

by bryan linden

## UltraChrome unchained

Drive your new Epson printer with software that really rips.

**R**ecently at Seybold, San Francisco, I was approached by a very animated Greg Gorman who was excited to tell me about ImagePrint 5.0, a great product he'd been working with that produced fantastic color and stunningly neutral black-and-white prints from his Epson printers. When I see someone as respected and talented as Greg so excited, I know it must be something really special, so I tracked down the software and this is what I found.

ImagePrint 5.0 is a software image RIP (raster image processor) for Windows and Macintosh Platforms (including OS X). For those of you not familiar with RIPs, you can look at this software as a printer driver and job management/spooler program on steroids. It has advanced layout features and can interface with all of Epson's latest seven-color printers including the Epson Stylus Photo 2200 and Epson Stylus Pro 7600 and 9600. ImagePrint may also be purchased for select models from other manufacturers. However, I did not test their products for this review.

I did all tests with the Epson Stylus Photo 2200 and Epson Stylus Pro 7600 using UltraChrome pigment inks running on a Macintosh G4 and OS X v10.2.2. I chose OS X for this review because native OS X drivers for the 7600 are still under development by Epson, and ImagePrint allowed me to print in my native OS immediately. All testing was done using a pre-release version of ImagePrint 5.0 and some features were not quite complete. Windows and OS 9.x versions are currently shipping and the OS X version should be ready by the time this article is in print. The feature set and usage for major functions is identical across platforms.

ImagePrint has several features, many of them unique to this software. Its features include PostScript compatibility, CMYK proofing, preservation of imbedded ICC profiles, advanced step and repeat functions, custom layout templates, regularly expanded output profiles for all Epson media and most major third-party papers, neutral black-and-white printing with the ability to easily apply custom warm or cool tints, and more. ImagePrint supports file types PSD, JPEG, TIFF, EPS, PDF, PostScript III and others.

Until recently, medium- and large-

format printers were beyond the reach of most professional photographers and designers, but with the introduction of Epson's new seven-color printers (2200, 7600, 9600) these amazing machines are well within grasp. The addition of a seventh color, light black (gray), helps provide a solution to the long-standing problem of achieving neutral black-and-white prints with tonality comparable to traditional wet chemical process prints. While the seventh color goes a long way toward making this a reality, there are still some small signs of color casts and slight metamerism



These two scans show an extreme example. The left image was printed with ImagePrint and shows smooth transitions throughout. The image on the right was printed from Epson drivers using a poorly built custom profile that works fine on standard images but fails the test with a more challenging photo. The image on the right shows harsh transitions and improper color reproduction.

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issues in some UltraChrome Ink prints.

Enter ImagePrint 5.0, a solution that not only produces some of the best inkjet prints I've ever seen, but also has cost- and time-saving features that are sure to please. ImagePrint can run on one stand-alone machine or act as a network client/server program across a Windows, Macintosh or mixed environment network. It also has cool features like the ability to create "hot folders" on a system to perform a variety of functions, including automated printing. Just drop an image on a client-side folder and ImagePrint will send to the server and perform whatever task is associated with the folder.

Installation of ImagePrint is straightforward and only took about five minutes, including the restart that was necessary to activate the included USB encryption dongle. Each printer license is valid for as many CPUs as necessary, although each printer on the network will require its own license.

After installation, visit ColorByte's Web site and check out the profile download section. Here you can download extremely high quality profiles for every type of professional media that Epson produces and many for popular third-party media. There are profiles for matte black and photo black ink sets, and for different viewing light, including incandescent, fluorescent and daylight. Here you will also find profiles made specifically for printing black-and-white images from color RGB files that you have to see in action to really appreciate. ColorByte regularly adds new profiles to its library, and I've been told that in some instances they will even build custom profiles for their customers if one doesn't already exist.

