

A view of Windows Vista

With the next generation of Microsoft Windows just around the corner, will it be worth the wait?

BY STEVE JENKINS

The next generation of Windows, officially titled Vista, has been a long time in the making. Its predecessor, Windows XP, first appeared in the public domain in 2001, making the transition almost six years – and that's if Vista makes its scheduled debut!

Although Microsoft has insisted Vista will be unveiled to the public in the first quarter of 2007, the launch has been plagued with problems. Even if that exact date is still open to speculation, when the OS finally does make an appearance, Microsoft assures its waiting consumers that it will have been worth the wait.

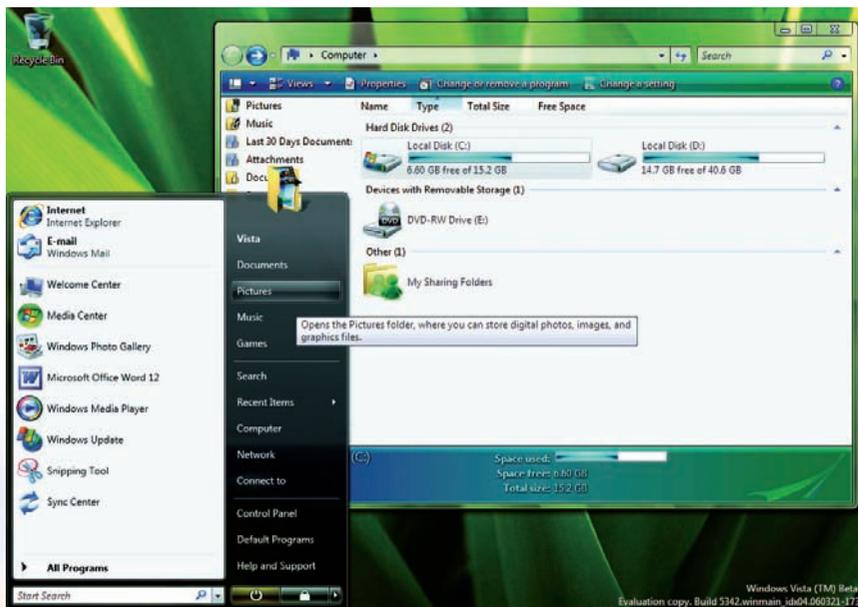
Will Vista prove to be the powerhouse Microsoft claims or will it be a case of 'don't believe the hype'?

Looking good

With several betas and the CPP (Customer Preview Program) available, much of the mystery of Vista has already been dispelled. However, one component that's been gaining plenty of attention is the new user interface.

With the right hardware, the visual sophistication of the new interface can be fully appreciated. Vista introduces glass effects to home and office

ALL GROWN UP: *The vastly improved graphics engine brings with it visual sophistication and the option to make standard Windows elements semi-transparent. The new Start menu finally grows up and becomes a new mature self*





computing, enabling elements such as the title bar and taskbar to become semi-transparent so users can focus on the task of actually using the software. This opacity also allows for users to view underlying content without the inconvenience of having to minimise or close a window. This may be a simple feature but could be worth its weight in gold, improving productivity no end.

Alongside the new UI, the other famous feature of the Windows Desktop – the Start menu – has also been given a major reworking.

The first, most traffic stopping change is that it no longer bears the moniker 'Start'. Sporting simply the Windows flag that brings forth the new improved menu with a single click, the new look Start menu is sure to cause some excitement. The gateway to Windows also now boasts a redesigned layout, giving the menu a far more compact look and feel. The 'My' tag has been removed, with My Documents, My Pictures, My Music, etc simply becoming Documents, Pictures and Music. This rejuvenated menu helps give the impression of a far more grown-up and mature system.

And that's not where the menu updates stop. The cascading All Programs menu system has also been given the boot, and space within the menu is reused to display a sub Contents menu for quicker interaction. In addition, an integrated desktop search known as Instant Search offers the option to find and launch almost any file or program instantly.

