

Low Budget Chinese DTP As a Side Business

To do... Or not to do...

Disclaimers

- I have no business relationships with any manufacturers in regard with any software products mentioned here.
- The information provided here were mainly based on my personal experience and for information only.
- There is no guarantee whatsoever about the accuracy, completeness, and correctness of the information contained in this presentation.

DTP (Desktop Publishing) -- A Definition

"Producing high quality printed documents such as brochures, flyers, greeting cards, newsletters, etc. using your personal computer."

– <http://netforbeginners.about.com/library/glossary/bldef-desktoppub.htm>

Chinese DTP -- My Definition

- Requests of layout of translated text that can not adequately handled by word processing software, such as Microsoft Word
- Frequently with template(s) available
- Normally without graphic design work involved

To do... Or not to do...

- Probably not, if you can help it. That is,
 - if you are a talented translator who gets enough, or more than enough, translation works; or
 - if you'd rather spend your free time sharpening your translation skills or with your family; or
 - if you hate to see the expensive hardware and software, especially software, you invested sitting there gathering dust and becoming obsolete.

Doing Chinese DTP -- Pros

- Providing fuller service to clients
- Extra income, especially when translation business is slow and/or when you have a team member, such as your SO
- Having the layout done the way you like it -
 - less communications required
- Fun if you like these kinds of detail-oriented works -- can't say I do.

Doing Chinese DTP -- Cons

- Initial capital investment can be substantial
 - Although you may already have a computer system and a good printer, software investment alone can run into thousands of dollars
 - Most of the software required are "professional" software, which are normally expensive and have steep learning curves
 - Constant evolving of technology making it very difficult to stay current and recover the investments

Doing Chinese DTP -- Cons

- Too many new things to learn
 - Basic DTP skills
 - Efficient and Effective use of DTP software
 - Usage of different fonts, their strong and weak points and uniqueness, often learnt by trial-and-error
 - Troubleshooting when in trouble -- program crashing, file corruption, and so on...

Doing Chinese DTP -- Cons

- Lack of experience
 - Infrequent jobs lead to relearning of DTP software every time
 - Vast underestimation of efforts involved lead to unprofitable jobs, unhappy clients, and other difficulties
 - Low quality amateurish works could jeopardize your reputation as a reliable service provider

Whatever You Say... I still want to give it a shot!

- Sure thing
- Rather you compete with other desktop publishers
- Following slides outlined general requirements and procedures

Tools Required -- Hardware

- A decent computer system
 - Macintosh used to be the platform of choice in the DTP field
 - Nowadays, all common DTP software are available on Windows platforms as well, so an separate system may not be necessary
- A larger-than-normal display
 - To show the entire page legibly

Tools Required -- Hardware

- A good laser printer
 - A "tabloid" (11 x 17) printer is not necessary, and probably not warranted

Tools Required -- Software

- High-end page layout applications, such as
 - QuarkXpress
 - Adobe PageMaker
 - Adobe FrameMaker
 - Assorted fonts

Tools Required -- Software

- Illustration and output applications, such as
 - Adobe Illustrator
 - Adobe Acrobat

Chinese DTP -- Two Ways

- Direct
 - QuarkXpress
 - Adobe PageMaker
 - Adobe FrameMaker
- Indirect
 - Adobe Illustrator

Chinese DTP -- Direct Way

- The ideal way to do DTP
 - Working directly in page layout programs
 - Many times templates are available
- Has its shortcomings
 - Software that can handle Chinese are expensive, especially Chinese versions of QuarkXpress
 - Few service bureaus or printing shops can handle native PageMaker or Quark files containing Chinese characters

Chinese DTP -- Indirect Way

- Using Adobe Illustrator to create text blocks, then creating "outlines" of the characters and saving the files as EPS files
 - These files are graphic files containing images of Chinese characters constructed with font curves
 - The files are resolution independent, up to the intrinsic resolutions of the fonts used
 - They can be inserted into almost all page layout programs, which in turn can be used by almost all service bureaus

Chinese DTP -- Indirect Way

- Shortcomings
 - Text formatting capability very limited
 - One page at a time, very tedious
 - In most cases not suitable for large volume of text
 - Reflow of text extremely time-consuming
 - Although the printed result is fine, the on screen quality is poor

Chinese DTP -- Output Options

- Submitting native layout program files, such as PageMaker or Quark documents would be ideal, but the clients, printing shops, and/or service bureaus must be able to handle the files
- PDF files are more portable, yet I have heard of color accuracy complaints

My Setup -- Hardware

- A PowerComputing Mackintosh clone upgraded with a PowerPC G3 400 MHz processor
- A 19" CRT Monitor
- A Lexmark Optra R 1200 dpi b/w laser printer, which has been my workhorse printer for over four years by now

My Setup -- Software

- QuarkXpress, bought a used v3.32, later upgraded to v4
- PageMaker, bought a used v5, later upgraded to v6 and v6.5
- FrameMaker v5.5 for Windows, never put in production
- Illustrator v8.0

My Setup -- Software

- Acrobat 4.0
- Miscellaneous Chinese fonts

Software -- Where to Buy

- Ebay.com is a good place to start. One often can find genuine software for less than half of the retail price
- Asiasoft.com has a good collection of localized software, but they are not cheap!

Conclusion

- Chinese DTP might be a profitable proposition
- Many details involved, which are hard to learn and easy to forget, unless used routinely
- A professional translator might be better off staying away from the temptation of getting his/her hand dirty in the DTP field

Thank you very much!