a file from a Mac user. They insist it is in EPS format, but we still cannot open the file after several tries. What’s going on?

A: I’ll bet the file is in EPS format, but the Mac user simply did not add the extension after the file name. Rename the file with the proper extension and it should open properly. Macintosh computers do not need the file extensions to open a file. So by default, many of them do not include the extension in the file name. Most of the time the file will open just by adding the extension.

Q: One of our regular customers wants me to send them a file in JPEG format. All of the designs that we have done for them are in FlexiSIGN. How do I do this?

A: FlexiSIGN has the unique ability to convert your vector graphics, (which are line-based drawings) into bitmapped formats like JPEG.



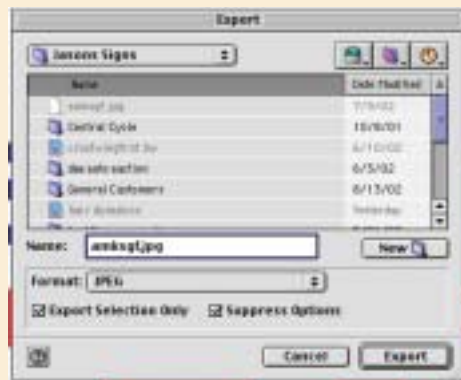
1. Simply open the file in FlexiSIGN, select the drawing and go to the Bitmap menu at the top of the screen.



2. Select *Rasterize*. When the dialogue box pops up, select the appropriate dpi settings and mode, then click OK. FlexiSIGN then rasterizes the image into bitmap form.



3. At this point the graphic is in no particular format. Select the newly created bitmap, then go to *File > Export*.



4. Choose the format you want to export it to—JPEG, TIFF or PSD (Photoshop). Be sure that the extension is correct so that we eliminate any future problems associated with PC vs. Mac platforms.

Spelling it out for clients makes life easier

When dealing with files from assorted graphics programs that must be transferred back and forth—sometimes between PCs and Macs—it's best to develop a policy regarding the preparation of artwork. Here's the one we use in our shop. Most printers and other companies who accept files from outside sources have these policies. They specify types of files accepted, format supported and instructions for sending. If you supply the sender with the information in advance, you are less likely to spend the day on the phone trying to reach a solution.

If you're sending us an electronic file

We attempt to keep up with the latest programs and versions, but it is impossible for us to list every possible item. Please call 417-863-2205 or e-mail ridestyle@mac.com if you have an application that is not listed here.

The following applications are fully supported:

- Adobe Photoshop®
- Adobe Illustrator®
- Adobe PageMaker®
- CorelDRAW®
- Corel PHOTO-PAINT®

We can also accept files created using Scanvec Amiable's FlexiSIGN-PRO sign-making software.

Our success rate with the following formats is very high: Adobe Illustrator®, Macromedia FreeHand, CorelDRAW®, Adobe PageMaker®, Quark Xpress, Adobe Photoshop®, Corel PHOTO-PAINT®, EPS, TIFF, JPEG, BMP, GIF, PCX, Pict, Pict2, TARGA

Important: Please convert all fonts to outlines or paths, or include all associated fonts with the file.

For graphics that are to be cut from vinyl film or other materials, send EPS, CASmate, CorelDRAW®, Adobe Illustrator®, Macromedia FreeHand, FlexiSIGN.

For graphics that are to be output as digital prints, the files should be in TIFF or JPEG format at a resolution of 300dpi at the actual size of the print.

If you don't see the file type you require listed here, please call.

We accept files on the following media, in either Macintosh or PC format:

- 3½-in. 1.44MB and LS-120 Diskettes
- Recordable CD (650MB Capacity)
- 3½-in. 100MB Iomega Zip
- 3½-in. 250MB Iomega Zip

Q: The file the customer sent me looks right in the preview window, but when I import or open the file, I get a missing font dialogue box. What is the problem and how do I fix it?

A: This happens all the time. When you save a file that includes text, the computer saves the text and a tag that tells it which specific font was used for the text in that original file. If you do not have that particular font installed on your computer, you will get the missing font dialogue box, and a generic font will be used to replace the needed font.

There are a couple of ways to deal with this. One is to find the font and install it on your computer. The problem with this is that you may not have the font, or it may be difficult to find. The best way to handle this is to have the person who sent you the file convert the text to outlines and/or paths in the software used to create the file. Now your computer sees the text as part of the drawing. Unfortunately, you won't be able to edit the text with the character menu or change the font. But, since what they are sending you is a file they want reproduced, you shouldn't need to make any modifications to it anyway.

Some customers will include the fonts with the file. If so, you can install the font on your system and the file will open just fine.

What's good for the goose is good for the gander. When you prepare a file for someone, don't assume that they have all the same fonts you're using. If you convert your text to outlines, they won't be calling you with a problem. Before sending someone a file, open it; go to *Edit > Select All* (or just press *Ctrl + A*). Mac users can press *Function + A*, then go to *Arrange > Convert to Outlines*. Then export the file as usual in the format desired. Now all text is converted to outlines and they should be able to open your file with no problem.



Missing font dialogue box



Text is converted to outlines

graphic world uses. Let's look at some questions and see if any of them sound familiar. I hope the answers make your everyday work less stressful.

Handling files can be easy These techniques should greatly reduce the problems that seem



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to go with file translation—and what computers and software are supposed to do—and your day should be less stressful. ☺

There's more on www.signcraft.com

Click on *Features* to read Jason's article:

- **How to prepare customer-provided art for cutting**, March/April 2002
- And other articles by Jason