Take control

The Control Panel is an essential and central point for modifying the many settings that Windows currently possesses. The new improved Control Panel retains some of the old favourites, but boasts plenty of new additions as well. In fact, there are now a total of 54 Control Panel applets waiting for your attention. 

Get ready for Vista

The appearance of a new OS brings with it one prevailing question. Will my present machine be powerful enough or will I need to upgrade?

History dictates that Microsoft's minimum specs are liberal to say the least. As a general guideline, you'll need to double whatever Microsoft states to gain acceptable performance from the OS. At a quick glance, users will need for a Vista Capable PC, according to guidelines, a modern CPU (Intel, AMD or Via at least 800MHz), 512MB of RAM and a DirectX 9 class graphics processor. For a Vista Premium PC, a 1 GHz processor, 1GB of RAM, 128MB graphics memory plus 15GB of free disk space and a DVD-ROM.

For further assistance you can try the latest beta of The Windows Vista Upgrade Advisor. This is a small application that runs on current Windows XP machines



LOOK FOR THE LOGO: The Windows Vista Capable PC logo will identify the hardware you need



to find out if they are ready for an upgrade to Windows Vista. This can be found at www.microsoft.com/windowsvista/getready/upgradeadvisor/default.mspx.

For replacement PCs, users need to look out for the Windows Vista Capable PC logo which identifies hardware that meets or exceeds the requirements to deliver the Windows Vista core experience. For a better Windows Vista experience, be sure to get a Windows Vista Capable PC that is designated Premium Ready.

BE PREPARED: It's best to play safe and double up on whatever specs Microsoft gives in order to get a reasonable performance from the operating system



ADOBE HAS SUPPORTED MICROSOFT OPERATING SYSTEMS CONSISTENTLY, SO IT'S A NATURAL EVOLUTION FOR US TO SUPPORT VISTA

A NEW BROWSING EXPERIENCE

A big player in the Windows universe and the World Wide Web, Internet Explorer has been given a long overdue overhaul. The latest beta (www.microsoft.com/windows/ie/default.mspx) introduces a sparkling new interface and a host of new features including the much vaunted tabbed browsing. This finally brings it in line with its few competitors (mainly Firefox). Web searching straight from the toolbar, reading and subscription to RSS feeds, and improved support for cascading style sheets (CSS) are also included. The tools menu gives way to the all-new and improved Phishing Filter, which offers Automatic Website Checking to ensure that a site is safe.

Much like the old Control Panel, the Vista version is available in two views – Classic and Category – with the Category view now expanded. Tailoring the look and feel of Vista to suit personal requirements is now within easy reach thanks to the Ease of Use Center. User Accounts and Family Safety provide control over how children access and make use of the PC, as well as giving the option to impose time limits.

CONTROL PANEL: The Control Panel is where the heart of Windows Vista lies and a visit will reveal a host of new improved applets, an amazing 54 in total



Security is an issue that has been at the heart of Windows for many years, and Vista proves to be no different. Microsoft states that its latest OS will be the most secure version of Windows yet. To this end it has included a host of tools and features to prevent unwanted intrusions. Automatic Updates and Windows Security Center can help you keep your PC up to date with the latest security patches, while the improved Windows Vista firewall will help repel hackers, viruses and worms. Windows Defender (already available in beta) helps protect you against spyware and other potentially unwanted software. Plus there is the inclusion of the Malicious Software Removal tool, which scans your PC looking for known prevalent viruses.

Gadgets and Sidebar

Vista is by no means going to be all work and no play, though. A new addition, that Mac OS X and even Google users might have seen the like of before, is Gadgets. Essentially, Gadgets are mini-applications that are web services delivering information to the desktop. These include news updates, weather information and Internet radio streams. These are but the tip of the iceberg though with Gadgets being capable of integrating with installed applications – Media Player, or being standalone apps – Calculator.

Alongside the standard Vista set, further Gadgets can be downloaded from a wide variety of

MINI APPS: Download, install and manage a host of mini applications with the help of the Windows Sidebar and a pool of Gadgets available from developers and manufacturers across the globe



developers. And Microsoft has thought of you if you have too many gadgets to know what to do with. The Windows Sidebar is a panel that resides to the side of the desktop and lets users organise Gadgets for easy access.

