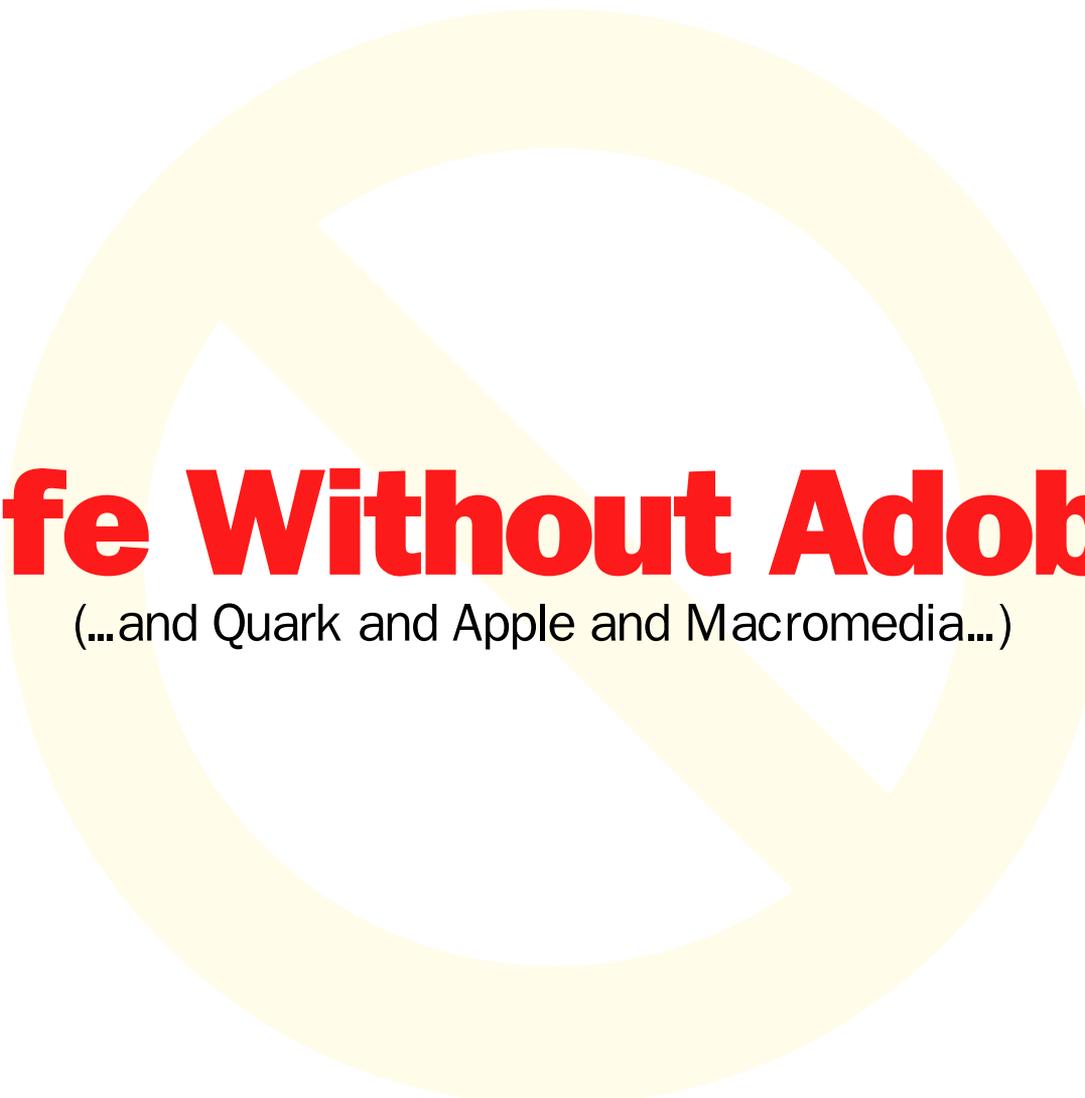


GRAPHIC EXCHANGE



EXPERIENCE

Photoshop 6
Painter 6
Canvas 7
CorelDraw 10
Microsoft Publisher
QuickTime 5
OS X



Life Without Adobe

(...and Quark and Apple and Macromedia...)

