FLAAR Reports

**Annotated list of
Raster Image Processor
(RIP) software for
Large Format Inkjet Printers**

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Caption for cover page: Different RIPs used at FLAAR facilities

Introduction

The following list of RIPs is based on gathering data over the last three years. We compile information from every source we can find, including IMI conferences and especially walking the floors at trade shows such as:

- CeBit (Hannover, Germany)
- DRUPA (Duesseldorf, Germany, every four years)
- Graphics of the Americas
- Graph Expo
- IPEX (Birmingham, England, every several years)
- ISA
- PhotoPlus (New York)
- PMA (Photo Marketing Association)
- Photokina (every two years, Cologne, Germany)
- SGIA

RIP companies come and go, merge or go bankrupt. Thus we recommend you stick with a well known RIP such as PosterJet, Wasatch and others of comparable international stature.

If you need to know what a RIP does, and why you need it for a large format printer, then ask for Nicholas Hellmuth's FLAAR Report*: RIP+Help*: general introduction: quick-start list of the best RIPs which we recommend; hints for what accessories you need; list of where you can get books and training, plus general information on the care and feeding of your RIP.

If you are unsure of some of the jargon, we emphasize with you and have written a "Glossary of RIP Jargon" to assist you.

The following list is relatively complete but there are so many RIPs for imagesetters we have not listed them all. Our purpose in this report is to feature RIPs for wide format inkjet printers. For RIP products that we know and trust we have added contact information.

The purpose of these reports are to provide basic information so everyone has the same level of knowledge. In years gone by, few people published the full story about digital imaging products. The result was that thousands of companies made their decision on what to buy exclusively from the hype generated by PR agencies. It's amazing that more buyers did not realize how little they were being actually told about the products they paid thousands of dollars for. If you go back to ads for RIPs in 1996 through 1998 to 1999, it is a wonder there were no class action lawsuits for false or misleading advertising (or at least for failure to disclose the features that the product was NOT capable of).

For example; in 1996, when we acquired our first RIP, we presumed the one that was touted in all the trade magazines was the best in the world because it was an hardware RIP. We assumed that a software RIP was a lesser product. Three years later, having learned the hard way, we found out that software RIPs had far more advantages. It took about four more years, but thousands of other people also learned that software RIP was the way to go. Today very few people would consider an hardware RIP, especially if they know about the valid alternatives among the many capable software products.

We also eventually learned that a RIP should have certain key features. The pseudo-fancy RIP we ended up with in 1996 turned out to lack those necessary features, but since it was a "hardware RIP" we presumed it was superior. Turns out the one thing which was superior was the fat price.

A RIP should be fully upgradeable to handle other brands of printers. If you can't switch your RIP from one computer to another, or from one printer to another, why bother? There are plenty of excellent, multi-talented, full-featured, totally upgradeable RIPs.

One company offers no tech support whatsoever. They even state that clearly when you buy their RIP. Their policy is you are supposed to get tech support (for their RIP) from the reseller who sold you the printer.

Good luck.

So don't buy low-bid on the Internet, since who at a PO Box web site reseller knows the intricacies of a RIP.

If you are buying a RIP in America, we recommend you stick with RIPs that have proven tech support in the USA.

The following report is a list of the RIP companies that we have seen listed anywhere. FLAAR offers a second different report on all the details of RIPs that you need to know about before you buy. But we will give you a hint here, be sure you understand what kind of a lite RIP you are getting.

Lite RIPs lack many of the features that you may eventually need.

But there are low-cost full RIPs which are a bargain. Only thing lite about them is they can run just a single printer. But (unlike expensive hardware or other tethered RIPs with add-on computer cards), the low-cost full RIPs can be upgraded to run other brands or other models of printers.

FLAAR List of all Known RIPs
### which Drive Large Format Inkjet Printers

3M, *Cactus RIP*, one of the few Macintosh-based RIPs. Four years ago this was one of our favorite industrial strength RIPs. However 3M is not a software company. The RIP began to fall behind during 2000. For example, it took 3M forever to get a version for the newer printers. At this point FLAAR withdrew its recommendations. Currently we have a buyer advisory, a polite way of saying it is not a very impressive product under today's conditions. It appears that Cactus is no longer in business as a RIP. A search on the 3M web site turned up zilch. It is a shame when buyers are left abandoned.

Adobe, *Press Ready*. It is ironic that one of the world's most successful software companies, and the originator of PostScript, had its only RIP limited to desktop sized printers. This RIP either failed in the marketplace or otherwise was withdrawn circa 2001. Don't confuse Adobe Press Ready with Adobe PostScript. Adobe PostScript is alive and well; Press Ready died many years ago.

Agfa, for years rebranded Onyx PosterShop. I do not know what RIP Agfa features today (summer 2004). I believe Agfa has also recently developed their own proofing RIP. I would guess they previously rebranded BEST.

AHT, Advanced Hi-Tech Corp, *ColorFlare, OneRIP*. AHT also makes RIPs for many color copiers such as Konica, Minolta, Mita, Toshiba, and Xerox.

Alan Graphic Systems, alanRIP, PanDot. Considering this RIP cost between $9,000 and $26,400, no wonder the company seems to be extinct today. Not even any remnants of this company could be found on an Internet search.
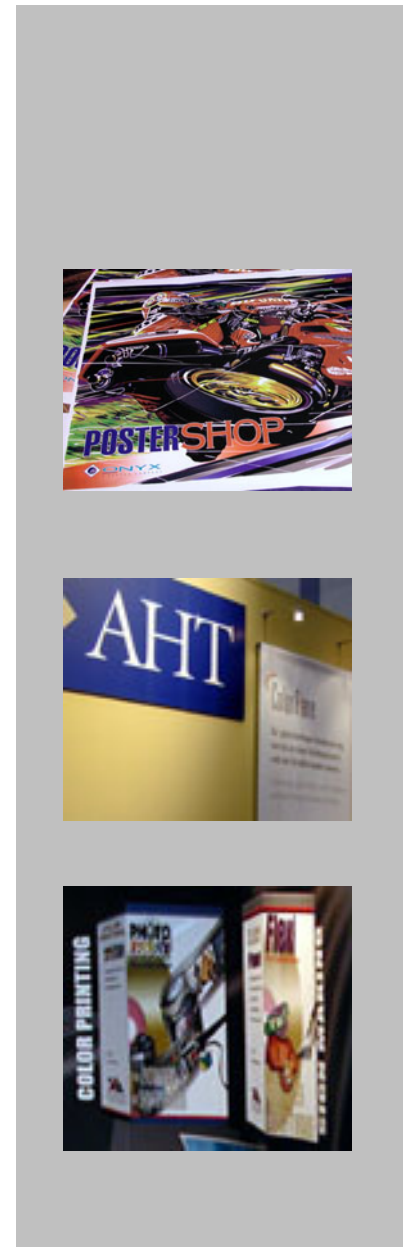
Amiable Technologies, merged with Scanvec in 1999 to form Scanvec-Amiable. Producers of PhotoPrint 3 Family and FlexiFAMILY 7.