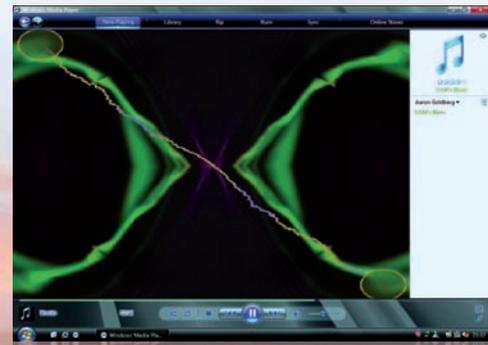
As you might expect from a new Windows OS, Microsoft has included a host of media tools that begin to take Vista beyond a PC operating system. Included is an updated version of Windows Media Player with a new improved interface and all round manageability. Integrated into the player is URGE, a new digital music service from MTV Networks. Vista's own version of Media Center with updated interface makes an appearance making it easier than ever to find, play and manage all your digital entertainment on your PC or TV using a remote control. It's almost like you never had a PC. Alongside the big players there's the updated Movie Maker, now with support for HD video and burning to CD/DVD plus DVD Maker for creating DVD interfaces.

A Photoshopper's paradise?

But what about Photoshop users? Will Vista be a paradise for us, or will we find that like the brand new Intel-powered Macs, Photoshop has not been considered?

As usual, the app giant is being tight-lipped about any forthcoming changes to software to encompass new technology, although one Adobe spokesman

MUSIC: Get to grips with the all new interface of Windows Media Player 11, and take control of your music and video. Plus, expand your music collection with the integrated download service URGE



VISTA HAS JETTISONED MANY A FEATURE TO MAKE ITS RELEASE DATE



"Admittedly we've had to wait a long time for a major upgrade to Microsoft's Windows, but despite that it looks like we won't be disappointed as there's definitely a lot to get excited about in Vista – from the fresh new sophisticated look including desktop gadgets and the 3D Flip view to simplified system management and improved security features."

Stuart Tarrant, Editor – Windows XP Made Easy

did tell us: "We have supported Microsoft operating systems consistently, so it's a natural evolution for us to support Vista. Beyond this, it is Adobe corporate policy to not comment on future versions of our software."

And there's more

Any insight into Vista would not be complete without the mention of the Windows Vista product line-up. This will consist of six versions, two for businesses, three for consumers and one for emerging markets: Windows Vista Business, Windows Vista Enterprise, Windows Vista Home Basic, Windows Vista Home Premium, Windows Vista Ultimate and Windows Vista Starter. The three contenders for the home users are Windows Vista Home Basic, Windows Vista Home Premium and Windows Vista Ultimate. For an in-depth view, head on over to

SUPREME CONTROL: *Take control of access and get peace of mind all in one easy-to-set-up centre. Limit access to undesirable websites, impose time limits and block programs on your machine*



www.microsoft.com/presspass/press/2006/feb06/02-26WinVistaProductsPR.mspx

Vista is expected to hit the streets in Q1 2007. However, much in the tradition of all that is Windows, even this date could prove to be flexible. Originally set to be released in 2005, Vista (codenamed Longhorn) has jettisoned many a feature to make even the '07 date. This includes the recent removal of WinFS, its relational file system once described as one of the pillars of Vista. The recent €497m fine from the European Commission for a 'near-monopoly' of the Windows System hasn't helped matters either.

Microsoft recently said that efforts to improve security in Vista were largely behind the delays. Vista chief Jim Allchin commented, "We're trying to do the responsible thing here." Well, let's hope so, and roll on 2007 when we can finally see the fruits of the software giant's labour – and it had better be good. ■■

PHOTOS: *Browse your carefully arranged photo collection via a selected month or day, or view your highly rated favourites. Give the not-so-good a helping hand with a click of Fix*



INSTANT VISTA ADVICE

The advent of a new OS brings with it plenty of online information, and Microsoft sites among many others can be found in abundance. The main instigator of the latest Vista news and general information lies within the Microsoft site itself.

