at your service: "I let Proteus do the work for me"

"When we were trying to decide which printer to go with," explains Melissa Swanson, communications products program manager for the National Guard Association of the United States, "the fact that Sheridan Magazine Services offers Proteus at no charge was a real perk ... definitely an incentive when stacked up against other printers."

At first glance, Swanson's comment may seem surprising, since her magazine — *National Guard* — doesn't look like the most likely candidate for the publication-planning software. Published monthly, *National Guard* typically comes in at 48 pages plus cover, with about 17 to 20 advertisers per issue — a size some publishers might consider too small to reap much benefit from Proteus.

But Swanson says she knew from the first mention of Proteus that it was just what she needed. "One of the features that really stood out was the ability to keep track of advertisers' position requests," Swanson says. "Some of our advertisers are pretty specific about how close their ads can be to the competition, and I'd been spending extra time reworking the imposition to get it right."

Before adopting Proteus, Swanson created her impositions in Microsoft Word, drawing boxes to represent pages and typing in labels for content and ads. "It was really daunting," Swanson says, "especially working with partial-page ads. I had to do so much tweaking and centering and re-sizing of fonts just to make it legible. And making changes was a nightmare."

These days, she says, she enters advertisers' instructions about competitors into Proteus as soon as she gets their insertion orders and lets the software's built-in conflict-checking ability keep track for her.

"I let Proteus do the work for me, and it's so much less stressful than it used to be," she adds. "We still go through multiple versions as ads come in or stories change, but Proteus has really stream-lined our process. It helps us figure out how much editorial we'll need to complete a section once all the ads are in place. And it shows us where the signature breaks are, so I can tell right away if I'll have to move a story — or design it differently — to keep a spread from falling across a break."

Despite the application's complexity, Swanson says she felt "very comfortable with the basics" after the first day of on-site training, and "ready to really use it" after her first issue. "I don't use all the features," she says, "but what I do use really works for me."

SMS Proteus Support Manager Rebecca Hoeckele says Swanson's experience is pretty typical. "Out of the dozens of customers I've trained, there's not one who uses *all* of the functionality of this powerful tool; each staff will tend to zero in on a different subset of features," she says. "But because there's no charge for the sublicense, the training or the ongoing support, the cost-benefit analysis is a really easy one: If any part of Proteus makes your work less stressful, it's well worth investing the time in training."