

DESN 130 - TYPOGRAPHY

Differences Between Font Formats

Though most users can install and use all three formats, there are differences between PostScript, TrueType and OpenType fonts that you should be aware of.

PostScript

The PostScript or “Type 1” font format was developed by Adobe in the 1980’s, several years before the release of TrueType. The format is based on Adobe’s PostScript printing technology – a programming language that allows for high-resolution output of resizable graphics. PostScript has long been viewed as a reliable choice, particularly for professional designers, publishers and printers.

PostScript fonts consist of two parts, which are both necessary for the font to be properly printed and displayed on screen. With most operating systems, PostScript fonts can be installed simply by being placed in the system’s font folder. However, PC users working on operating systems that predate Windows 2000, need to install the free ATM (Adobe Type Manager) utility in order to use PostScript fonts.

TrueType

The TrueType format was jointly developed by Apple and Microsoft in the late 1980’s, several years after the release of the PostScript font format. For many years, there was a bias against this format, since the se fonts were not very reliable for high-resolution output in the early days of their existence. Today, many of the fonts included with both the Macintosh and Windows operating systems are TrueType, and they work perfectly well. TrueType fonts contain both the screen and printer font data in a single component, making the fonts easier to install. For this reason, TrueType is a good choice for those who have limited experience working with and installing fonts.

OpenType

OpenType, a joint effort from Adobe and Microsoft, is the latest font format to be introduced. Like TrueType, OpenType fonts contain both the screen and printer font data in a single component. However, the OpenType format has several exclusive capabilities including support for multiple platforms and expanded character sets. OpenType fonts can be used on either Macintosh or Windows operating systems. Additionally, the OpenType format permits the storage of up to 65,000 characters. This additional space provides type designers with the freedom to include add-ons such as small caps, old style figures, alternate characters and other extras that previously needed to be distributed as separate fonts.

However, not all OpenType fonts contain additional characters. Many fonts have been converted from either PostScript or TrueType formats without expanded character sets to take advantage of the cross-platform functionality benefits of OpenType. Unless clearly stated otherwise, assume that the OpenType font you are purchasing features the traditional character set found in PostScript and TrueType fonts. OpenType fonts that do contain expanded character sets are referred to informally as “OpenType Pro” fonts. Support for OpenType Pro fonts is increasing, yet the format is yet to be fully supported by all applications. To be safe, check the documentation of your applications.

COMMON FONT FILE EXTENSIONS

- .PFB Type 1 PostScript font binary file, used for storing vector fonts – outline font
- .PFM Font metric file, used to provide font information on an Windows machine – screen font
- .TTF Truetype font file, used for storing vector fonts – Also used for OpenType fonts containing TrueType font data.
- .OTF OpenType font containing PostScript Type 1 font data
- .AFM Font Metric file – used to provide information on Adobe fonts
- .INF Font information file for DOS