● Official Windows Vista

www.microsoft.com/windowsvista/default.aspx

This is the starting point from which users can branch out, discover and expand their knowledge of the next generation OS.

Additional official websites that make the grade include:

● Get Ready

www.microsoft.com/windowsvista/getready/default.mspx

This page provides links and insight to Windows Vista Capable PCs, Windows Vista editions, Upgrade Advisor and the Customer Preview Program.

● Windows Vista Community

www.microsoft.com/windowsvista/community/default.mspx

This page includes Vista featured articles, links to popular blogs, up and coming events, newsgroups and community MVPs.

● Windows Marketplace

www.windowsmarketplace.com

Provides a selection of Windows Vista Capable and Premium Ready PCs that are available today.

For an unofficial view of the latest and greatest Microsoft OS, pay a visit to:

● ActiveWin

www.activewin.com

The Active Network is a huge resource that's dedicated to Windows in all shapes and forms. Alongside its dedicated Windows XP section, users will find the Vista section which offers an in-depth guide to the OS.

● Paul Thurrott's SuperSite for Windows

www.winsupersite.com

This site embraces all versions of Windows with FAQs, reviews, Tech Showcases and its own dedicated Windows Vista Activity Centre.

gadgets

When you're stuck at your desk, a cool gadget or funky flash drive can fire up your inspiration

TADO Hero Flashdrive

Price: £64 / \$117.95

Web: www.mimoco.com

You're probably familiar with the work of TADO (www.tado.co.uk). A design company that produces its own cartoon-esque worlds through Photoshop, Illustrator and Flash, Mike and Katie are well-known in the design industry.

Expanding their creative wings further than their illustrations and range of toys takes them, they've now designed a series of flash drives. Imagine tucking your work onto these funky drives – you'd be the envy of the design world! Check out www.mimoco.com, where you'll find designs by lots of artists and the storage goes up to 2GB – not bad. Convenient and portable, these drives are an essential working tool, and with one this design-friendly, you'll never lose it. ■

Rating: **5/5**



Photoshop Shortcut Keyboard

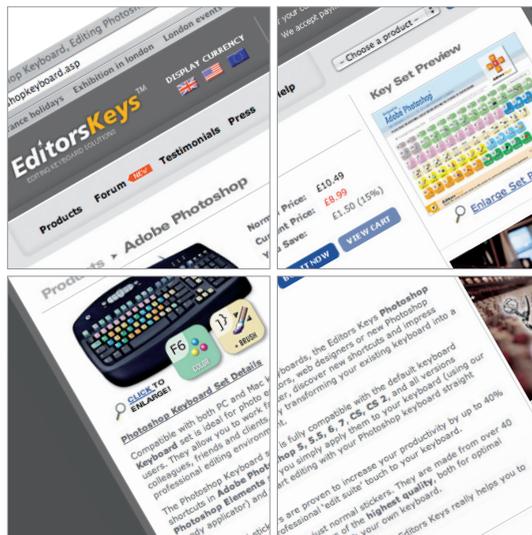
Price: £10.49 / \$18

Web: www.editorskeys.com

Deal for those new to the Adobe app, this gadget is compatible with both PC and Mac keyboards. Allowing you to work faster than ever by giving you easy access to shortcuts, the Photoshop Keyboard is fully compatible with the default shortcuts in Photoshop 5 and above.

Transforming your keyboard couldn't be simpler – just stick and go for a potential increase in your productivity. Although we're not huge fans of keyboard stickers like this, they can be an invaluable resource while you're learning and can be easily disposed of afterwards. ■

Rating: **3/5**



Availabot

Price: TBA

Web: www.avilabot.com

Now this really is a frivolity. As yet only a prototype, the Availabot is designed to make you aware when your instant messaging friends are online. For example, when your mate is online Availabot stands up straight, and when they go offline your desktop buddy drops to the floor.

