

Can you really do it all in InDesign?

BY LIDKA SCHUCH

Simplicity benefits us all. Whether destined for print or for a monitor, the less complex your final publication, the easier it is to edit and output. And this applies just as much to a design workflow as to a prepress workflow. With fewer programs and fewer file formats, our workflows could be so much more streamlined.

If somebody could give me just two applications—one for drawing and page layout, and another for processing continuous tone images—I would be happy as a lark. And if these programs had an easy way to generate good looking HTML pages for the web and PDFs for use in interactive CD-ROMs and DVDs—all from projects originally created for print—I know I wouldn't ask for more. At least not right away.

Adobe InDesign is approaching the status of an all-purpose application. Lots of bugs were ironed out in version 2.0 and the program got much faster. Most important, you can now draw in InDesign and transport your vector paths safely back to Illustrator just by drag-and-drop or copy-and-paste. You can even generate decent HTML syntax straight from any InDesign document, not to mention export good PDF files. Compare that to Quark's version 5 upgrade!

With all these features in InDesign (and they print smoothly, too!), why are we still using QuarkXPress?

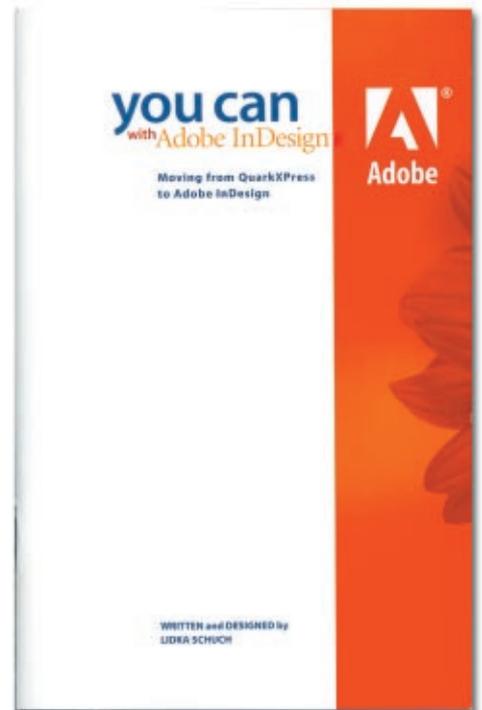
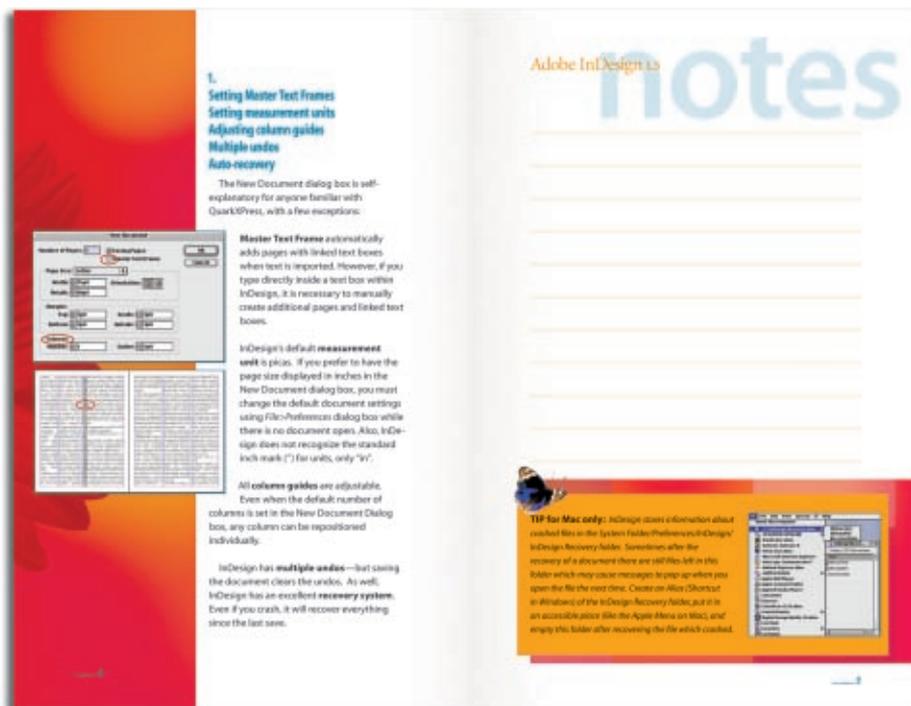
The obvious answer is that layout and prepress people still favor Quark. Why? Because it's so thoroughly entrenched as the de facto standard for print page processing.

