

Let's face it, the desktop just ain't what it used to be

Allow me to preface my remarks with belated apologies to Tim Gill, the man who created *QuarkXPress*. In April 1999, in a Seybold Boston show commentary, I wrote some things that he thought were unfair.

Describing his keynote presentation (which would turn out to be his Seybold swan song), I said, "Rather than give us a glimpse of *QuarkXPress* 5... [Gill] took us on a fanciful trip down Vapourware Lane, demonstrating prototypes of dreamy products-to-come-when-ever, with lyrical names like *Wrapture*, *Troika*, *Mirim* and *Cypress*, each having its own elaborately sculpted logo, and none able to make it through its demo without crashing."

Now, that wasn't fair, and I admit it. Gill's influence on the development of the desktop was profound; *QuarkXPress* almost singlehandedly elevated the art of page creation from hobby class to professional status. The least I could have done was to give *Quark* some time and see what would actually transpire.

Well, it's been three years. *QuarkXPress* 5 is finally out. *Troika* aka *avenue.quark*, *QuarkWrapture* and *Mirim* are real products, albeit with profiles as low as *Quark*'s advertising budget. It looks like I was wrong—*Quark* is doing fine. Seems two and a half million users don't mind working with old features and old operating systems.

But really, Tim, what I'm most sorry about is that you're not there any more. In the opinion of many, mine included, the interests of the *QuarkXPress* community

are being served less well in your absence.

So the ideas about the future of core desktop applications which I describe in *The Power of Two*, beginning on page 8, might raise an eyebrow or two—and not just in Denver but in San Jose as well. Yet the speed and versatility of desktop technologies have soared to heights barely imaginable just a decade ago; and with *InDesign* 2 finally ready to face off with *QuarkXPress*, it may be time for the desktop paradigm to shift.

The imagery that can be created today with a program like *Photoshop* on a system costing less than \$3,000 isn't just eye-catching—it's flabbergasting. Just think, ten years ago even a system that sold for a hundred times that price was still only capable of doing a fraction of what can be done with an off-the-shelf personal computer today. And, as Ron Giddings discusses in spectacular form in *The artist's Photoshop*, pages 36-39, version 7 raises the bar again.

As this issue's cover suggests, new interfaces are the key to making these technologies easier to use and more inviting to play with. However, mouthwatering Mac OS X graphics—or even the latest faces of Windows XP—are masking operating machinery that can now effortlessly perform video rendering, upload files, play music, manipulate images, and a great deal more, all at the same time. Mac-based web developers in particular will be smiling ear to ear when they read Bob Connolly's report on OS X and the Web (p14-18), with special attention to Macromedia's new *Flash MX*.



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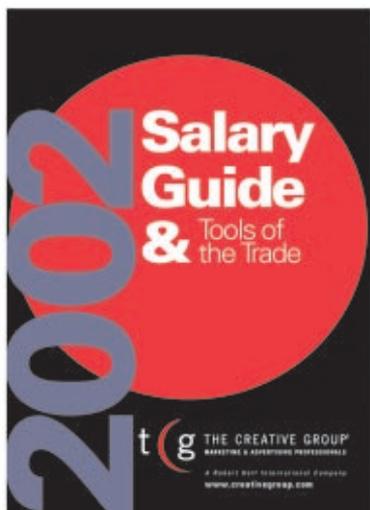


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PUBLISHER'S NOTES

And lest you Windows-based multimedia lovers think we're too highbrow to address what's new in that environment, we include a review of two eye-opening low cost digital video applications sure to make you squeal. Kirby Ferguson doesn't just pay lip service—both *Ulead Media Studio Pro 6.5* and Sonic Foundry's *Vegas Video* look like solid contenders (see p33-35).

Technology may often appear to get too technical, and the phrase “micro electrical-mechanical systems” may seem like a mouthful, but anyone with a taste for the latest computer-to-plate technologies will probably want to keep an eye out for the implementation of MEMS in the next generation of platesetters. As Lerrick Starr details in a special report (*New IntelliSpot may redefine CTP imaging*, p28-29), prepress systems developer Agfa is now working cheek to jowl with a leading HDTV developer, and the result is a new way of imaging press plates that produces a radically different “spot”.

Last but not least, what self-respecting graphics publication could carry a theme like *Face to Face* without including the most fundamental element in print, the typeface? Fortunately for us, Nick Shinn has been busily nosing around in cyberspace, searching out the best type resources available on-line. The fruits of his investigation can be found on pages 22-25 in *Cruisin' for Fonts*.

Yes, the desktop revolution has delivered everything it promised, and more. Even if we still can't completely accept every hardware or software developer's claim at face value, these days (unlike some years ago) we can be more confident that most of what they say is at least possible.

And each new iteration of toolsets and technologies puts more power and capability into the hands of creative content producers, which is where it belongs. The work of artists and designers and photographers and publishers was held for ransom by the printing trade for far too long, but inexpensive microprocessing power and sophisticated software products have made the output of words and pictures in color to paper so much easier, and richer in creative value. Aspiring moviemakers who used to be shut out by the high costs of film production now have digital alternatives. And the Internet has opened up a whole new realm of graphic and multimedia possibilities and challenges.

The technologies themselves have reached safe plateaus of reliability, predictability and affordability. Now the task for users is to convince developers to agree on consistent standards, whether they be cross-platform, cross-application, or cross-planet. And the best way to achieve this is to mouth off every time you see something you don't like. Give them an earful if their software design seems awkward or clunky or unintuitive or just plain laborious. Be cheeky if you need to be. Don't be satisfied with paying for software facelifts with no meaningful improvements. They can't turn a blind eye for long once the money stops coming in.

The new battleground won't revolve around features and functions—it will be about the interfaces and file formats.

And that's coming right from the hertz's mouth. ☺