Artist RIP, produced by Korea Soft. Has earned a commendable reputation as being good in the areas of printing speed, quality, and function. Has an excellent user's manual. Downside is poor tiling inaccuracy. http://www.artistrip.com/english Artist RIP comes bundled with some printers from Korea. These printers (such as DGI) are fine; but you may eventually prefer Wasatch or other international RIP if you are in Latin America, USA, or Europe.

ArtQuest, *JetBox*. Difficult to find actual product name that is current. Many of these RIPs come from the world of computer to plate prepress shops. FLAAR tends to feature the RIPs which are dedicated more directly to wide format inkjet printers.

Aurelon, a respected Belgian company, producers of DeskCheck and Signalize. OEMs to PerfectProof, a proofing RIP in use in Europe and the USA. www.aurelon.com

BEST was one of the leading and more capable of the German RIP companies three years ago, but once it was sold two years ago their style changed. BEST is/was primarily a PC based RIP and intended for serious professional proofing. The Mac version is a separate lite product. The Mac product is not a Mac version of the main RIP. The main PC products work on virtually all Epson, Roland and other piezo and HP, Canon, Encad thermal printhead printers. If you have color measurement tools such as X-Rite and/or Gretag-Macbeth, and if you are willing to receive serious training and/or overcome a learning curve, then this is a high-end technical proofing RIP for a commercial proofing company. BEST was at its peak when purchased by EFI, Electronics for Imaging. Only time will tell how products and policies will evolve under this sudden change but the first thing that happened is that several of their key people in Germany and in the US either left or moved to competing companies. For further information on BEST RIPs contact imaging@parrotcolor.com.

Birmy, used to make acceptable entry level lite RIPs for cheap desktop printers. Birmy was used in the late 1990's for people who bought low cost Epson desktop printers and quickly learned they needed a RIP if they sought to include any text. Birmy itself ceased to exist but the Birmy interface, some of their code writers, and therefore logically potentially other features such as the interface live on in iProof, which however has expanded into wide format size. It is priced as a lite RIP. Most people who start with lite RIPs soon find they really need a full-featured RIP. Thus if you buy a lite RIP you may have to pay twice, and learn a second RIP on top of it. It may cost less in the long run to consider a full-featured RIP.

Cactus, see 3M Cactus.

CADlink Technology, *Photoscript*. Seems like a good RIP. CADlink is a capable Canadian company; makes lots of different products including SignLab layout for signage, but we have not yet evaluated that yet. Have not seen them at any trade show during 2001 but they appeared at ISA 2002. Did not see them at ISA 2003 or ISA 2004. www.cadlink.com/index.php

Caldera, *VisualRIP*, for XES ColorgrafX X2 and a few other printers. A French RIP which duplicated many of the features of Adobe Photoshop. ColorgrafX X2 seems to have been abandoned by XES (Xerox Engineering Systems). Caldera continues, since it was independent of XES.

CiberPrint, a product I have not seen or heard of previously, never at American tradeshows, not even ISA sign tradeshow. Did not notice it at Photokina 2002 in Germany or IPEX 2002 in the United Kingdom, but sometimes products are present but simply don't stand out.

CGS Publishing Technologies International, *O.R.I.S. Color Tuner*. Has a good reputation as a professional quality proofing RIP but we do not have personal experience with it so are unable to judge. O.R.I.S. Color Tuner color management software allows for color adjustment through both ICC profile technology and O.R.I.S. Color Tuner tools.

Colorbus, was five years ago a prominent RIP exhibited at major tradeshows. But at DRUPA 2000 it had not yet accommodated six color printers which were the rage at that date. The general feeling is that Colorbus is more interested in color copiers than in large format. This may be the reason their RIP for large format is not as innovative as the RIPs of other companies. On the positive side the RIP handled newsprint well on the HP DesignJet 1050 and 1055 series. Circa 2000 reviewed on www.wide-format-printers.org. For about two years Colorbus was not seen at tradeshows in the USA and their web site was seldom updated. However Colorbus is still evidently hanging in there, but too many other RIP companies have devoted more attention to the wide format market. As of August 2003, however, Colorbus seems to be on the move again, and is offering a RIP for Canon imagePROGRAF printers. We do not yet know if they are Canon approved. Colorbus Cyclone RIP can also run the XES (Xerox) ColorgrafX X2.

ColorByte. Someone bought it and said the Mac version did not function adequately. We discretely asked around and were discretely told that the Mac version is reportedly not finished at that time. This was two years ago. The PC version is supposed to be more finished than the Mac version, but we have not yet tested it. We have one user who had it, and got rid of it in favor of ErgoSoft which he liked much better for fine-tuning giclee prints. Yet we have another photographer who likes ColorByte for its funcionality on Mac OS X. Tech support is rated as iffy by both users (ColorByte is a very small company). Also rebranded by LexJet under a different name. One user reported that it was slow because it writes the file before completing an action. This user switched to a different (faster) RIP and said "I went from a roller skate to a jet."

ColorChoice is Roland's name for a lite version of Scanvec-Amiable. Users send in complaints that this RIP can't do everything they need it to accomplish. One reader said it did not support PSD or CDR files. Actually it appears that the full version of Scanvec-Amiable can't either. Roland dropped Scanvec-Amiable in 2003 and now offers a lite version of Wasatch.