A purely fun way of showing whether or not your mates are online at any given time, the Availabot has one more trick up its sleeve to ensnare you into buying. It can be made to look like you or your friends! No word yet on when this little gadget is going to be released or how much it's likely to retail for (at time of print), but we reckon unless it's under a tenner, this is one office gadget we can all live without. ■

Rating: **3/5**



High-tech treats

PQI U510

Price: £35 / \$44.99

Web: <http://www.pqimemory.com>

If you thought your flash drive was small, then check out the latest offering to be announced by PQI. The U510 looks set to be the world's slimmest flash drive at just 3mm thick. That's not much bigger than your credit card!

Designed to fit neatly in your wallet or pocket the U510 has a built-in retractable USB connector, works with Macs and Windows, and holds an amazing 16GB of data!

Although the some information remains unobtainable (at time of print) the U510 will be available in iron grey, metallic silver and a football-inspired design. ■

Rating: **4/5**

Logitech Cordless Desktop S530 Laser for Mac

Price: £69.99 / \$127

Web: www.logitech.co.uk

Designed specifically with the stylish white Macs in mind, the new S530 is the ideal companion for your monitor, scanner and printer. Complete with a one-touch button that allows you instant access to your music and photos on a Mac, the Desktop also includes a cordless, ergonomically designed keyboard with extended battery life and a sculpted laser mouse for extra precision. Perfect for those using Photoshop.

Although if you're a PC user this one is definitely not for you, with the USB mini-receiver and stand, this is the perfect package – even if you're designing on the go. ■

Rating: **4/5**

Wacom Graphire4 Classic

Price: £54 / \$99.95

Web: www.wacom-europe.com/uk

Even those put off by some of Wacom's more expensive tablets can't turn their nose up at the Graphire4 range. Starting at just \$99.95 (around £54) the tablet is cheap enough to let you get the feel of the stylus, without feeling like you've spent a fortune.

The Graphire4 Classic has everything you need to get going with a tablet – a working space of around A6 (which is great for enthusiasts, although pros might find this a tad restrictive), 2000 dpi to allow pinpoint accuracy and a pen compartment to store your new cordless and battery-free Wacom pen.

Of all the gadgets you may want, this is one you actually need. ■

Rating: **5/5**

High-tech treats

Logitech MX1000 Laser Cordless Mouse

Price: £49.99 / \$91
Web: www.logitech.com

This was the world's first laser mouse and remains to this day a decent product. With an incredible 20 times more sensitivity to surface detail – or tracking power – than optical, laser can track reliably even on tricky polished or wood-grain surfaces.

The MX1000 also offers some advanced features that will make you more productive and more comfortable, these include the sculpted thumb support and finger grips for enhanced control, tiltable wheel for scrolling sideways and illuminated four level battery indicator. One more plus point is that it's available in two hues – gunmetal silver and onyx black – so no matter what your setup, this will look fab. ■

Rating: 4/5

MacBook

Price: £1028.99 / \$1499
Web: www.apple.com

Do you like to stand out from the crowd? If so your next purchase should be the MacBook black.

We're all used to seeing the white Macs. People on trains rub them in our faces (metaphorically only of course), students show them off in the local parks and TV shows seem to sport more than their fair share. However, they're all white.

The new MacBook from Apple features Intel technology, a screen over 13 inches wide as well as all of a Mac's usual fare, and comes in either traditional white or the bold black. Which will you choose? ■

Rating: 5/5

HP TravelScan 860 Business Card Scanner

Price: £36 / \$67
Web: www.usbgeek.com/prod_detail.php?prod_id=0283

For people who are always meeting new clients, business cards can become more of an annoyance than a resource. However, with this cool little portable scanner from HP, that might all be about to change.

As you get a new card you can simply feed it into the miniature scanner and it's stored directly on your computer. The scanned images can be converted into text using built-in optical character recognition technology, and can be imported directly into Outlook or another client. Costing just £36, you get the black and white scanner, cable, software and carrying case. ■

Rating: 4/5

Pantone Huey

Price: £69.95 / \$127
Web: www.colourconfidence.com

To be able to work to your best, you have to be sure your technology is working to its best too. And what most people can overlook is proper colour calibration for their monitors.