B Y K I R B Y F E R G U S O N

IT'S BEEN SAID BEFORE: GRAPHICS PROFESSIONALS CAN BE SNOBS. IF YOU'RE NOT USING DESIGN TOOLS FROM THE LIKES OF ADOBE, QUARK, MACROMEDIA AND APPLE, THERE ARE CERTAIN MEMBERS OF THE CREATIVE ELITE WHO WILL LOOK DOWN THEIR PIERCED NOSES AT YOU. BUT NOT ALL GRAPHICS USERS HAVE MACS, NOT TO MENTION \$3000 TO SPEND ON THE "BIG THREE": QUARK XPRESS AND ADOBE PHOTOSHOP AND ILLUSTRATOR.

Are these people doomed to grind out troublesome, second-rate work? Do pricey, professional tools really help you produce better work, with less fuss? To find out, I took three Windows graphics programs—CorelDraw, Deneba Canvas and Microsoft Publisher (products anyone with a black turtle-neck and blue hair will regard icily)—and put them through their paces on some real-world print publishing tasks.

In the first part of this two-part feature, I'll cover the composition abilities of these programs; in the second, I'll examine their

output features and real-world practicality.

But before we get rolling, a quick word about which Windows you should use. If you want the smoothest, most stable performance possible from these applications, don't use Windows 95, 98 or Me—Windows 2000 is the way to go. Just keep in mind that some older systems with little RAM will actually run faster using Windows 9x. If you haven't upgraded to Windows 2000, it's well worth it for the improvement in performance from applications like these.

CorelDraw has received loads of abuse from the design and prepress community over the years—and for the most part, rightfully so. Cheesy marketing materials, a bargain-bin approach to artwork, outlandishly buggy software, and perhaps most of all, the countless horrifying creations it spawned—all these combined to make CorelDraw one of the least respected ways to create computerized artwork. Using CorelDraw was considered a breach of taste.

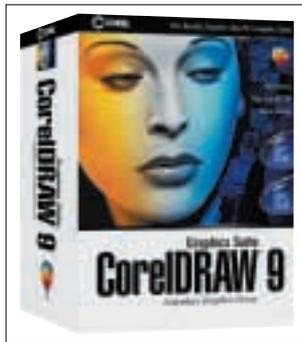
In addition, Draw has traditionally been regarded as “the PC drawing program” (remember, at one time it was the only one) and thus bore the brunt of Mac bigotry. To cement its bad reputation with Mac users, Corel released a really frickin’ bad port of CorelDraw 6, its inglorious Mac debut version.

But despite all the blunders and bad taste, CorelDraw has steadily improved over the years, even releasing a solid version of Draw 8 for the Mac. There can no longer be any doubt—Draw is in the big leagues, and version 10 looks to be the best one yet.

With the noteworthy exception of web publishing, for which it contains only rudimentary tools, the Draw suite covers all the bases: high-end drawing and image editing, web graphics, desktop publishing, font and image management, even autotracing and barcode creation. In spite of being the most expensive package in this roundup, Draw is the best value here, packing in three solid apps: Draw, PhotoPaint and R.A.V.E., a Flash-like vector animation program which has been added to the Draw 10 suite. As well, CorelDraw Suite includes handy utilities like Corel Trace, Bitstream Font Navigator and Canto Cumulus. Draw gives you a very full toolbox, and unlike in the old days, these programs are actually good.

CorelDraw (the program) remains the cornerstone of this suite, and it’s a powerful if somewhat wild ‘n’ wooly program. The latest upgrade is the suite’s most modest update yet, offering small enhancements like PerfectShapes (liberated from Canvas), which lets you instantly create common shapes, and Real Time Preview, which displays objects in—you guessed it—real time, even as you manipulate them. Draw 10 includes many small but crucial usability enhancements which play a crucial part in elevating a graphics program above the competition. I for one applaud Corel on its new restraint and care in upgrades.