ColorDirect, see XES.
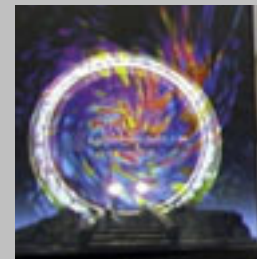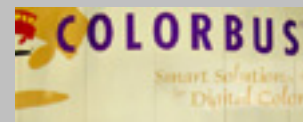
ColorTrac, I am presuming this is a RIP for their large format scanner, possibly scan to print? ColorTrac is now part of ACTion.

ColorGate Digital Printing Solutions. The company was still operating both in Germany and the USA but has downsized in 2002. In late 2002 they closed their office in the USA. Thus we can no longer recommend them until we are assured that tech support will be available and that return policies will be honored. We do not know their distributor in the USA. Too bad, we felt this RIP had hope for growing in the US. ColorGate is popular in Germany and Europe. The company has excellent people on staff and is still on the FLAAR list of RIPs to watch for.

ColorSpan, ColorSpan offers a hardware RIP and a software RIP. We had a test drive during a 3 day ColorSpan training program and found it easy to learn and easy to use. e-mail: productinfo@colorspan.com. The RIP took a 180MB file and enlarged it to over 700MB to print it 36" wide by about 10 feet long at impressive quality. Just realize this is an expensive dedicated RIP intended only to operate the ColorSpan printer. I am guessing that one version of the RIP can be upgraded to run the next generation of ColorSpan printer but I do not know that for sure. We have two ColorSpan printers and found it was easier just to get a separate fresh RIP for each of them.

Compatible Systems Engineering, Inc (*ColorBurst* Systems). ColorBurst RIP runs HP, Encad, Roland, Mimaki, Mutoh, Epson, as OEM Vutek, Iris (separate product), and Conde OEMed printers. Epson was the last major printer manufacturer to drop EFI as their favored RIP. Currently no major wide format printer company features EFI any more. Today Epson features ColorBurst LE (lite edition) on their Epson 4000. We know and respect the folks at ColorBurst but do not have as much personal experience with this RIP as we do with other brands.

Conde, *SubliPrint*. Many RIPs are listed in the Seybold Report that are otherwise not exhibited at tradeshows nor listed in trade magazines. Not clearly listed on web site, but a search reveals where it is sort of buried. I am guessing from the name that this RIP is for dye sublimation printing. I do not know who makes this, other than has Jaws inside.

Compose, *Express RIP*, the one test we did at DRUPA turned out very badly. The results were very poor probably because of an inappropriate RGB to CMYK conversion. RIP would probably be better if the test had more time to work out that situation. The people at their booth seemed pleasant. We probably ought to test it again in our own facilities. Compose is a level three PostScript rip offering color management tools and support for various file formats including .eps, .tiff, and .bmp.

Creo, Brisque, Prinergy, etc. Some Creo RIPs are the descendants of older proprietary Scitex RIPs for closed systems. We do not cover closed systems.

DCS Software, **PosterJet**, is alive and well under new ownership in Germany; readily available in USA and Canada too. Contact is ken@scarabgraphics.com.
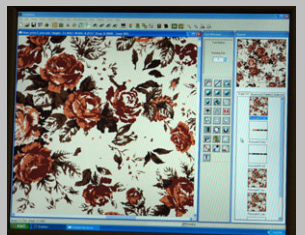
DigiColor, an earlier name for what is today PosterJet.

DigiFab, *Evolution RIP*, a good RIP for printing inkjet textiles.

Dr Wirth, *ProofmasterPro*, RIP for printing inkjet textiles.

DuPont, *Color Station*. It is my impression one of their RIPs was from BEST, but it is hard to keep track of which is which. Now DuPont evidently has a different RIP, not from BEST. DuPont is a multi-faced company that produces Color Station through its printing and publishing division. Color Station color-proofing software allows for color management without other third-party applications.

Durst-Dice, producer of Cheetah 2000 RIP. Cheetah 2000 compatible with the Durst Lambda wide format laser light digital imager, and Epsilon digital printers, commonly found in photo labs. Lambda is a high quality printer, but an RGB laser color imager, wide format, but not CMYK inkjet. As of September 2003 Durst split from Dice, so the RIP is available from Dice now.

Dynalab; hard to tell whether this is a RIP on its own, or the Japanese or Chinese character versions added to other RIPs.

EagleRIP V8, sorry, we do not know the product or the company behind it ("Founder"). Seems to come from the People's Republic of China.

Edox, unsure this is still a viable RIP.

Electronics for Imaging, EFI, Fiery, originally a hardware RIP, expensive, limited options, we have not been able to find any upgrade path (namely about zero). We know; we made the mistake of getting two of them because the trade magazines praised them. Too many other RIPs are faster, upgradeable, and not such a price. It is my impression that their RIP for the Canon BJ-W9000 is the same or similar to the old RIPs they used to make for HP 2800 and 3800. We had one. We were unable to find any way to rotate certain basic file types. When we got another HP DesignJet, we found the EFI was not upgradeable nor would it run any other printer whatsoever. Thus it is worth asking if probably these hardware RIPs should more fairly have been labeled as "lite" RIPs to provide adequate warning to people who, in those years, were not properly informed. Since hardware RIPs fell out of favor during the last two years, EFI has concentrated on copiers and other products. It is also noteworthy EFI policy (for both the EFI RIP that I had) that EFI itself notifies you that you can't get tech support from EFI; you have to get it from the company that sold you the printer and/or the RIP.

ErgoSoft, *Posterprint*, a nice RIP made in Switzerland. Has helpful features for printing on inkjet textiles. FLAAR has recently received this RIP for evaluation, so we will gradually update this section of the report as the summer goes on. Several reports from end users indicate that ErgoSoft is an excellent RIP. ErgoSoft has a representative and tech support also in the USA. Contact Robert Ebersole, reversole@ergosoftus.com. One of several advantages of ErgoSoft is that you can run as many printers as you wish; with most other RIPs you have to pay substantial sums to run a second printer.

ESRI, ArcInfo, ArcView, ArcPress. Seems to be a technical product for CAD and/or GIS.

