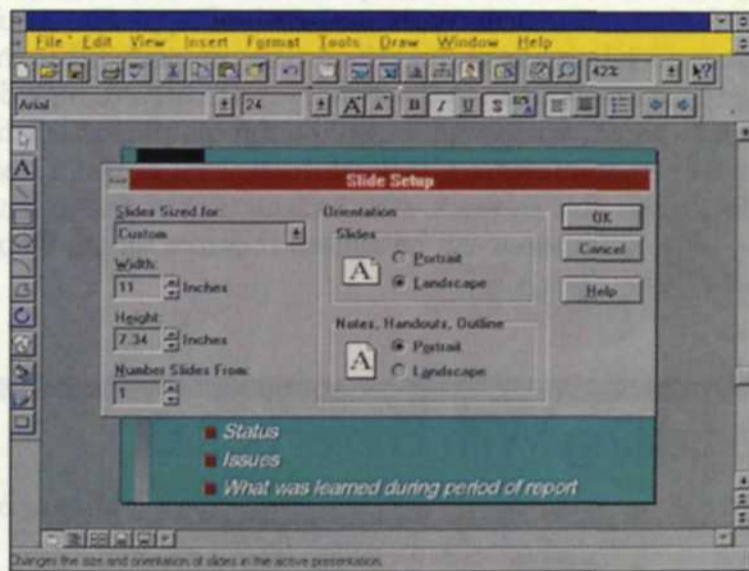# Service Bureau Blues

Sue and Jack Drafahl

Font Problems?

Setting up page format.

IT SEEMS THAT more and more people are called upon to give visual presentations. Since almost every business and many homes have computers, it is common for people to want to create their own slides for their lectures. Many have the computer and software capable of preparing the information, but lack the equipment necessary for the final slide output. That is where an imaging service bureau comes into the picture—we have the equipment to provide a final slide, hard copy or even an overhead transparency if desired.

When photography entered the digital world, many larger photo labs decided to include service bureaus as part of their services. Looking through the yellow pages today, you will find that many photo labs are also listed in the computer graphics section. These new photo lab/service bureau combinations offer customers a variety of hybrid services ranging from the creation of lecture slides to the repair of photographic images.

As the photo industry leans toward the digital direction, photo labs are going to invest in more digital equipment. If you decide to offer a service bureau as part of your lab services, you may find a wealth of new clients. Once you have your equipment properly set up, your lab can quickly justify the addition of all that digital equipment.

Although the concept of service bureaus sounds great, it comes with its own lumps and bumps. Before you jump in, we think that you should consider some problems we have run into when setting up a service bureau. Following is a collection of problems and solutions that seem to surface regularly.

Page Format

The most common mistake that first-time service bureau users make is setting the page size wrong. Most clients work in the 8.5x11 world, and compose their first great lecture in that format.

Unfortunately, film recorders don't use this format, and the page size should be 7.33x11 inches. So, when the client brings in his file composed in the wrong page size, several options are possible. The first and easiest option would be for the client to return home and recompose it on the correct page size. More than likely, the service bureau will need to reformat the file to fit into the slide format. If there are many diagrams and text, the time to refit them to slide format may take too long.

The best solution would be to let the program reduce the top and bottom of each image to fit into the slide format. This would leave black spaces on the left and right sides of the image. It may not be exactly what the client had in mind, but the overall effect is usually acceptable. The next time he will be sure to compose the file correctly.

