Plugging Plug-ins – Why Third-Party Software Matters

By Michael Peters, Director of Mapsoft

Any professional racing driver will tell you that there's no such thing as too much power. Give them a new, 1000-horsepower engine and after 5 laps, they'll pull into the pits and say: "Great, but can you give me 1100bhp?"

It's just the same with software – especially software that's as versatile as Adobe Acrobat or PageMaker. No matter how powerful, flexible or easy-to-use the application, as soon as users get to grips with it, they'll find it doesn't quite do *exactly* what they want it to. Or they'll want it to be just that bit easier to do a certain function or perhaps be able to batch functions together.

This isn't greed, or customers being niggly – on the contrary, it's actually a compliment that the original application is proving useful. It simply underlines that there's no such thing as the perfect program.

Users will invariably never tell you exactly what they want from the outset. What they *will* tell you is the improvements they want on top of what they already have. And this is where third-party developers and their plug-in products enter the picture.

These developers usually start by being close to the user community for a given application – typically in chat forums and the like. Every so often, users will ask the question: "how can I do this?" or "is there something that can help me do that?" If the question is asked more than once, perhaps there is a gap in the market.

So if a handful of people ask for the ability to be able to mask off an area of a PDF document, to suppress a logo or some kind of sensitive information that they don't want others to see, there's an opportunity to fulfil an emerging need.

It's this kind of situation that saw the founding of Mapsoft. By staying close to the Adobe user community, the company has steadily expanded its range of plug-in products to fulfil functional needs and niches of user groups.

For example, its solutions' family now encompasses *Impress Pro*, a plug-in that enables users to add multiple text stamps to a document either as a watermark below existing text, or above existing text as headers and footers. Other solutions include *MaskIt*, which lets users cover up certain content on a document that may be confidential or commercially sensitive, and *DogEars* – a useful publishing tool which lets users mark pages of interest in a document so they can quickly refer back to them, just like a physical bookmark.

So what should you look for in a third-party developer? Firstly, does the developer have the endorsement of the main vendor's partner programme? This should be considered essential. Mapsoft for example is an Adobe Business Partner and has been developing plug-ins for Adobe products for over 10 years.

Second, how closely tied to the main vendor's products are the third-party developers' products? Ask the question. They should license and use the main vendor's core technology in developing plug-ins, to ensure reliability and glitch-free use. Mapsoft license and use Adobe's own core technology in developing plug-ins and customised products, to ensure reliability and glitch-free use.

Third, can the product be evaluated before buying to ensure it does what users want? If this isn't possible, it can undermine the whole reason for buying the plug-in. Any developer that has confidence in its solutions should offer evaluation versions as a matter of course. (Free evaluation versions of all Mapsoft's plug-ins are available from the Mapsoft web site.)

Finally, can the developer offer user references and ongoing support for the plug-in? This is the acid test to prove that the third-party developer is in it for the long haul. Look for experience and long-term commitment to the sector as

evidence of the developer's credentials. With over 10 years experience in the sector, working with a number of high profile companies such as Network Rail, Xerox and Hallmark Cards, Mapsoft has proven expertise and commitment to deliver high quality products. And all of Mapsoft's software solutions come with one year's free support as standard.

By bearing these points in mind, you can be sure of getting the most effective and reliable plug-ins – plug-ins which will enhance the experience of the main application, speed up routine tasks and add valuable extra features and functionality.

www.mapsoft.com / 01548 856770