FastRIP, for Epson 3000 and Epson 7000. Hard to figure out the name of the company which makes this product. We also see what appears to be a different RIP with the identical name associated with Barco and Dotrix, Belgium. Sorry, but we have never previously heard of this or FlexRIP (evidently a cousin of FastRIP?). It is unclear whether the Barco FastRIP is the same as the one sold in the USA, since the Barco version is only for high-end printers costing half a million dollars. The USA FastRIP is a low-cost RIP for a cheap desktop printers. Epson 3000 is an outdated printer known for unreliable feeding mechanism and quirky drivers that waste lots of expensive media.

Fuji Film Electronic Imaging Ltd, Celebrant (sic), for Fuji printers and HP including 2500. I have not seen this RIP in any other list of RIPs. I do not know much about this RIP. Fuji had a printer handled by Brady, but Fuji no longer attempts to keep up with other wide format innovations elsewhere: today Fuji just sells Epson printers.

Fusion Systems, ColorRay for Epson and HP printers on Sun Solaris and Silicon Graphics IRIX, which explains why we don't see this RIP at digital imaging tradeshows or in trade magazines. DigiPage is also listed as one of their products. These are among the few RIPs which work on UNIX or Linux. ColorRay 4.0.1 RIP works with Mac OS X.

Gerber Scientific Products, OmegaImageRIP. For older simple early wide format printers from Encad and HP. Unlikely this RIP has survived?

GlobalGraphics owns Harlequin and Jaws, the inner components of about half the RIPs on the market. Global Graphics now offers its own RIP, GlobalColor. Presently this is available only via OEM Canon, who no longer offers EFI as its primary RIP for the newer Canon printers.

GMG, ColorProof, a German proofing RIP. Saw at IPEX 2002 tradeshow and then again at Graph Expo '03.

Graphics Integration Technologies, Graphics-Pro is a copier RIP and also for Epson, HP, Mutoh, and Encad. Bought by Xitron. Have never seen or heard of this RIP at any tradeshow or printshop.

Graphx, RasterPlus

Handmade Software, Image Alchemy PS

Hewlett-Packard, *Ps*, the on-board PostScript portion of the RIP. Simple to use once you overcome lack of adequate *User's Manual*. Slow. Limited options; tethered to one printer (its physically inside the printer). In effect a lite RIP though not labeled or priced as such. If you use your HP at home or for occasional printing, this RIP is appropriate. However this RIP does evidently have Pantone certification and naturally operates the color management ICC color profile features of certified HP media wonderfully. For information contact colorguru@colordna.com.

Highwater Designs, *Torrent.* Saw at IPEX 2002 tradeshow but nowhere else.

Ilford Imaging, RIPStar, their brand of Poster Shop, a good RIP, especially to take advantage of Ilford's inks and photo media. It is unclear how well Ilford will survive in 2005.

Image Technologies, *Wisp PSPro, Pro Plus.* This company also makes *Trafik*. At DRUPA or CeBIT 2000 I was never able to understand the difference between Wisp and Trafik. If their parent company was at IPEX 2002 they were well hidden. Too bad because their products support many printing devices including wide format printers, film recorders, and imagesetters.

Imaging Technologies Corp., Xtinguisher 247 hardware RIP server; only up to 400 dpi. Have no idea where I find these RIPs. We know nothing about them other than in passing as we search mountains of documentation.

IProof Systems, see also Birmy (simple RIP for desktop Epson printers), whose interface and some of whose software engineers were reborn in iProof. We do not ourselves use any iProof RIP; we estimate this might be considered a lite RIP.

ISIS Print Manager, a RIP for Mutoh printers, provided by Mutoh. Here is a good example of a dedicated RIP custom-made for a specific printer. We have met the engineering product development manager, Christopher Brown, and find the RIP an interesting product. Mutoh also offers a hardware RIP, *Thunderbird*. We do not know how these compare in feature sets to traditional RIPs such as Wasatch, ErgoSoft, PosterJet or others. We guess the Mutoh product is comparable to a lite RIP. This is a polite way of saying that eventually you may desire to obtain Wasatch or other full-strength RIP.

Korea RIP, *Artist RIP*. Has a nice manual but users say it can't tile large billboard sections evenly..

LDR, ColorRay, lots of computer to plate RIPs ended up in the Seybold Report because that was their heritage. Seybold is not specifically a wide format forum. LDR restructured and created Fusion Systems. No wonder it's hard to keep track of these RIPs.

LegatoScript for DesignJet 3 OS, Have no other information.

LexJet Direct, *SpectrumPro*, OEM from ColorByte. Works on PC but as of summer 2002 the version for Mac was most politely described as incomplete.

Main Top; their web site is up for sale, so I guess their RIP is long gone.

Management Graphics Inc. EDPX 00. EDPX 2000; don't see a year 2002 product? Not to pick on this particular RIP, but we do not recommend using RIPs that are not well known.

Microspot, *X-RIP*, for HP DesignJet printers with Mac OSX.

MMS, *iMac RIP-Station*, a German RIP evidently; for desktop printers, older printers.

Mutoh, see ISIS Print Manager.

Onyx, *PosterShop*. Now owned by Océ. Full-featured commercial production RIP (a polite way of saying this is not really for the first-time user at home or retirement business). However an Epson owner recently wrote to state that he was told the PosterShop RIP can not in fact access all the internal benefits of Epson's own dithering pattern. We have heard that some other RIPs also inflict their own dithering pattern on Epson printers, negating the benefits of owning an Epson to begin with. We are keeping our ears and eyes open for more information.

Paradigm Imaging Group. Daylight RIP. I must have missed this RIP at tradeshows since it is not in any FLAAR list until I saw it in Digital Graphics, Oct. 2002, p. 45.

PerfectProof, ProofMaster. An excellent European RIP for proofing; they have office and tech support in America too. Does not use ICC color profiles (either did anyone until recently; indeed most people use ICC profiles as a place from which to start tweaking… if you have to twiddle with them, why are they considered so useful??). Our use of PerfectProof at the university demonstrated it was easy to use and worked just fine. Contact for PerfectProof in USA is info@perfectproof.com, tel (888) 228-9070. Contact in Europe is +32-(0) 2-253 07 32. They exhibit at tradeshows and we have checked out their international headquarters outside Brussels: definitely competent people behind this product. Many new updates are now available in 2004. States that it works with Mac.