If it looks like he might be a long-term customer, bring him into the imaging area, and show how to set up the page
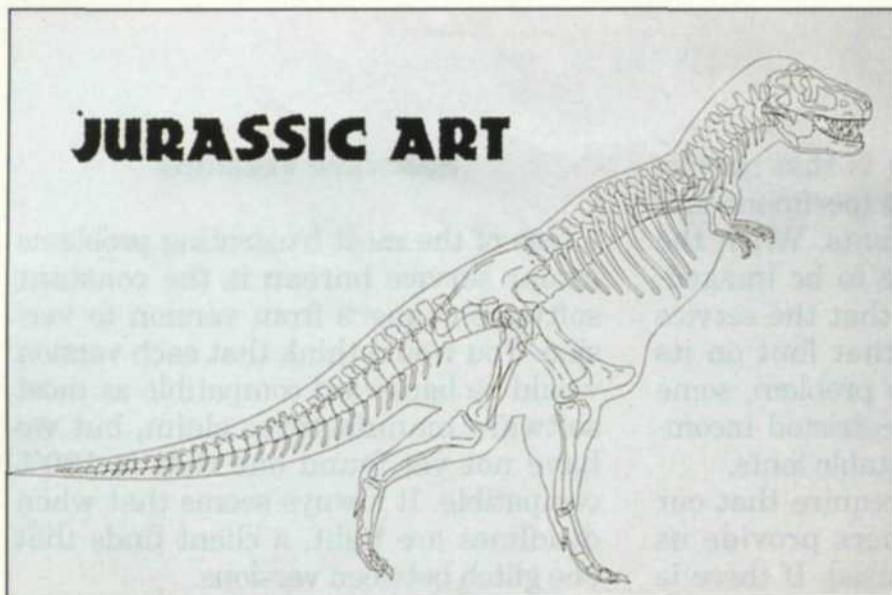
Light Background.
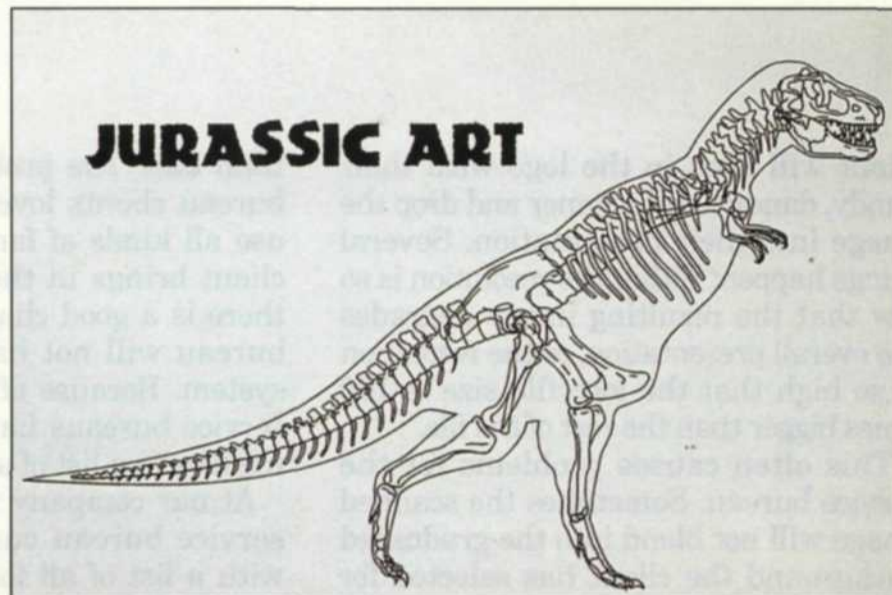
Corrected Background.

Where did the Impact Occur?

The collision that killed the dinosaurs should have left a crater about 150 to 200 kilometers (90 to 120 miles) across. Scientists have identified 139 impact craters Earth, but none of the known craters were both the right age and the right size. They began to search for the "missing" crater. Analysis of the thickness of the iridium-enhanced deposits at different places around the world indicated that the asteroid hit somewhere in North America. Coarse rocky debris, thought to have been deposited by giant waves spreading out from an impact, were found at several sites on the U.S. Gulf Coast, including outcroppings along the Braxos River in Texas. Then an 18-inch layer of debris full of small blobs of glassy rock called tektites, which form from melted rock ejected during an impact, was discovered near Beloc, Haiti.

The "World on One Slide" problem.

Where did the Impact Occur?

Crater about 150 to 200 kilometers across
139 impact craters on Earth
Hit somewhere in North America
Coarse rocky debris found on the U.S. Gulf Coast
Layer of tektites was discovered near Beloc, Haiti

The "World on One Slide" reduced.

size on specific software program. His gratitude will probably pay dividends monthly.

Monitors and Color Balance

Each monitor is different and each will give a different color balance. We have had clients tell us that the image we give them from their file is not what they saw on their monitor. The solution is simple. Clients need to have a sample slide made ahead of time to find out how the film recorder images their file. Once they have approved the sample, they can prepare the remainder of their files for you to image.

If you are preparing the slides for the client, she may have specific colors that she is trying to match. Assuming that your monitor is set up to match the balance of the film recorder, you could bring the client into your work area and have them select the desired color off your screen. If your work load won't allow this

interruption, the alternative would be to show the client a series of color images made from your film recorder.

We highly recommend you make a wide selection of color samples from each program commonly used. Each sample should also have text on it, so that when you project the image the client can see exactly how the final images will look. We keep a projector in our conference room so we can project the sample, so there is no doubt about their color selection.

Too Much Text on One Slide

Some economy-minded clients look at your service bureau prices, and decide that the best way to bypass costs is to use size 4 typeface, and try to put the encyclopedia on one slide. This results in two problems. First, the slide is worthless to the client, because no one can read any of the information. This should be displayed with a sample slide in the conference room, or by laying the sample

on a light box and asking the client to read the slide without the aid of a loupe.

The second problem occurs when the client uses all the space in the slide format to get all the information on the slide. The slide mount cuts off text if it is too close to the edge of the frame. Again another sample set of slides could show the need for a 5–10% space around the edges of the information area.