Draw is very fast to use. Corel’s often imitated double-click method of transforming objects is quick and powerful. Tasks like transparencies, extrusions and distortions are easily accomplished with interactive tools. You can even adjust tracking and leading with only mouse movements. CorelDraw also features my favourite live shadow tool, allowing you to quickly apply shadows and adjust feathering and transparency with sliders—no digit entering (unless you want to). No other program lets you

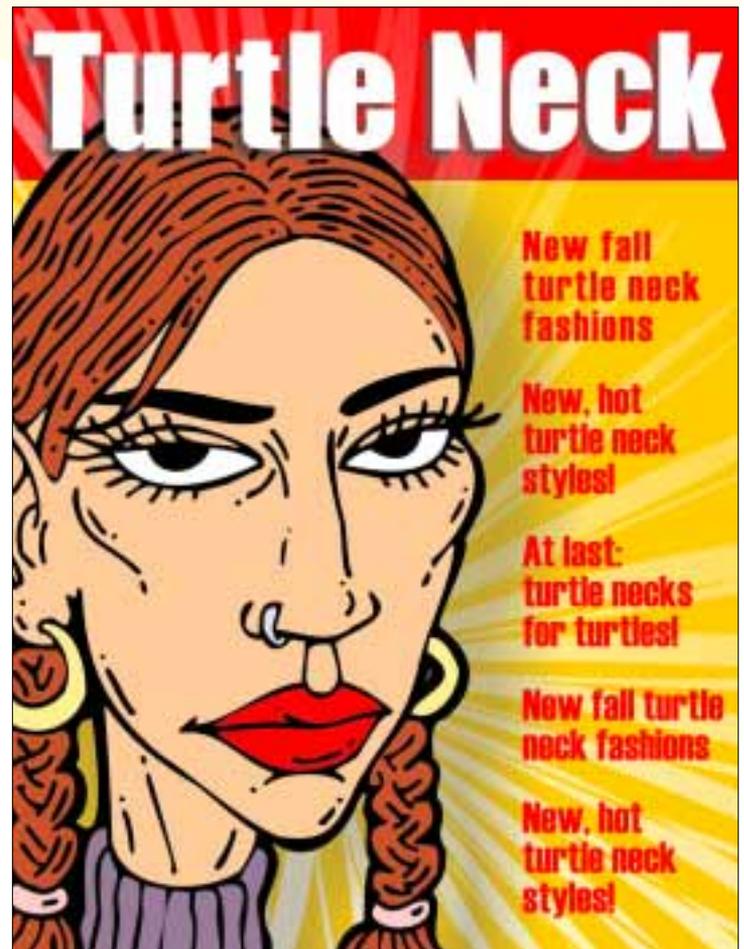


do so much without touching the keyboard.

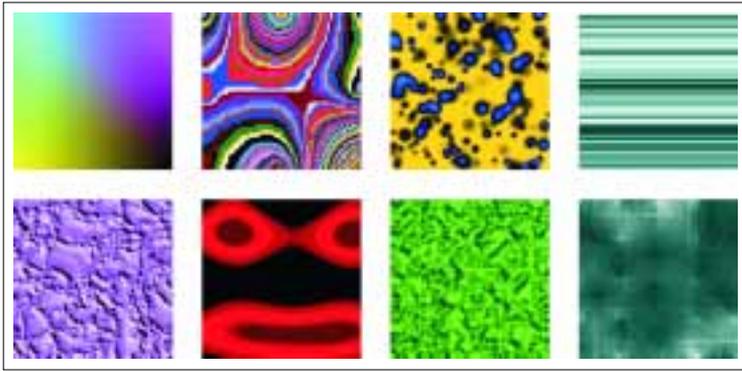
Draw can import just about anything, and can edit vector formats like Adobe Illustrator, although its more elaborate features get lost in translation. Still, Draw’s import capabilities are good enough to handle almost any logo you’ll receive. Thankfully, Corel has long since abandoned its old method of embedding graphics, which made serious publishing work a nightmare.

CorelDraw also boasts excellent integration with its bitmap-editing counterpart, the underrated PhotoPaint. Though a little slower and less elegant than Photoshop, value and power make PhotoPaint an alternative worthy of serious consideration. (It’s also worth pointing out that Photoshop 6’s modified cropping tool is a rip-off of PhotoPaint’s.)

While Draw packs in more features than any other competitor, this is a mixed blessing: it can perform almost any task you conceive of, but the dizzying array of features may leave you



Splashy special effects, like drop shadows and the distorted spiral in the background, are a breeze in Draw. Among the dreck, Draw’s clip art collection has some keepers, like this artsy girl. Happy hunting.