Pinebush, *HyperXpress*, claimed to be an alternative to ESRI products for GIS.

Pisa, not even www.xs4all.nl/~hmd/rip.html had a link to their site. But we tracked them down; PS Group was bought by CADlink.

Pixelis, *ProofCreator*, mainly older printers. The Seybold Report on RIPs was published in 2001, so the research was probably mainly in 2000, at the height of the economic boom. The subsequent collapse carried many RIP companies with it. Some linger on, but are not serious contenders when compared with Wasatch or even PosterJet.

Pixo Arts Corp., Picaxo Bureau 2000 Some RIPs just sort of disappear from the radar screen. At one point their latest news release was August 1999.

PhotoPrint is the product name the Scanvec-Amiable RIP. Current version as of May 2004 is version 4. If you are in signage this is a name to consider although we ourselves use Wasatch and PosterJet for signage at our two university print shops.

Photoscript (CADlink). Nice product that runs on a Mac. We have received this product and it is in the queue for testing and evaluation. CADlink exhibits at sign trade shows in the US.
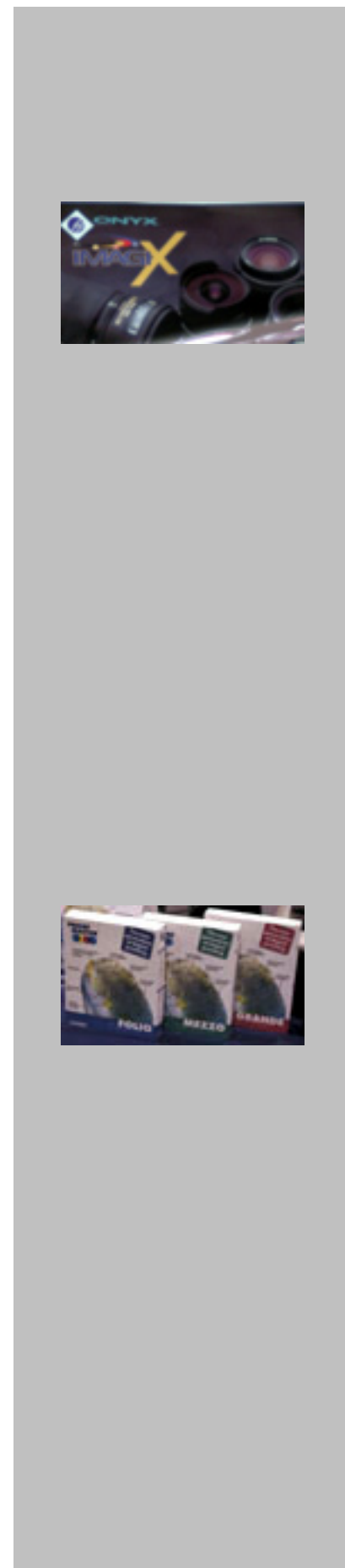
PosterJet*,* Works well on and with Macintosh computers. Fast (RIPs on the fly). Easy to use; for example, requires no technical training. Can be upgraded; works on HP DesignJet, Canon, and other printers. For information on PosterJet RIP, in USA contact Ken Stokes, Scarab Graphics, ken@scarabgraphics.com. PosterJet was formerly sold by DCS Software. Also formerly sold as DigiColor. PosterJet is the RIP we have installed at the FLAAR facility at Francisco Marroquin University in Guatemala because of its speed and ease of use. New versions appear regularly about once a year; such new versions are a benefit for end-users and also show that the company behind the product is alive and well.

Praxisoft. Their RIPs are rebranded under other names elsewhere. I do not know much about their RIPs. Although I would imagine they exhibited at DRUPA, in point of fact I have visited their booth only at DPI trade show (2001) and that only briefly. I believe Praxisoft also makes ICC color management software, but we do not have it so I do not know details.
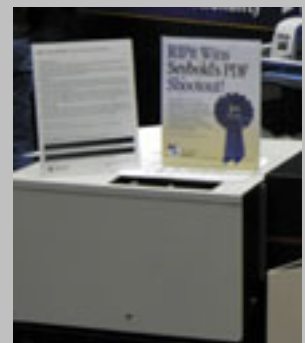
RamPage, a prepress RIP not primarily for wide format inkjet printers.

Repro Precision, *Dispatch-it, PixelPower Pro*. Even we gave up trying to find out about this obscure product.

RIPit Computer, *OpenRIP*. Seems to have hit its stride in year 2000. The people behind this product are very sincere. Is primarily for offset printing (not for photo and giclee). But also works on wide format inkjet printers and for proofing. We may try to learn more about this product in the future (a tough job with over 80 RIPs available in the US alone).

RTI, includes Harlequin features, but is another of the "invisible" RIPs, meaning you rarely if ever hear of them, nor see them at a tradeshow.

Scanvec-Amiable*, PhotoPrint* These are the RIPs for Roland and entry-level Encad printers. You need to check to see whether these are lite RIPs or not. Scanvec-Amiable is a large company with pleasant and helpful people at their popular booth at tradeshows. However their earlier RIPs were not always very popular. Roland just stopped using their RIP and went for another OEM source. Word on the street, however, is that the newest Scanvec-Amiable product, in its full-version (from Wasatch), is improved.

Scitex (CreoScitex, now Creo), Brisque, parallel file RIPping for Iris Realist, Improof, etc

SCP Software GmbH, DaylightRIP, another of the countless RIPs from Germany.

SeeColor Corporation, For proofing with newsprint on the HP 1050 and HP 1055 and 2000cp series. Does not seem to support more recent printers.

Serendipity Software, BlackMagic. Not a RIP in the normal sense of the word.

Shira, Shiraz seemed a very capable RIP. Their distributorship has been open in USA only recently.

S. H. Pierce, *PosterWorks*, is really a layout software for tiling building wrap and other giant images. Nice product.

Sign-Tronic, *Colour Graphics Server*. Many of these European RIPs are not known in America.

Splash Technology, bought by EFI and no longer a wide format printer RIP on its own. This is why we are unsure what will happen to BEST RIP now that it too was bought up by EFI.

