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Convert QuarkXPress files

Perhaps the greatest concern to QuarkXPress users who want to use Adobe® InDesign® is the large store of XPress files on our hard drives. Fortunately, you can convert most of your QuarkXPress files and templates into InDesign documents. In this tutorial, we'll tell you what you need to know to make this feature work for you.

Note that InDesign CS 2 can open QuarkXPress 3.3 and 4.x documents and templates. It can convert documents and templates from multi-language QuarkXPress Passport 3.3 and 4.1x files. (InDesign CS can open QuarkXPress Passport files of the same versions only if they have been saved as single-language files.) QuarkXPress 5 files must be saved backward to QuarkXPress 4 format. Files from XPress 6 are an even bigger hassle: You have to save them as version 5 files, then open them in version 5 and save them down to version 4. (InDesign can also open Adobe PageMaker® 6.5 and 7.0 files as well.)

Although we don't know what Adobe has planned for later versions of InDesign, it would surprise us if they ever update this feature so that it can open files from XPress 5 or later; we think of it as a "limited time opportunity."

Conversion isn't perfect

When InDesign opens a QuarkXPress file, it must do a file translation into the InDesign format. This translation is extremely difficult, partly because Quark hasn't made public their secret and proprietary file format information. (Adobe had to decode it themselves). Plus, InDesign performs a great many page layout functions differently than XPress does, and there are some XPress features which don't exist at all in InDesign—like layout spaces and most of the web features. As with translations between spoken languages, conversions from QuarkXPress aren't flawless. It's our experience that InDesign's conversion can get you about 90 percent of the way there in an "average" document.

All but the most simple XPress documents will likely require some reworking in InDesign. The more design-intensive your pages, the more likely you'll have to do significant cleanup. That said, we also know of cases in which very complex pages converted without any changes whatsoever. On the other hand, we have heard of at least one case of a commercial printer opening a customer's XPress files in InDesign without consulting with the client first (because he wanted to print from InDesign instead)—this is clearly a *really bad* idea.

What translates well

InDesign can read all the paragraph and character styles, master pages, and RGB or CMYK colors in the XPress document (colors other than CMYK and RGB may be an issue, which we'll discuss below). The page geometry (where things are on the page) and XPress-created and linked items will almost always be converted correctly, but proof the files closely for small "glitches," like objects that have moved slightly. Text formatting will usually be converted well, but many line endings may break slightly differently because InDesign uses a different composition engine.

Think "templates"

In our opinion, your best strategy is to think about opening templates rather than files. That is, open template files, or open old XPress documents that you're going to significantly update anyway. Use the conversion process to create new InDesign templates which can be used to produce new projects. Or, if you have files that have elements which are frequently used in many documents, convert those files only as needed. Converting all your legacy QuarkXPress or PageMaker documents into InDesign documents is probably a waste of time.

Even if you only work in InDesign from now on, you'll probably still want to keep a copy of XPress around to open old legacy documents. This is just a harsh reality of publishing—David still keeps an old copy of PageMaker handy to deal with the documents he created in the late 1980s!

Convert QuarkXPress files

Converting a QuarkXPress file is usually as simple as choosing Open from the File menu, and selecting the file (or dragging the file on top of the InDesign application icon). However, there are a few preliminaries that we recommend you follow which usually make the process go smoother.

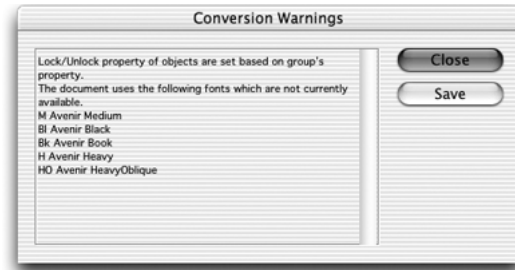
First steps

First, it's a good idea to open your QuarkXPress document in XPress and make sure that all the fonts and graphics are up-to-date. Then, resave and rename the file using the Save As function. These steps generally eliminate InDesign errors which occasionally pop up, such as, "There was an error reading the file," "The document includes one or more broken links to external image files," and even "Cannot convert the document."