I'm not sure why anyone would use CorelDraw's textures. Besides being of dubious practical value, they're butt-ugly. Canvas's are better, but again, of limited use.

scratching your head. And though Draw is eminently customizable, it offers no options for some of its more fundamental idiosyncrasies. Panning and zooming, for instance, is convoluted and at odds with most other programs; most graphics pros are accustomed to holding the space bar to pan and control-space bar to zoom. I'm sure Draw users are familiar with Corel's method, but this should at least be an alternative in Draw's myriad of options. Dockers are still a nuisance to manage, and Corel has yet to adequately reign in its palette-heavy interface.

The Draw package as a whole desperately needs a designer's touch. The program's splash screens (which sometimes don't even use the Corel logo), presets, tutorials, clipart and fonts are of distressingly unprofessional quality. If Corel wants to appeal to designers, they should start by hiring some. The company's marketing has always looked as if it's done by well-meaning amateurs. And with its odd lingo (Fountain Fills = gradients, Power Clipping = clipping paths; Nodes = Control Points), Draw can alienate you from other graphics programs. I'd like to see Corel ditch this bizarre terminology.

Despite my gripes, CorelDraw is flexible, enormously powerful, and easy-to-use. With the addition of all those MetaCreation's tools to Corel's stable, Draw has some intriguing integration and bundling potential.

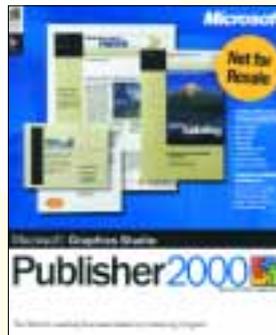
CorelDraw 10 should be available by the time you read this. We'll have a full review next issue.

The budget-minded may be interested in CorelDraw Office Edition, a lower-priced version of the suite which is optimized for corporate users. Office Edition most notably includes Corel's PowerPoint competitor, Presentations, but does lack PhotoPaint.

Curious Mac users should check out CorelDraw LE, a free limited version of Draw you can download from CNet at www.download.cnet.com.

M I C R O S O F T P U B L I S H E R 2 0 0 0

Publisher is the misfit here—it's a little desktop publishing program among graphics behemoths. But its prepress features (which we'll cover in the second part of this story), such as trapping, color separations, and Pantone colors, distinguish it from the rest of the SOHO set. Publisher even includes a measurements palette that draws immediate comparison to Quark and PageMaker. This ain't PageMaker, let alone Quark, but it is a capable low-end print production tool.



The first thing to do after booting up Publisher 2000 is go to Tools>Options and uncheck "Menus show recently used commands first". This is one of Microsoft's more dubious interface enhancements, constantly shuffling and hiding menu selections in a misguided attempt to make things easier.

Whereas Draw and Canvas have a fairly traditional graphics program feeling, Publisher is more like a custom-built Word, with a dash of PageMaker. As such, it's the easiest program here to use, but also the least powerful. Both Draw and Canvas are in another league—and have the price tags to prove it. For its price, though, Publisher is remarkably powerful, offering leading, kerning, Pantone support and image editing abilities.

Publisher has some inventive features that the big boys would do well to lift: design objects let you quickly create labor-intensive bits like calendars and coupons; mail merges are a breeze; the clip art browser is slickly integrated. Publisher also has some handy keyboard shortcuts, such as allowing you to rotate ob-

jects. Best of all, Publisher has a table tool, allowing you to quickly format data. Why doesn't any big league graphics app have this (including Draw or Canvas)?

Publisher's limitations are plentiful too: only one file at a time can be opened; there's no editing of vector files; no gradients; resolution of pictures is difficult to manage. As well, Publisher's interface can be a little tedious. For instance, the cursor changes according to where you are hovering over an object and what action can be performed. This is intuitive, but can require some painfully precise mouse movements.

For good or ill, Publisher is awfully darn helpful. Animated characters and pop-up balloons frequently give advice when you begin using the program. The program is also rife with Wizards,

	1999	2000
January	\$10,000	\$13,000
February	\$8,000	\$9,000
March	\$13,000	\$15,000
April	\$6,000	\$6,500
May	\$10,050	\$11,000
June	\$4,000	\$6,000

Why don't the big boys have this? Li'l Microsoft Publisher has a dandy table tool. I'm envious.