The Pantone Huey is a breakthrough. Able to work with LCD, CRT and laptop screens and compatible with Windows 2000/XP or Macintosh OSX 10.3 and above, Huey is the size of a small marker pen and is the first monitor calibration device to continually adjust a monitor as room lighting changes. With calibration complete in less than three minutes, you'll be left with plenty of time for creativity. ■

Rating: 5/5



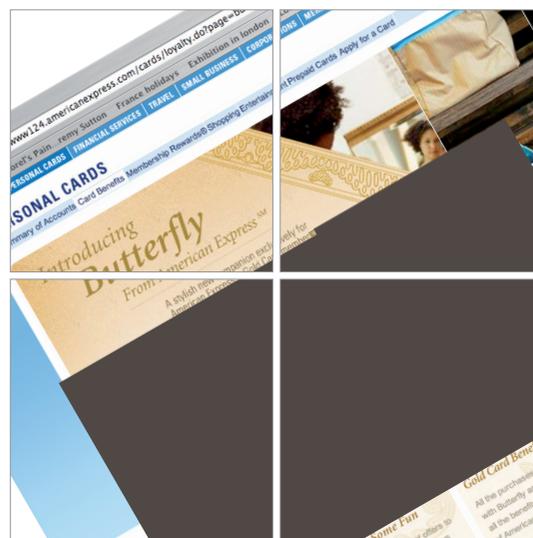
American Express Butterfly

Price: N/A
Web: www.americanexpress.com/uk

If you're starting your own design business, could there be a better way to impress clients than to buy lunch on an American Express? Yes: buy it with the new Butterfly.

Only available to Gold Card holders, the butterfly comes in its own sleek case that can be worn around the neck, but its show-stopping feature is the fact it is jointed to bend in half. The Butterfly, although not available to everyone, is embedded with status and style that means it's sure to turn heads. But a whole host of people wearing their cards round their necks in a recognisable case can mean only one thing. Trouble. ■

Rating: 3/5



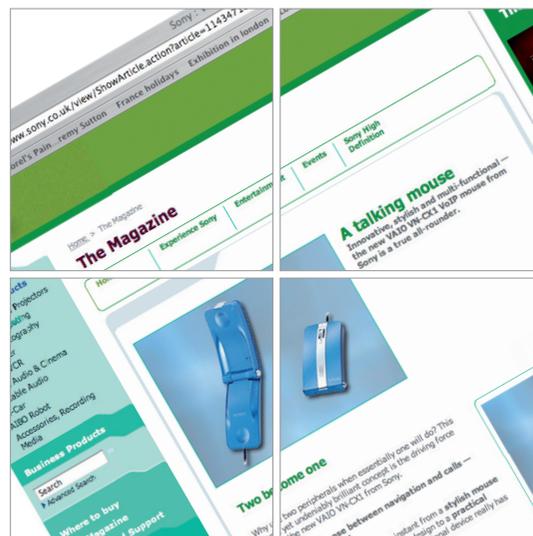
Sony Mouse Phone

Price: £55 / \$100
Web: www.sony.co.uk

If you want decadence, look no further than the Sony VAIO VN-CXI – a mouse and phone in one. If you like the concept, it could be the perfect gadget for a home office.

In mouse mode the VN-CXI is highly responsive, featuring 800dpi resolution that makes navigating files and the Internet a breeze. As an Internet telephone incoming calls are announced by a LED on the mouse or by a ring tone if you prefer and the device opens at the touch of a button to become a handset for hands free or normal calling. Weighing in at just 67g the VN-CXI is available in black, silver or blue, but it's the question that's on everyone's lips we just can't answer. Why? ■

Rating: 4/5



books

Not all books are made equal, so we sort the wheat from the chaff in the digitally obsessed literary world

Artistic Techniques With Adobe Photoshop and Corel Painter

Author: Deborah Lynn Ferro
Publisher: Amherst Media
Price: £21.99 / \$34.95
ISBN: 1584281650
Web: www.amherstmedia.com

If you want to branch out of the realms of Photoshop and explore some new apps then this book is for you. Looking at the way Photoshop works with Corel's Painter, this volume teaches even old hands at 'Shop, new tricks.