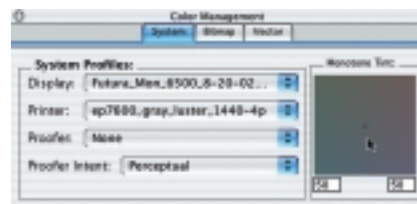
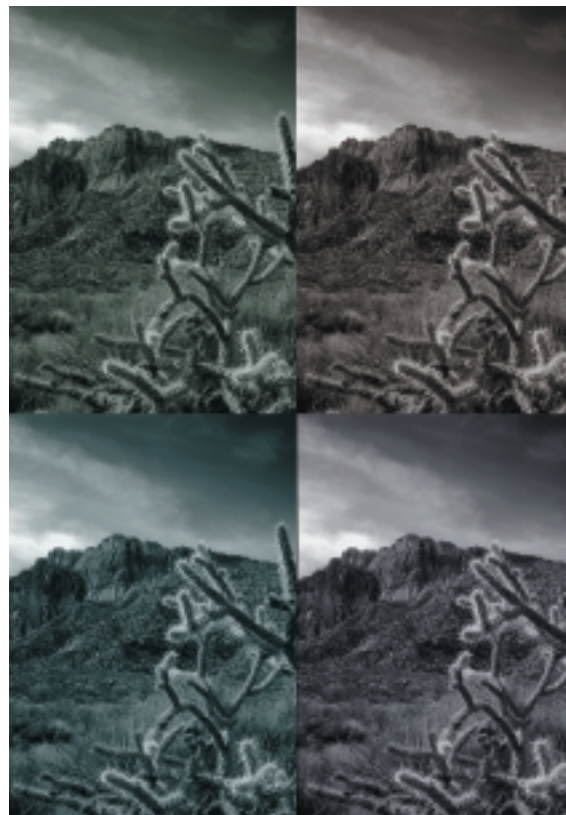
To get up and running quickly you can take a tour of ImagePrint right on ColorByte's Web site ([www.colorbytesoftware.com](http://www.colorbytesoftware.com)). This Flash tour is more tutorial than tour and effectively runs through all of the major features of the software. It's very well done and is something I wish more manufacturers would offer in this age of missing manuals.

The user interface includes useful

tools for laying out jobs quickly, including step and repeat, centering, crop marks, document cropping, scaling, rotation, tiling, full resolution and previewing. There are also tools for adjusting levels, curves, ink limits and more that are applied to output only and do not affect original files. All of the tools work very well and are easy to use, but the interface can stand some improvement. It would be nice to have dockable palettes that could be minimized and expanded, like those found in Photoshop. Many of the layout tools are found in the preferences submenu, which could be more aptly named "layout." An unsharp mask feature would be very handy, as would the ability to use Photoshop-compatible plug-ins, which would reduce having to move back and forth to Photoshop. ColorByte is already working on a solution to print using its drivers directly from OS X applications, including Photoshop, and it already includes this feature in Windows versions.

Among ImagePrint's biggest selling features are its proprietary screening, dithering, micro weave and profile technologies that, in many cases, produce images with more visible detail than other print methods. I made test prints of finely detailed images through my normal managed workflow, Epson's recommended workflow and ImagePrint's workflow, labeling each respectively on the back. In each case, the ImagePrint images revealed the most detail. Color transitions and gradients printed extremely well, too, with no signs of banding or aliasing even among high-contrast and deep-shadow areas.

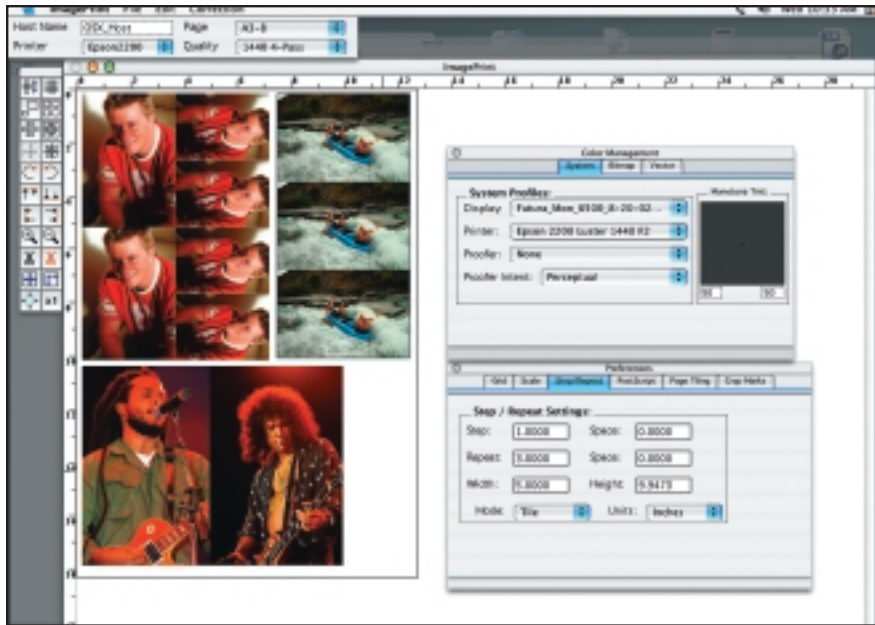
As a color geek, I've never been much of a fan of canned output profiles and have always opted to build my own for optimum results. But I have to admit that ColorByte's profiles are the most accurate canned profiles I've ever used. The results were very consistent among media types (Enhanced Matte, Premium Glossy, Premium Semi Gloss, Premium Luster) and even different printer models. Using ImagePrint profiles can save loads of time for users who build their own profiles, and they provide a cost-saving alternative for



**RGB color photos converted to black and white with ImagePrint and toned using the Monochrome Tint picker**

those who opt to purchase monitor profiling hardware only, instead of monitor/printer profiling packages. You can build output profiles for use with ImagePrint, but it requires printing output targets directly through ImagePrint. Detailed instructions for the process are available through ColorByte.