Print

SHE CLICKED ON THE BUTTON

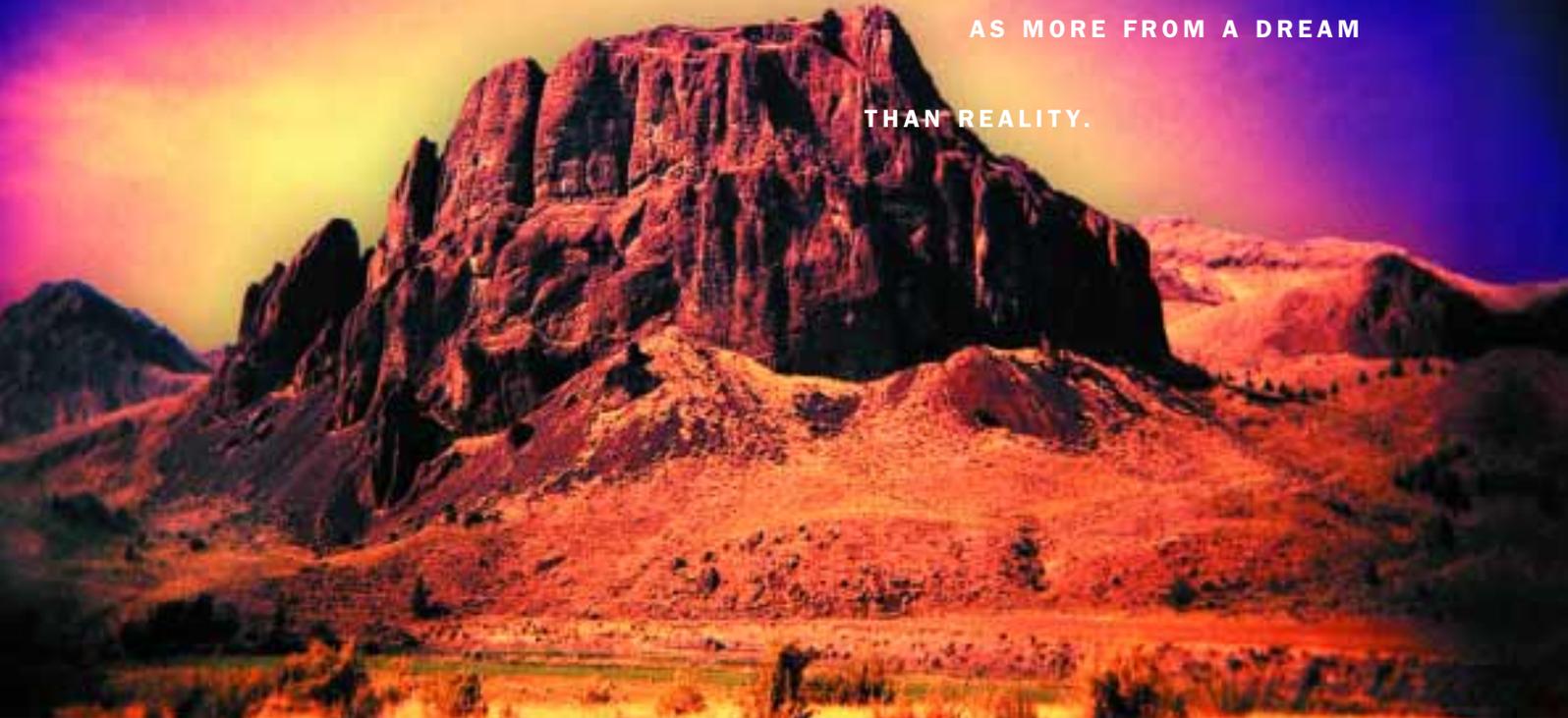
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Design Objects is one of the more handy features in Microsoft Publisher, letting you instantly create things like calendars. Also note the measurement's palette, a nod to Quark and PageMaker.

