by Sam Bennett

Epson
DISCPRODUCER PP-100

The Epson Discproducer PP-100 arrived at my office one fine Friday afternoon. I took it home the same day, with excited thoughts about high-quality disc duplication. I have owned an Epson photo printer for printing pictures from my Nikon DSLRs for some years, so I was previously acquainted with Epson's photo-realistic printing.

When my schedule allowed, I opened the shipping carton which contained the unit, a few blank CDs, 6 ink cartridges and both USB and power cables. The included Quick Start instruction sheet was well thought-out and easy to follow. In short order, I had the Discproducer set up and ready to print with ink cartridges, blank CDs, and appropriate cabling installed according to the provided diagrams. After installing the software from the supplied CD (which also contains a very complete PDF user's manual), I was ready to publish... or so I thought. The PP-100's front panel error light slowly flashed orange, the Epson Total Disc Monitor software informed me that the unit had suffered an, "autoloader error", and the process came to a grinding halt. After I spoke with a very knowledgeable and thorough technical support agent from Epson, we decided that I had received a faulty unit (most likely damaged during the long journey from California to North Carolina). Paul the agent was very helpful and secured a replacement unit for me--shipped next day air, no less. This next day replacement service was not just a "reviewer's courtesy;" according to a few retail websites, Epson offers several levels of extended or expanded warranty service including next day replacement, which can be very important to those users who have deadlines to make and commitments to keep.

When the new unit arrived, I went through the motions once more, installing the software, registering the unit, and creating a disc publishing job. This time, the unit initialized itself successfully, as indicated by the Total Disc Manager software which informed me that, "You can now publish discs." So, without further delay, I started the Epson Total Disc Maker software and began my first attempt to publish a disc with the PP-100.

The software is well laid out and easy to use; anyone who has had previous experience with disc publishing will find themselves in familiar territory. The user interface has three main sections (Disc, Label, and Publish) accessed from three big, friendly buttons at the top of the window. The first section, Disc, allows the user to specify the type of disc to be produced. Available choices include Data DVD, Data CD, Music CD, Music & Data CD, Video CD, and finally, Copy. After selecting one of the above, the software advances automatically to the next tab, where the user can then add content to the compilation.

The next section, Label, provides a clean and simple interface for creating a disc label. There are over 50 included templates to choose from, or the user can design his or her label completely from scratch, importing custom images or logos, and adding text as desired. The final section, Publish, contains three sections of information and settings. The first section is a summary of the data to be written. The second is a preview of the disc label, and the third section allows the user to

choose how the unit outputs discs, and how many copies to make. This section also allows fine tuning the printer settings, although I never found it necessary to make any adjustments there, as the print quality on the provided Taiyo Yuden Water Shield discs was without question the finest on-disc inkjet printing I have ever seen.

During my review period, I published several types of discs including audio and data CDs as well as video and data DVDs. The Discproducer handled all of these disc types with aplomb; I encountered only one problem and that was one of my own making. It seems that the CD-RW drive in my laptop computer is not fast enough to serve as a source drive in the Copy mode; I ended up with a few unusable discs (which were helpfully labeled "Error disc" by the built-in printer.)

In order to successfully complete that duplication job, I had to create an .iso image of the disc, and use that image as the source. After taking this extra step, the unit produced the desired copies flawlessly, with a beautifully printed glossy label, to boot. To be sure, the laptop computer in question did not meet Epson's published minimum hardware requirements, and so I must fault my laptop, rather than the Discproducer for this one (and only) disc writing error. By way of comparison, my desktop computer had no problems with the same publishing job.

The software supports BMP, JPEG, PNG and TIFF image types. Alpha channels are supported with PNG files, so transparent backgrounds are possible. This can add a very professional touch to your church's logo, for example. Also,

the ability to produce discs from standard .iso disc image files gives the Discproducer extended functionality. The user can continue to compile and edit content in their preferred software suite and produce a master .iso image file, which can then be used by Total Disc Maker to publish said content.

Similarly, if the user needs more functionality than provided by the Label section of the software, it is possible to create the label image in another application (such as Adobe's Photoshop) and then import the resulting file into the Epson software for final output. In fact, during my review period the only complaint I had was regarding the software's lack of advanced text manipulation controls. I would have preferred the Label section to have leading, kerning, and tracking controls, but again, the software allows the import of graphic elements produced in other applications, rendering this minor criticism moot.

The unit is well built with a small, squat chassis that resembles a cross between a dorm-room refrigerator and a microwave oven. It is pleasing to look at and fairly quiet in operation (much quieter than some other duplicators I have had to live with before). The unit can hold 100 blank discs of the user's choosing in its 2 input stackers. These can be CDs, DVDs, or both. Completed discs are stored in stacker 4, a sliding tray that allows finished discs to be removed while the publishing process continues uninterrupted. Depending on the length of the disc, music and data CDs can be published in about 2.5 minutes per disc. DVDs take longer to produce due to their increased data storage capabilities. In practice, this usually worked out to

around 9 minutes per disc. The unit will run unattended for a job of 50 discs, after which time the user must remove the completed discs and refill the input stacker(s) with blank media.

The Epson-specified Taiyo Yuden Water Shield discs are more expensive than standard inkjet printable duplication media, but the quality of the printed image proved to be worth the extra cost. To test the Water Shield name, I ran cold water from the kitchen faucet over one of the discs for about a minute, and the image stayed clear and crisp, with no running, smearing or streaking. I cannot be sure if the Epson inks or the Taiyo Yuden discs are responsible for this amazing feat, but I suspect it is a combination of both.

The Total Disc Maker software will estimate how many discs can be printed with the available ink, which is another nice feature. Under what I would consider worst-case circumstances, (a disc label that was fully colored with very little white space) the estimation never went below 500 discs. The estimation went up to over 3000 discs when I designed a label with mostly white space. Combining these two estimates with some pricing information I found on the Internet, I have been able to estimate that it costs somewhere between 70 cents and $1.10 per printed CD or DVD, assuming those discs are the aforementioned Taiyo Yuden Water Shields. While these discs are a bit more expensive than some alternatives, the quality produced by the Epson-Taiyo Yuden combination speaks for itself.

At the risk of repeating myself: the Epson Discproducer PP-100 creates the best looking on-disc inkjet-printed images I have ever seen. I liked the unit so much, that I am paying it the ultimate reviewer's compliment: I'm keeping the review sample. ◆

Sam Bennett is Senior Service Technician at Audio Ethics Inc. He can be reached at sbennett@audioethics.com

DISCPRODUCER PP-100 • BY THE NUMBERS

6	2.5	9	100	50
INK CARTRIDGES PROVIDED	APPROX MINUTES PER DISC	APPROX MINUTES PER DVD	DISCS AT A TIME	INCLUDED LABEL TEMPLATES