From selecting the right hardware and software to make your digital masterpieces to revealing tricks to combine the effects of these two powerful apps, everyone will find something new in this read. Possibly one of the most useful features of this book is its advice on marketing and selling your images. Looking at the advantages of producing limited editions, as well as revealing the must-knows behind pricing, marketing and the media, you'll find it invaluable.

The book however, is severely lacking in photographic presence. Although packed full of step-by-step tutorials on how to create images within both apps, the lack of visuals makes the techniques harder to follow and ultimately uninspiring. A few more photographs and a few less words would make all the difference to this book.



Moan over – as a whole the volume will teach you some essential tools to combine the power of Corel and Adobe to create collages, painterly effects, pencil sketches, watercolours and more.

Top notch for a tenner, but for over 20 pounds you might feel a little disappointed. ■

Rating: **3/5**

3D Game Textures: Create Professional Game Art Using Photoshop

Author: Luke Ahearn
Publisher: Focal Press
Price: £29.99 / \$54
ISBN: 0240807685
Web: www.focalpress.com

It's no surprise to learn that a lot of Photoshoppers are also gaming and Internet enthusiasts. Spending most of our time locked onto the computer for one reason or another, it's great to know we can create what we're looking at.

3D Textures teaches you how to create professional-looking videogame textures with step-by-step tutorials. Also focusing on teaching you the most efficient workflow critical for game development, this is not a book that speaks down to you.

Using just Photoshop the book explores the skills needed to create grungy urban settings or rich fantasy worlds. From start to finish the volume looks at the research behind the games, to creating effective bullet holes, blood splatters and blast marks.

Written by Luke Ahearn, a professional game developer with more than 13 years' experience in the business, this is not a read for Photoshop beginners. Ahearn was involved in the production of *Dead Reckoning* and *America's Army* as well as having a hand in the backgrounds of some of EA's biggest titles. If the thought of learning from the best isn't enough to make



you want to part with your hard-earned cash, the CD-ROM extra might just be. Packed full of everything you'll need to get started developing your own game textures, the CD is the perfect accompaniment to a great book. ■

Rating: **5/5**

Further reading

The Book Of Digital Photography

Author: Chris George
Publisher: Ilex
Price: £20 / \$36
ISBN: 9781904705857
Web: www.ilex-press.com

Available from August, *The Book Of Digital Photography* is described by its publishers as "its most ambitious single volume photography title to date" and after taking a look at it we'd have to agree.

Anyone trying their hand at being a snapper will love this book. Looking at everything from depth of field to focal length, lighting and shutter speed to all aspects of manipulation. Because of the breadth of subjects, some aspects are skimmed over that should be explored further, but for people with a good basic knowledge, this is a fantastic book. ■

Rating: **4/5**

From Guttenberg To Opentype

Author: Robin Dodd
Publisher: Ilex
Price: £19.99 / \$36
ISBN: 1904705774
Web: www.ilex-press.com

An informative and comprehensive history of type from the earliest markmaking to the present day, this book is a must-have for anyone working closely with typefaces.

A beautifully designed and laid out read, the 400 images to 192-page ratio certainly gets our approval. Starting with the beginning of the written word, to the introduction of printing, this volume really sets the scene. Once we get to the modern day the book focuses on specific typefaces and where they originated, looking at how they are still used today. A little samey after a while, especially if you have no real interest in the area, although if you're looking for a new font for your site this might help out. ■

Rating: **3/5**

Automating Photoshop To Get Twice The Work Done In Half The Time

Author: Matt Kloskowski
Publisher: Peachpit Press
Price: £24.99 / \$45
ISBN: 0321441656
Web: www.peachpit.com

This book reveals all the tricks, tips and techniques behind automating Adobe Photoshop to save time and effort.