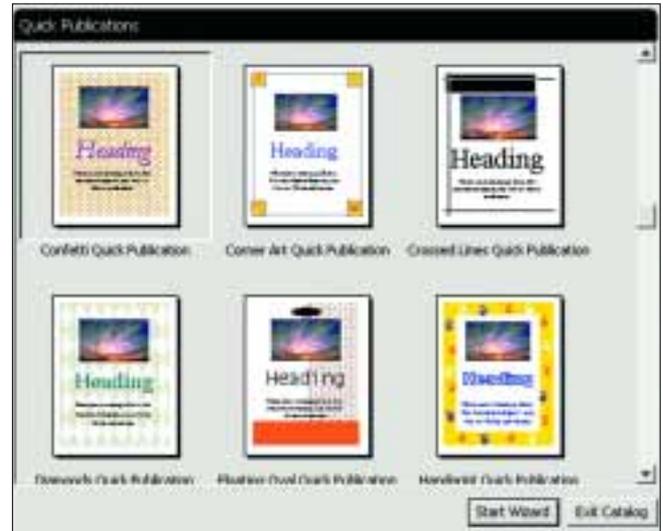
those little straitjackets that anyone vaguely creative will undoubtedly chafe at.

Aesthetically, there are features here that simply shouldn't be touched: Publisher's Word-derived drawing features are of use for only the most primitive sketches; Word Art effects are cheesy; the included templates are at best mediocre. (Sadly, they're better than those in Canvas and Draw.) However, I did find Publisher's collection of clip-art to be the strongest of this pack—surprising, considering that this is the lowest priced program here. The Publisher 2000 package also includes a helpful, if hype-riddled, booklet that tells you not just about the program,

but also about printing and design. Nice.

If you spend most of your day in Office (and I'm guessing most of you don't) Publisher will have an obvious allure. And for illustrators, artists and photographers with little time to spare learning programs, the program is a fast, simple way to produce documents. But if you're in the print industry, Publisher is not really intended for you. For a low-end desktop publishing program, this is a refined package, and surprisingly powerful. But Publisher knows what it is—Word on steroids.

In the second part of this story we'll cover what may be the more interesting facet of Publisher 2000: it's new-found prepress abilities, previously unheard-of in this calibre of application.

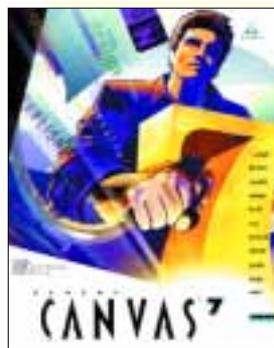


Designers needn't worry about being put out of work by Microsoft Publisher's templates.

D E N E B A C A N V A S 7

While Draw and Publisher have both suffered outright hostility from the print community, Canvas's biggest obstacle has been indifference. Actually, in my eight years in the print and design industry, I've never come across a Canvas image. The program has received a small amount of renown for its CAD-like technical drawing abilities, but has been long overshadowed by Illustrator, FreeHand and even Draw.

Formerly a mid-end vector program competing more with ClarisDraw than Illustrator and FreeHand, with version 5 Canvas became the first graphics product to truly integrate the worlds of vector and raster graphics. These early versions of an all-in-one graphics solution were buggy and slow, but Deneba has consistently improved the program and modern hardware can now better accommodate the program's immense processing requirements. The program has matured to the point where Canvas 7 is a solid product, although the melding of raster and vector images still strikes me as a problematic mix.

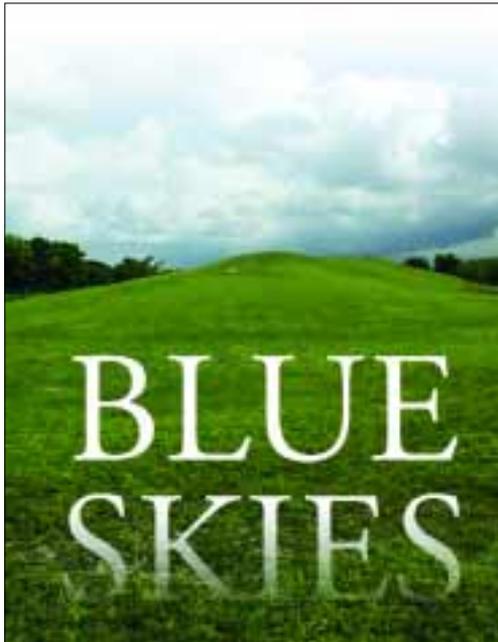


Despite its relatively petite price tag (compared to Illustrator, FreeHand or Draw), Canvas is a professional application, with all the accompanying complexity. In fact, Canvas's interface may be even more chaotic than Draw's; its type panel is particularly convoluted. I can't think of another program with more inexplicable icons than this one. On the up side, Canvas has borrowed liberally from other graphics programs, so when you learn Canvas, you're learning a little of everything. For those of you hoping to one

day graduate to more institutional programs, Canvas is a good way to start learning the ropes.

