



From the Technology Trenches – Rick Bernauer, Senior Systems Consultant

The basic scanning process is very similar to making a photocopy of a document; however, instead of copying to another piece of paper the photocopy image is stored as a picture, or graphic image, on the computer. Initially, the computer handles the scanned page as a graphic image whether it's a photograph or a page of text. There are many formats that have been devised to save computer graphic files, each with its own strengths. The "extension" of the file is used to denote the different formats. The format you choose will determine the quality and size of the digital file.

JPEG – Joint Photographic Experts Group. The JPEG format supports compression rates of 1/10 or more, but its "lossy" compression removes some color information reducing the quality of the image.

GIF – Graphics Interchange Format. Smallest file size after JPEG format. GIF format supports 8 bits of color information and therefore is best used for images with only a few distinct colors. Commonly used for web graphics.

TIFF – Tagged Image File Format. Commonly used in litigation support software like Summation. The TIFF format supports lossless compression but has the largest file size, also support multi-page format.

BMP – Bit Map. A MS-Windows standard which has fairly small file size but does not have good compression or good quality.

PDF – Portable Document File (Adobe). Many firms have started using Adobe's PDF (Portable Document File) format because it has become a standard for image and document exchange. PDF files can be easily viewed through a free "reader" program available from Adobe but a special piece of software (the "writer") is required to create PDF files.

Next month: Tips on using scanners and OCR.

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