Storm, Proofink. Storm went bankrupt in America several years ago. In Germany they lingered on; their Germany web site has sort of survived but the link to ProofInk is non-functional. That's why we don't recommend RIPs from small companies which may not survive long enough to provide you an upgrade. Of course even larger companies fall into bankruptcy, such as Yarc.

Tangent Imaging Systems, *Reproworks*, PC, Encad, HP, RasterGraphics wide format printers. Our original notes indicated ColorSpan but otherwise we don't know about this RIP. Tangent is one of several companies which were bought or merged to become ACTion Imaging Solutions. ReproWorks is a copying and printing software for wide format scanners, and hence printers for such scans.

TechPool Software, *Transverter RIP*. Primarily for the Fuji Pictrography photo printer.

Thinking Youth, One of countless RIPs that you otherwise never hear much about. Many of these lost RIPs came from some page on an HP site relative to RIPs which ran their 2000cp and 3000cp series of printers several years ago. I am guessing this RIP is from Asia.

Thunderbird, recent hardware RIP from Mutoh for Falcon II and Toucan series. I do not know whether this has Mutoh's own Isis software inside or another OEM RIP.

Transverter Pro, see TechPool Software.

UFO Systems, *ColorFlare*, see AHT. ColorFlare is now "OneRIP" from a German company named OneRIP. OneRIP from AHT itself seems dedicated to copiers, not wide format inkjet printers.

Visual Business Systems was making a RIP which supported ICC color profiles back in 1997. www.modrepro.com/pages/issues/1998/97-08/new-prod.html

Visual Edge Technology*, ImageJet LE, ImageJet XL*. Although I don't see them at tradeshows in recent years, their web site suggests the company is alive.
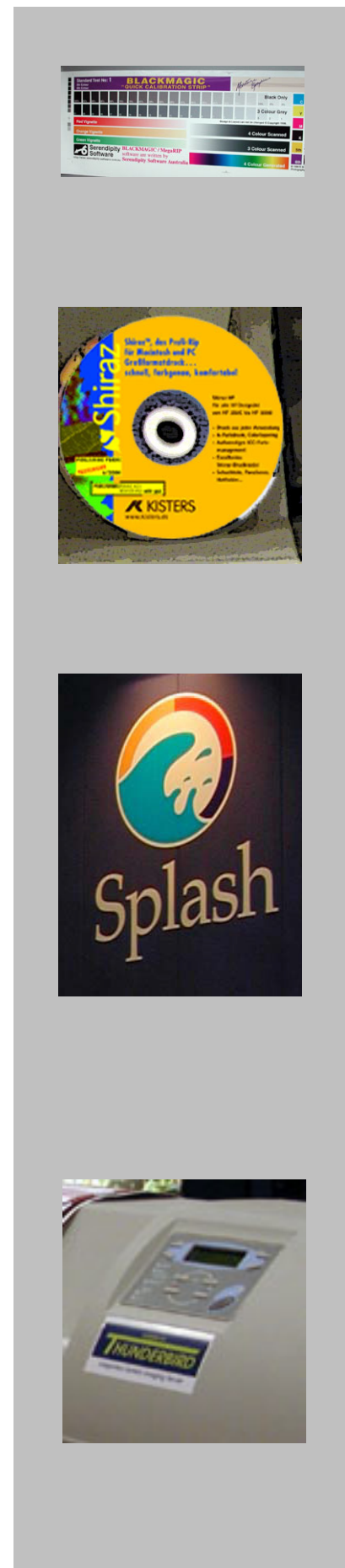
Vividata, Pshop. Based on Ghostscript, which would lead one to suspect this was a low priced and potentially low end RIP?

Vivid Image, used to have scan to print software.

Wasatch Computer, *SoftRIP*, Wasatch has an excellent reputation as a good RIP. The way to distinguish a professional RIP from just an ordinary software is how often is it updated and does the company dare to show its face at major tradeshows? Wasatch exhibits at ISA, SGIA, and many other significant tradeshows. Their RIP is frequently updated and offers virtually every feature a professional user or advanced beginner would desire. We have nine RIPs on our shelf, but use only three RIPs in daily practice. One of these is Wasatch: we use it every day. Wasatch makes versions for textiles, for screen printing masters, and for other special uses. But the main SoftRIP is a general-purpose RIP which we like. Wasatch has competent and pleasant people on their staff.

Yarc, went bankrupt. Be sure not to buy a used RIP from a company which has no upgrades and zero technical support.

XES, Xerox Engineering Systems, *NTX*, ColorDirect, for ColorgrafX X2 and X2-Tech. Unclear whether an OEM, and if so, from whom. Up until it abandoned wide format inkjet printers XES offered primarily Caldera, a product suite from France. I do not fully understand what NTX is; did not notice it when last looking at www.XES.com web site (late August 2002). By late 2002 or early 2003 XES seems to have quietly abandoned ColorgrafX X2. I sort of feel sorry about people who bought this project. No matter how good the printer and RIP were, is not much help if there are no upgrades.

Xitron, Epson Navigator XPR; recently bought Graphics Integration Technologies and their Graphics-Pro ProofRIP.

YiHong, a RIP from mainland China, evidently for older HP printers. Stick with mainstream RIPs.

ZEH Graphics Systems, *NetPlot*. Seems to be exclusively for old XES Xpress plotter, an obsolete and discontinued printer.

Zenographics, *SuperPrint*. Zenographics seems to make software components to be added to a RIP, rather than a complete RIP in and of itself. Zenographics is at the Univ. of California, Irvine, Research Park.

Yikes, more than 70 RIP brands to chose from!
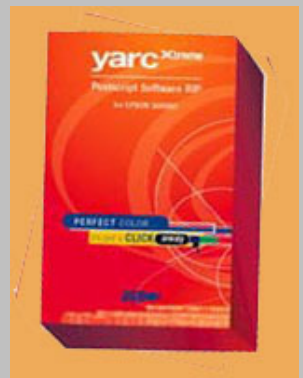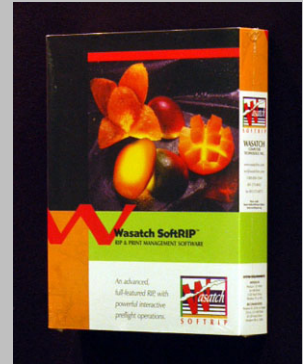
But a dozen of these companies have gone bankrupt, being bought out, or simply disappeared. How do you select a RIP that is likely to survive?