Despite its interface sprawl, Canvas certainly delivers the DTP goods: it's a very good vector illustration program and a decent image editor and page layout program (though it's not tailored to long-document creation). Canvas is particularly adept at handling transparency, even letting you mask images using soft-edged brushes.

Programs like Draw and Canvas first pioneered advanced fea-



Illustrator stole Canvas's thunder here, but Canvas still handles transparency nicely.

tures like transparency and 3D rendering, but these cool features are always the most troublesome. Same goes for Sprite Effects, one of Canvas's most vaunted recent features. Though now somewhat overshadowed by Illustrator 9's effects capabilities, Sprite Effects are still right on the cutting edge—that means they can be slow to render (especially at print resolutions) and buggy. Use 'em with restraint, and that's a universal suggestion. Besides being visually busy, excessive use of elaborate special effects will slow you to a crawl and increase the chances of you creating an unprintable file.

Like Draw, Canvas imports an amazing array of file formats, albeit sometimes imperfectly. Also like Draw, Canvas successfully imported a Photoshop layered file, with each layer as a separate object. Alas, if you ever receive a Quark file, you're outta luck because the only program other than XPress that opens Quark files is InDesign—and it doesn't do it particularly well.

Despite the intermingling of vectors and rasters in Canvas, these environments are no more alike here than anywhere else.

What we've basically got is two programs operating under one roof, suggesting that integration may not be such a great idea. With its blurring of vectors and rasters, Canvas may also be confusing to some users, since there are still unique issues involved with using either format.

An all-in-one graphics app simply can't compete feature-wise with separate, specialized programs, nor does Canvas purport to. It does a remarkable job of integrating diverse features, but a poor job of coherently presenting them to the user.

As much as I admired Canvas's ambition and features, I simply found it awkward to use. And its overstuffed appearance suggests that this program may be trying to do too much. If you're willing to dive in, Canvas is strong stuff, and a nice introduction to the world of graphics. But elegant it is not, nor does it make a compelling argument for the convenience of using an integrated graphics program.

Still, for those of you who just want to learn one graphics program, Canvas is the only app that does it all.

Those of you on a lean budget may wish to check out Canvas Standard Edition, a feature-limited version of Canvas intended for home users. Unfortunately, Canvas SE is hobbled enough to be considered strictly for output to your own printer.



Sprite effects are Canvas 7's whizziest feature, but use them with caution.

DRAWING CONCLUSIONS

Though these are all feature- and value-packed programs, there are certainly trade-offs in choosing them. Using less established Windows programs means you're going against the grain: the majority of printers and designers are using the Big Three on Macintosh computers, and sooner or later you will have to interact with them. Though high end work can certainly be done with these programs, if you're serious about professional print graphics, Quark/Illustrator/Photoshop on a Mac will simply make your life easier. However, if print graphics represent a smaller portion of your work, these issues begin to dissolve.

As well, there is also a certain amount of roughness in the likes of Canvas, Draw and Publisher that you won't find in the

more battle-tested Big Three. Fit-and-finish aren't quite the same, but such are the perks that come with high price tags.

While Adobe's products maintain the high water mark for usability and integration, and Quark's efficiency as a production tool is unmatched, Canvas, Draw and Publisher are all mature programs that offer good value for specific users. And if you can create it with Quark/Illustrator/Photoshop, you can certainly create it with these programs (except Publisher, maybe).

But can you print it?

In the second part of this story, we'll discuss the more mundane issues of exporting and printing from Draw, Canvas and Publisher. ■

CorelDraw 9

(at press time, Draw 10 was scheduled to ship November 10)

\$US569 for the full version;
 \$US249 for the upgrade Office Edition \$US229;
 \$US149 for the upgrade.

For more information visit www.corel.com

Microsoft Publisher 2000

\$US99 for the full version;
 \$US129 for Publisher Deluxe, which includes Picture It!; Publisher is also included in Microsoft Office Premium

For more information visit www.microsoft.com

Deneba Canvas 7 Professional Edition

\$US375 for the full version; \$199 for the upgrade; Standard Edition \$US99. Electronic versions cost slightly less.

For more information visit www.deneba.com

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