This is where some client education is necessary. Remind the client that slides are used to assist the speaker and not replace them. Data should be brief, and doesn't have to be in complete sentences. It needs to keep the viewer's interest, which can be accomplished by dividing the information into multiple slides.

Logos

Frequently presenters are jazzing up their presentations with company logos located in one of the corners of their presentation format. Often we find that the

client will scan in the logo with their handy, dandy hand scanner and drop the image into their presentation. Several things happen: Either the resolution is so low that the resulting image degrades the overall presentation, or the resolution is so high that the logo file size is 100 times bigger than the rest of the file.

This often causes problems for the service bureau. Sometimes the scanned image will not blend into the graduated background the client has selected for the presentations, or the final image is not the way she saw it on the computer.

With our clients we highly recommend that all logos be converted to a vector image using a tracing software, and cleaned up with a drawing program. We provide this service at our standard computer-time rate. Once this has been done, they receive a small high-resolution file that can be used in all their presentations. These vector logos can be colorized and also look good on graduated backgrounds.

Light Backgrounds

We recommend that dark backgrounds be used for all slide presentations. As luck would have it, we have several clients who make scientific presentations, and are required to make all slides with black text on a white background. Previously we would have shot the printed page on LPD film with great results.

Now these same clients have computers, and want the files they have created imaged on a film recorder. Because the white background is created with a CRT inside the film recorder, the black text is diffused and the image appears soft and lacks contrast. After experimenting with several settings on the film recorder, we found that you can successfully image these files by decreasing the film recorder's exposure by 30% and increasing the contrast by 30%. We also recommended to clients that they use bold text and fat lines for all illustrations when using white backgrounds.

Fonts Galore

In the last two or three years there has been an explosion of font types and families. We have seen Font CD collections with over 3000 fonts for less than $20! The problem is that service bureau clients love to experiment and use all kinds of fancy fonts. When the client brings in the file to be imaged, there is a good chance that the service bureau will not have that font on its system. Because of this problem, some service bureaus have restricted incoming files to a list of acceptable fonts.

At our company we require that our service bureau customers provide us with a list of all fonts used. If there is any question about whether we have them on file, they must provide us with a copy of the fonts necessary to complete the job.

With fonts being so cheap today we find it easier to buy several thousand fonts, and use a font manager for loading and unloading fonts. We use a program called "Font Power" on our PC. When "Client X" comes in, we look under Font Power for "Client X's Fonts," load them and image the file.

Microsoft has the best solution of all, with a new feature in its Powerpoint 4.0 program. As the client is saving out the file, a small box appears in the lower corner asking if she would like to imbed the fonts. This means that the file is larger, but also means that the service bureau does not have to worry about missing fonts.

To Fix or Not To Fix

When you have new clients using your service bureau for the first time, they invariably will have made several mistakes. What do you do? Send them home with an instruction sheet on how to prepare correctly? Or do you fix the mistakes and charge them high prices? We found both solutions are generally unacceptable. First, if they call ahead, we try to catch problems beforehand. This usually eliminates half the problems. If they do come in with problems, we show them what they did wrong, fix the problem and charge them the normal rate. We don't punish them for making a mistake the first time they bring in a job.

If they continue to make the same mistakes, we charge them for the necessary corrections. Using this policy, we have picked up several new clients who have become very loyal to our business. Each service bureau is different and you must establish your own policies.

Software Versions

One of the most frustrating problems in our service bureau is the constant software changes from version to version. You would think that each version would be backward compatible as most software manufactures claim, but we have not yet found one that is 100% compatible. It always seems that when deadlines are tight, a client finds that one glitch between versions.

This means that as a service bureau, you will have to keep on hand at least three of the most recent versions of each software program commonly used by your client base. This becomes even more of a problem when crossing platforms from MAC to PC or the reverse. Usually you must have the same version number to cross over. Just when we think we have the most current version, a client comes in with a file from a higher revision.

We sometimes have clients with software versions we didn't know existed, or an entire program that is not on our system. In these cases we suggest that the client output the file as a PostScript file. On the MAC side most programs will read the PostScript file and send it to the film recorder.

On the PC side, you will need a PostScript RIP (Raster Image Process) to send the image to the film recorder. We have tried several and found one of the most versatile to be ZSCRIPT by Zenographics. This program seems to take just about every type of PostScript file and send to a variety of film recorders virtually error free.

We hope we haven't talked you out of starting a service bureau. Our only intention was to give you a jump on getting started. When it is set up correctly, the service bureau can be the most profitable part of your photo lab business.

Since we were only able to discuss some of the problems this month, we will continue this article with several more topics in next month's issue. We want to help you quickly leave the service bureau blues behind and get into the green.

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Jack and Sue Drafahl own and operate a custom lab in Portland, OR. They are also professional photographers, specializing in underwater photography.