Producing neutral black-and-white prints with little to no color crossover and reduced metamerism is easy. Just drop an image into ImagePrint, select a gray output profile from the color management menu, and the image instantly converts on screen. This also unlocks the Monochrome Tint picker in the color management window, allowing for subtle toning from warm



Wisely choosing layouts can save media. This example shows the image stepping template being used to place all of my photos in one layout.

to cool. When you're ready to print black-and-white images in this fashion, it's important to pick Gray Pigment as the ink set in the printer setup dialog or you will get results that look more like a film negative. This is necessary because ImagePrint achieves its results from a custom-formulated method of laying down black inks for printing black and white.

Package printing is easy with ImagePrint; step-and-repeat is a breeze and templates are included for many popular page sizes and image sizes. Templates are customizable and come in packageable units. There are also many media-saving layout features that can reduce costly waste.

All printer functions (roll paper handling, borderless printing, cutting, etc.) are supported by ImagePrint, and there are even options with some printer models that aren't normally available, like eight-pass printing for improved detail. I noticed print speed improvement of 10 to 15 percent with ImagePrint using my setup and was told that there may be even more performance boosts coming soon (increases depend on CPU and printer combination).

The included Spool Face application makes job maintenance easy, even with multiple simultaneous jobs on several printers. Spool Face handles all queuing, reprinting, status and maintenance once jobs have been sent to print.

ImagePrint also utilizes outstanding interpolation algorithms that can produce very good results without resizing files in Photoshop. I made prints of several different subjects straight from 6-megapixel files and printed them as large as 24x36 inches. The resulting prints were quite acceptable and RIPed and printed

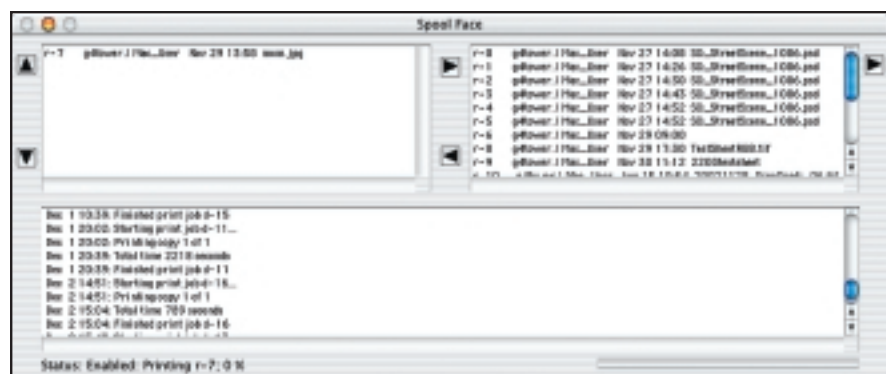
much faster than if the files had been upsized for output. A heavy production environment could save considerable time using ImagePrint.

This software is something that every serious imager ought to take a look at. Its high quality performance and ease of use make it something that can easily give professional labs and their equipment more than a run for the money. For everything from fine art to portrait packages, this software is hard to beat.

"For me it represents a much better [output] answer to some great Epson hardware," Greg tells me. "I think the new Epson printers [2200, 7600, 9600] are extraordinary and have far more capability than even Epson at this point realizes, which is evidenced by this RIP."

For ordering information, pricing or demo versions of the software, contact ColorByte Software ([www.colorbytesoftware.com](http://www.colorbytesoftware.com)). ◀

*Bryan Linden has been capturing digitally since 1993 and has an extensive marketing, design, sales, advertising and printing background. His company, Linden Photography, shoots entertainment, sports, music, commercial and fine art. Linden provides consulting services to manufacturers of imaging technologies on topics such as color management and product development. [www.lindenphoto.net](http://www.lindenphoto.net)*



Spool Face is the job management portion of ImagePrint. The upper left pane shows the current printing job. The upper right pane shows completed jobs and allows for easy reprinting of jobs. The lower pane shows print times and status and serves as the Spool Face log.