The conversion also generally works the best if linked graphics reside on your local hard drive, rather than on a network server or removable disk. Also, objects created by some third-party XPress XTensions may not convert properly (or at all). If you have trouble converting the file, you may have to disable the problem XTension and resave the file from XPress.

The conversion process

When converting a file, InDesign displays a series of messages describing what it's doing. When it finishes, it may display a Conversion Warnings dialog box, which lists objects it had trouble converting and missing resources. However, this isn't necessarily a complete list of everything which didn't convert!



The Conversion Warnings dialog box

Note that opening an XPress file in InDesign takes much longer than simply opening a normal file. The length of time depends entirely on the document's contents, but it's not uncommon for the conversion process to take several minutes per page. This may be a good time to take a break and go get a latté.

Problem areas to look for

Always proof your newly converted document carefully. The following list describes some of the areas which are likely to be the most problematic when converting QuarkXPress files, but it's by no means complete.

Runaround Text wrapping is handled completely differently by each application. It's likely that you'll have to re-apply text wrap to many graphics.

Clipping paths Images that contain clipping paths usually appear correctly in InDesign, but we've found that inexplicably the clipping paths sometimes get messed up in one way or another. Turning the path off and back on again in the Clipping Paths dialog box usually fixes this issue.

Colors RGB, CMYK, and Multi-ink colors should translate just fine. However, if you've defined objects using the Pantone, Trumatch, or Focoltone color libraries, these inks will be converted to CMYK definitions. However, they will still be listed as spot colors and separate on their own spot color plates, so this usually isn't a big problem.

Keyboard shortcuts for styles InDesign uses a smaller number of keyboard shortcuts for character and paragraph styles than QuarkXPress. Those shortcuts which don't fit InDesign's restricted range are dropped (the styles are still there, however).

Colorized images InDesign supports colorizing only black-and-white and grayscale TIFFs. XPress supports colorizing a few other file formats; these lose their coloring.

Nonprinting images Occasionally, some images in a document will become non-printing for no particular reason. You can quickly test to see if this is happening to you by switching into the Preview mode, which hides all non-printing items. The fix is simple: Select the image with the Direct Select tool and turn off the Non-printing checkbox in the Attributes palette.

Special characters and type styles QuarkXPress has a few special characters which don't exist in InDesign. These include the flex space (which is converted to an en space) and the superior style (usually converted to superscript). Bold and italic formatting is only maintained if the true font exists (faux bold or italic will appear on the InDesign page highlighted in pink). Shadow and outline styles aren't supported in InDesign.

Getting help

Adobe has two Support Knowledgebase documents which are helpful for dealing with conversion issues beyond what is covered in this tutorial. Document 331387 lists features which are supported in InDesign and which are not. Documents 326469 and 323158 provide troubleshooting procedures you can follow if conversion fails. These documents are available on the Adobe Support website by searching for these numbers at www.adobe.com/support/main.html.

Other conversion options

Opening an XPress document in InDesign isn't the only way to transfer your assets to your new page-layout program. You may find that it is easier, faster, or more convenient to transfer just parts of the document and rebuild the file in InDesign from scratch. Here are a few things to keep in mind.

You can export your text stories as Microsoft Word files (or Rich Text Format files in XPress for Windows or XPress 6) and import them into InDesign.

We also find it helpful to use XPress's Collect for Output feature to pull together all the graphics in one place, making them easier to import into InDesign.

One of the best ways to repurpose content from XPress or InDesign or any other program is XML. In our opinion, the Avenue.Quark XML tools that ship with QuarkXPress 6 aren't currently particularly useful. However, there are several other Quark XTensions on the market that help you get XML out of XPress, like RoustaboutXT from Apropos Toy & Tool Development (www.attd.com), WebXPress from Gluon (www.gluon.com), and EasyPress from Atomik (www.easypress.com). Once you have XML files in hand, you can import them into InDesign.

Excerpted from "Moving to InDesign: Use What You Know About QuarkXPress and PageMaker to Get Up to Speed in InDesign Fast!" by David Blatner, Christopher Smith and Steve Werner.

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