

COMMITTEE FOR GRAPHIC ARTS TECHNOLOGIES STANDARDS

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ANSI APPROVES NEW CGATS STANDARD TO SUPPORT VARIABLE DATA PRODUCTION WORKFLOWS

A new industry standard that will make it easier for designers to create and proof variable data jobs, and for printers to produce them, has been approved by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI).

The new document was developed by the ANSI-accredited Committee for Graphic Arts Technologies Standards (CGATS). It is entitled ANSI CGATS.20, *Graphic technology – Variable printing data exchange using PPML and PDF (PPML/VDX)*.

Since the advent of variable data printing, designers and printers have had to deal with an increasing number of jobs that vary the content of a printed piece based on information from a database. Because of the number of participants in these workflows, and the variations in the participants' own installed systems and capabilities, there was a pressing need for an open standard for variable data exchange.

ANSI CGATS.20 gives designers complete control over the final form, content and merged appearance of each piece, even when every page or document is unique. Printers can focus on production, which relieves them of the burden of manipulating databases, performing merges and ensuring the final product contains the correct variable data.

PPML/VDX builds upon the Adobe® Portable Document Format (PDF) and the Personalized Print Mark-up Language (PPML) to create an open standard for variable data exchange. This enables documents that will combine both database information and variable content to be created through a "save as" command in new software products to create variable data print jobs.

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PPML/VDX creates a well-defined verifiable data format that allows designers and printers to exchange final form, variable documents electronically.

A PPML/VDX compliant job includes creative content from current design applications and variable information from common database applications. The standard combines PPML's capabilities for encoding the layout of variable data with the PDF format's openness, reliability and soft-proofing benefits. The use of PPML/VDX will reduce the need for extensive communication between designers and printers.

The standard is intended to respond to the workflow requirements associated with the efficient and reliable exchange of final form data between one or more senders or receivers. The workflows addressed by this standard can differ in their degree of optimization, flexibility, and level of integration.

Because it is recognized that increasing flexibility can lead to the possibility of uncertainty or error in the interpretation of page appearance data as intended by the originator, two conformance levels are identified in the standard to provide a reasonable balance between flexibility and predictability.

The two conformance levels of PPML/VDX accommodate multiple exchange modes (including single file single transfer, multiple file single transfer, and multiple file multiple transfer) while insuring reliable exchange of all data components. The standard is therefore suitable for collaborative authoring workflows where more than one sender may exchange data components of the same job with a receiver, where the receiver can reliably determine when all components of the exchanged job are under their local control.

CGATS is administered by NPES The Association for Suppliers of Printing, Publishing, and Converting Technologies. The standard is available for \$40 from the NPES Publications Department at 1899 Preston White Drive, Reston, Virginia 20191-4367, telephone: 703/264-7200, fax: 703/620-0994, e-mail: orders@npes.org, or online: <http://www.npes.org/standards/orderform.html>. For more information, contact Mary Abbott at 703/ 264-7200, or e-mail mabbott@npes.org.

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