Rather than spending hours, or actually days, trying to figure out what RIP to select, you might as well let FLAAR help you out. We go to all the trade shows in Germany and across the USA. We speak with end-users and ask what they prefer. Plus FLAAR itself has almost a dozen different RIPs in our own facilities. Where possible we have visited the headquarters of the key RIP companies so that we can better judge their capabilities.
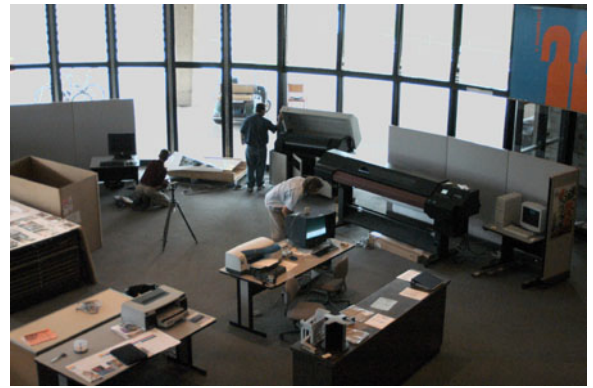
So save yourself lots of hassle, just peruse *RIP+Help*: general introduction: quick-start list of the best RIPs (eliminates all the no-name brands); suggestions for what accessories you need; information of where you can get books and training.

We like PosterJet for ease of use. Does not require any training.

If you need a tad more color management; if you wish a RIP that requires more study, then Wasatch is a good choice.

For our two ColorSpan printers we prefer their own hardware RIP since it works with the quad-black, the 11-color system (quad-black + 7 colors), and with the full 12-color system.

When you contact us, be sure to let us know what you intend to print, whether for home, hobby, business, commercial, or what. And what printer are you considering. Don't worry if you don't yet have your printer, but you do need to indicate which brands you are considering, since not every RIP works on your favored printers.

We have contacts with key people in the various RIP companies so can forward your e-mail if it seems you need additional help. This way you get the FLAAR report from us and then a follow-up from people for know more details, who can answer your questions on the phone, by fax, or e-mail.

Your feedback is encouraged: please send to FLAARtest@aol.com

What did you learn from this report?

Do you know another inventory of RIP software as comprehensive as this?

Was the level of this report ?
       [_] okay for me
       [_] too low, too entry level
       [_] I appreciate entry level info for beginners and intermediate
       [_] too technical

My level of familiarization was (before receiving the reports)

[_] Intermediate
[_] Already had desktop printer
[_] Already had wide format printer
[_] Prepress or other professional
[_] brand new at all this, I want to keep learning

Would you recommend the FLAAR reports to others?
[_] Yes
[_] No (please explain why not) [_____]

How can we improve these reports (realizing that some features are cost and labor intensive for a small institute)?

How would you prefer to receive additional assistance?
[_] all the FLAAR material in a book format so I get it all at once
[_] training via the Internet so I can study at home or at my office
[_] hands-on help by coming to the university and taking a FLAAR course by Nicholas Hellmuth or other pertinent university staff

please select the following areas of which you wish to learn more about.
[_] scanners, scanner software, and scanning to print on inkjet
[_] color management
[_] how to use, tweak, and generate your own ICC color profiles.
[_] RIPs, how to select, how to use, how to integrate with color management
[_] hands-on printing textiles with inkjet printers in the FLAAR facility
[_] digital photography and how to select a digital camera
[_] hands-on using all the FLAAR inkjet printers over a 2-day session, and thereby gaining the knowledge to decide which one to select for your own use in the future
[_] Course in Adobe Photoshop and associated imaging software

Sources and Resources on RIPs

HARPER, Eliot
 2001 RIPs for Ink-Jet Printers: The State of a Large Market. The Seybold Report on Publishing Systems.

NEILSON, Nina, compiler
 2002   Rip-Roarin' RIPs. Digital Graphics, Oct. 2002, p. 42-47.

We did not stop reading in 2002; but not much has been available in 2003 and 2004. FLAAR probably has more publications on RIP software for large format printers than any other source.

www.modrepro.com/pages/issues/1998/97-08/newprod.html (mentions that ICC color profiles were incorporated into RIPs as early as 1997).

www.xs4all.nl/~hmd/rip.html **(a rather long list of RIPs, many no longer in business, but includes some dinosaurs that even Seybold missed.**

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If you intend to quote any portion of a FLAAR review in a PowerPoint presentation, if this is in reference to any product that your company sells or promotes, then it would be appropriate to license the report or otherwise notify us in advance. FLAAR reports are being updated every week sometimes, and our comment on that product may have been revised as we learned more about the product from end users.

How are RIP sponsorships decided?

We usually check out a RIP for between one and three years before we reach a decision of whether this RIP is one which we feel is valid for sponsorship. Sponsorship means the company contributes for the improvements to the FLAAR web sites and covers aspects of the operating overhead. The company gets a logo link to indicate their sponsorship. FLAAR does not accept commissions on sales; actually we have no way of knowing how many RIPs are sold anyway.

The evaluators at Bowling Green State University are not paid by sponsorship funds at all. Actually the FLAAR editor (Nicholas Hellmuth) is not paid by sponsorship funds either (he gets a regular salary as professor).

In some instances we take the pulse of our end-users as a manner of recognizing which RIPs our readers have found to be useful in real-life prepress shops. Where realistic the RIP under consideration is utilized in one of our universities to check out its features. Since we have a dozen RIPs, the best test is to see which RIP the lab manager loads into the system after all the tests are over. So far that has been PosterJet at both universities. Each lab manager is totally independent. They could ask for, or utilize, any RIP they wish to. But they each selected PosterJet because it is the easiest to use and the fastest we have found so far. Hence PosterJet is a logical RIP to feature since it is the one we prefer.