Written by Matt Kloskowski, education and curriculum developer for the National Association of Photoshop Professionals (NAPP), the book can help you master Photoshop's powerful tools, and leave you wondering how you ever got along without them. This guide will also show you hidden actions and automation gems that are already loaded when you install Photoshop CS2 – if you want to increase your speed, and get twice the work done with half the headaches, this is the book for you. ■

Rating: **4/5**

websites

Whether you want some Photoshop community, advice, tutorials or inspiration, you'll find it all on the web

Photoshop User

Web: www.photoshopuser.com

Run by the National Association of Photoshop Professionals (NAPP), Photoshop User is the place for training, education and news on Adobe's finest app.

Although you have to become a member to enjoy the full benefits of the site, those benefits are numerous. From all the latest news on the Photoshop Expo to getting money off of hardware, software and the like, or being able to showcase your work on their online portfolio and receiving the *Photoshop User* magazine, the list is comprehensive.

However, membership does come at a cost and that isn't cheap. Starting from \$99 the membership will allow you access to Photoshop TV but you might find you can get similar benefits elsewhere and for less money. ■

Rating: **4/5**



Photoshop Café

Web: www.photoshopcafe.com

Providing visitors with access to all things Photoshop, the Café is a great place to visit. From online forums to discuss your 'Shop woes, to some fantastic tutorials provided by imaging experts, it's all here under one roof.

Created originally by Colin Smith, the site has grown to become a one-stop resource shop for image editors of all persuasions, including coverage of new features of CS2, competitions, book reviews and lots of useful links to Photoshop inspiration across the web.

A particularly fine feature on the website is the tips page. Whether you want to know how to create custom gradients easily or how to create a composite layer, this site covers it all. Well worth a visit next time you're online. ■

Rating: **5/5**



Planet Photoshop

Web: www.planetphotoshop.com

If you want to chat to fellow Photoshoppers about web design, advanced techniques or just the basics, there's few finer places than within the Planet Photoshop forums.

Although the community is still fairly small, it's friendly and you'll start seeing lots of familiar faces. But that's not all this site has to offer. Tutorials on the site cover a host of subjects – photography, effects, text, web and so on – and the tip of the day is a really nice feature.

If you're based in the US the most useful function will be the events listings, which is a handy feature to help you see what's going on near you. For those based elsewhere in the world, the resources tab brings up a page of useful links – making a specific Photoshop search much easier. ■

Rating: **4/5**



What's on the web

Photoshop Support

Web: www.photoshopsupport.com

Finding a site that provides you with access to great brushes, plug-ins and offers can begin to seem like a challenge once you've trawled through the net a few hundred times.

If you haven't yet found Photoshop Support though, you should pop over there soon, as this fantastic site provides you with opportunity to purchase many apps at a discount, as well as providing a host of brush and plug-in downloads.

Other resources found on the site include Flash and Dreamweaver tutorials as well as a photo and Hard Drive recovery centre – providing lots of advice and support. Easy to navigate and a good source of inspiration. ■

Rating: **5/5**

Photoshop Killer Tips

Web: www.photoshoppkillertips.com

Produced by the NAPP, this site provides visitors with access to an abundance of Photoshop tips to make creating Actions, batch processing, Histogram updates and more, easy.

Subscribe to the site for free and get the tips delivered straight to your Video iPod or iTunes player (iTunes version 6 or higher only), so no matter where you are you won't miss out on the top tips.

Although other resources on the site are thin on the ground – there's just a handful of links and the archived tips – the hints themselves are well worth a look to improve your Photoshopping abilities. ■

Rating: **4/5**

Photoshop Contest

Web: www.photoshopcontest.com

We're only too aware from our own forum (www.advancedphotoshop.co.uk) that you lot just aren't happy unless you're being creative. And you're even happier when being creative also means being really competitive!

Photoshop Contest hosts all the competitions one person could need. There's a daily one to test your skills as well as long-term contests to give you some extra thinking time. You can also take a look through the site's past winners in order to get some inspiration.

And that's not all. With tutorials, forums, news, galleries and more, this is one site that's sure to hold your interest for more than just a moment. Highly recommended. ■

Rating: **4/5**