So what are you going to do with your InDesign pages? Although the task of taking files from Quark to InDesign is fairly smooth, converting files the other way—from InDesign to Quark—is a tedious and time-consuming chore. It means dissecting the file into its original parts (text stripped of its formatting, graphics and images isolated from the document) and then recreating it, piece by piece, in QuarkXPress. And if the original files weren't built properly (many still don't know a linked graphic from an embedded one), someone just inherited a headache they don't want to deal with.

Or we could all accept PDF as the standard file format for page delivery. That would mean mastering the art of PDF creation, which would make all our printers happy.

Since many graphic designers have been pondering whether or not to switch from QuarkXPress to InDesign, let's look at just ten features that are built into InDesign but are not part of the basic QuarkXPress toolsets. 🍷

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This guide was designed almost entirely in InDesign, including the clipping paths and logos.

1 THE AMAZING EYEDROPPER TOOL

There is no tool in any page layout program that equals InDesign's Eyedropper tool. With the Eyedropper you can pick a color from any placed art or InDesign object and apply it to another object, or to text.

You can also select the text attributes (point size, leading, typeface, etc.) of one piece of text and apply them to another piece of text by selecting it (clicking and dragging) with the loaded Eyedropper.

2 VECTOR DRAWING TOOLS

InDesign includes a full set of vector drawing tools, almost identical to the ones you find in Illustrator or Photoshop. In fact, the path editing tools and previews in InDesign are so accurate, you can easily draw clipping paths right in InDesign. To edit the frame around an image, simply select the image using the direct selection tool (white arrow) and modify the points along the path. You can create compound paths, and you can also copy and paste them to and from Photoshop or Illustrator.

3 PASTING IN PLACE AND DUPLICATING OBJECTS

Paste in Place (in the Edit menu) works just like the standard Paste command except that the object is pasted into the exact coordinates that it was in when it was copied. Paste in Place works on the same page, on another page in the same document, or in a different document altogether.

You can also duplicate an object while moving, rotating or scaling it by holding down the Option key (Mac) or Alt key (Windows).

4 MAKING COLORS

Creating and editing colors and gradients is straightforward in InDesign. To make a new color, use the LAB, CMYK or RGB sliders on the Color palette, or open any swatch library using the Swatch Library command from the Window pulldown menu. To add a new swatch to the Swatches palette, drag it straight into the palette from the Fill or Stroke icon on the Tools or Color palettes.

To edit an existing color, double-click on its name or its swatch to open the Swatch Options dialog box. Colors can be organized simply by dragging their names or swatches around in the Swatches palette.

5 MULTI-COLOR GRADIENTS

Along with the pre-defined gradients included with InDesign, you can easily create your own. The colors then get blended together to create the gradient effect.

You can add colors to the gradient by inserting additional stops. To add a stop, simply click anywhere under the gradient ramp. Once a stop is selected, you can adjust the color of that stop by using the sliders on the Color palette (first select CMYK from the Color palette flyout menu). You can also choose colors for gradient stops by Option-clicking (Mac) or Alt-clicking (Windows) on a color swatch in the Swatches palette. If you don't hold Option or Alt, you will change the object's color to the flat color of the swatch on which you clicked.

6 STROKED TEXT

You can add a stroke to any object, including text. You can also use gradients to fill text, or for stroking any vector object (gradient stroke is unique to InDesign).

7 LINKED TEXT ON A PATH

As in QuarkXPress, you can create type on a path in InDesign. But InDesign allows you to link text paths in the same way you would link normal text frames. Paragraph attributes and styles can also be applied to text on a path. To indent a text path, click and drag the marker on the path where the text begins.

8 TRANSPARENCY, DROP SHADOW

AND FEATHERING

InDesign's Transparency palette is identical to Adobe Illustrator's. All standard blending modes are there, and you can apply transparency or feathering, or add a soft shadow to any object right in InDesign.

9 EXPORT AS HTML

Unlike in QuarkXPress 5, you don't have to destine your document for the Internet use before you even begin to design it. You can export any document as an HTML file and the export options include JPEG and GIF compression controls.

10 MULTIPLE UNDOS AND CRASH

RECOVERY

InDesign has multiple undos—but be careful, because saving your document will clear them.

The program has excellent crash recovery features (it even recovers unsaved changes), but it hides information about crashed files in the System Folder/Preferences/InDesign/InDesign Recovery folder. Empty this folder after recovering a crashed document, or you may get all sorts of strange messages popping up. Since the path to this folder is very long, create an Alias (Shortcut in Windows) for the Recovery folder and put it in an accessible place.