But this could change as our lab crew learn more about additional RIPs. The trend is towards RIPs with color management features. In this realm Wasatch would have potential advantage. Thus you will see new RIPs added because the basis of the overall FLAAR system is to test what products work best for our own internal needs. FLAAR does photography and printing for two museums on our university campus. At the other university we assist the art faculty and students and do basic printing for other departments of the university. In this manner we learn about what it's like at an actual print shop. This practical experience is the forte of the FLAAR system of evaluation.

Where possible we select competing RIPs to provide balance. Thus out of the multitude of proofing RIPs we have selected CGS O.R.I.S. and ProofMaster as featured products; we may add GMG in the future. In technical matters such as this we listen carefully to the professor of color management on our campus. He has a MS degree from Rochester Institute of Technology, so we value his judgments on which RIPs we should write about. As we learn more about other RIPs we may well add new featured products.

Acknowledgements

Advisory

We are quite content with the specific printers, RIPs, inks and media, we have in the two FLAAR facilities at the two universities. However even for us, a product which looks good at a tradeshow, sounds good in the ad literature, and works fine for the first few weeks, may subsequently turn out to be a lemon.

Equally often, what at first might be blamed on a bad product, usually turns out to be a need of more operator experience and training. More often than not, after learning more about the product it becomes possible to produce what it was intended to produce. What at first looks like an inadequate RIP, could equally well be the wrong ink or inappropriate media.

Either way we can't guarantee or certify any make or model because we don't know the conditions under which a RIP software might be utilized in someone else's facility. As a result, products are described "as is" and without warranties as to performance or merchantability, or of fitness for a particular purpose. Any such statements in our reports or on our web sites or in discussions do not constitute warranties and shall not be relied on by the buyer in deciding whether to purchase and/or use products we discuss because of the diversity of conditions, materials and/or equipment under which these products may be used. Thus please recognize that no warranty of fitness for a particular purpose is offered.

The user is advised to test products thoroughly before relying on them. The user must assume the entire risk of using any described hardware, software, accessory, service, technique or other products.

We have no idea of your client's expectations. What students on our campus will accept may not be the same as your Fortune 500 clients. In many cases we have not ourselves used the products but are basing our discussion on having seen them at a tradeshow, during visiting a print shop, or having been informed about a product via e-mail or other communication. Tradeshows are idealized situations, with full-time tech support to keep things running. The same equipment may not work as well in your facility as we, or you, see it at a tradeshow. All the more reason to test before you buy; and keep testing before you make your final payment. Your ultimate protection is to use a gold American Express credit card so you can ask for your money back if the product fails.

Heat, humidity, dust, experience level of your workers (whether they are new or have prior years experience): these are all factors that will differ in your place of business as compared with our two universities.

Actually you may have people with even more experience than we do, since we deliberately use students to approximate newbies. FLAAR is devoted to assisting newcomers learn about digital imaging hardware and software. This is why Nicholas Hellmuth is considered the "Johnny Appleseed" of wide format inkjet printers.

There is no warranty or guarantee that the output of these products will produce salable goods, since we do not know what kind of ink or media you intend to use, nor the needs of your clients. You will most likely need a color management system which implies color measurement tools and software. To handle ICC color profiles, you may need ICC color profile generation software since often the stock pre-packaged ICC color profiles which come with the ink, media, printers and/or RIPs may not work in your situation. Not all RIPs handle color management equally, or may work better for some printer-ink-media combinations than for others.

Be aware that some RIPs can only accept ICC color profiles: you quickly find out the hard way that you can't tweak these profiles nor generate new ones. So be sure to get a RIP which can handle all aspects of color management.

Just remember that every machine has quirks, even the ones we like. However it may be that the specific kind of printing you need to do may never occasion that shortcoming. Or, it may be that your printer was manufactured on a Monday and has defects that are atypical, show up more in the kind of media you use which we may not use as often during our evaluations. Equally possibly a printer that was a disaster for someone else may work flawlessly for you and be a real money maker for your company.

Thus be sure to test a printer under your own specific work conditions before you buy. You absolutely need to do print samples with your own images and the kind provided by your clients: do not rely on the stock photos provided by the printer, ink, media, or RIP manufacturer or reseller. Check with other people in your area, or in the same kind of print business that you do. Don't rely on references from the reseller or manufacturer (you will get their pet locations which may be unrealistically gushy): find someone on your own.

Although we have found several makes and models to work very well in our facilities, how well they work in your facilities may also depend on your local dealer. Some dealers are excellent; others just sell you a box and can't provide much service after the sale. If you pay low-bid price, you can't realistically expect special maintenance services later on. Indeed some low-bid internet sales sources may have no technical backup whatsoever.

Another factor in printer selection is what do your clients want? Some clients refuse to accept anything but output from an Iris or Ixia. Yet others accept the output from an Epson 3000 (probably because they have not seen the output from an Epson 10000). No matter how much you like Printer X, what counts is does it produce output that your clients will pay for and come back for more.

Since your clients may differ from our clients (since we do not print commercially in a normal sense), be sure that you take your own clients' preferences into account.

Most of the readers of the FLAAR Reports look to see what printers we use in our own facilities. Readers realize that we will have selected the printers that we like based on years of experience and research. Indeed we have met people at trade shows who told us they use the FLAAR web site reports as the shopping list for their corporate purchases.

Yes, it is rather self-evident that we would never ask a manufacturer to send a product which we knew in advance from our studies was no good. But there are many printers which are great but we simply do not have them in our facilities. For example we would definitely like to have a Gradco Mammoth (flatbed up to 3 inches). Would like to evaluate an Encad NovaJet 880 to print on thick material (up to half an inch if I remember correctly).

So again the suggestion: be sure to ask around in other print shops, with IT people in other corporations, at your local university or community college. Go to tradeshows….but don't use the booth…ask questions of people in the elevator, in line at the restaurant, anywhere to escape the smothering hype you get in the booth.

Taking into consideration we do not know the conditions in which you may be using your hardware, software, or consumables, neither the author nor FLAAR nor either university is liable for liability, loss or damage caused either directly or indirectly by the suggestions in this report nor by hardware, software, or techniques described herein because.

Reports themselves and this list prepared by Nicholas Hellmuth, FLAAR, sent to you by the staff of the Digital Imaging Resource Center, Francisco Marroquín University.

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