

Desktop publishing package

Adobe FrameMaker 7.0 beta

Adobe FrameMaker's legendary status in the DTP (desktop publishing) world is undisputed, but does it have much of a future? The recent aggressive promotion of stablemate InDesign has prompted some to question Adobe's continued commitment to the venerable DTP giant. While the appearance of FrameMaker 7.0 doesn't give the program the backing it deserves, what's on the inside provides answers for many of the doubters.

A new leaf

FrameMaker's importance in publishing markets – particularly the book and medical journal field – was established a decade ago through its powerful indexing and long document management features. This upgrade attempts to maintain the program's following by extending its appeal into fresh areas.

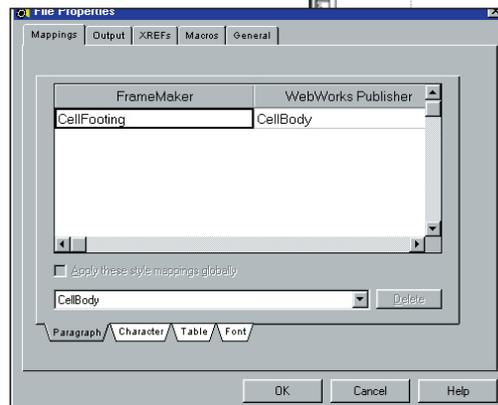
The significant upgrade in version 7.0 lies in the program's enhanced support for two structured markup languages, XML (extensible markup language) and SGML (standard generalised markup language), which allow documents to be easily repurposed for different media. XML allows a document designed for print to be easily recreated for web output without affecting its structure. SGML support isn't new to FrameMaker – version 6.0 offered it via an expensive add-on – but its incorporation into the main body of the program is a significant boost to the program's affordability, particularly if you're thinking about switching to structured output.

Thanks to the growing importance of cross-media publishing, support for such structured output is appearing in DTP applications, including InDesign and QuarkXPress. However, neither offer the range or power of FrameMaker, which can now open and save XML natively. You choose between structured or unstructured authoring when you first launch the program, but you can switch between them.

XML-based document creation has always been seen as complicated, but FrameMaker removes much of that mystery.

→ FrameMaker's appearance is a little dated compared to stablemate InDesign

↓ Document characteristics can be easily remapped on export



It parses XML so it appears onscreen in Wysiwyg (what you see is what you get) format, while you see an overview of the XML content in Structure view in a separate window, with XML validated as you go.

Export rules

The program's HTML (hypertext markup language) and XML export options are enhanced through the bundled WebWorks Publisher Standard Edition. WebWorks allows you to map document formats to specific XML or HTML tags, with cascading stylesheets and hyperlinks seamlessly retained during conversion. Microsoft's eBook and Palm's Reader formats have been added as export options and you can now export SVG (scalable vector graphics) images with your documents, whether they are destined for print or the web.

As a cross-platform output format, PDF (portable document format) is as important as XML, so you get a bundled copy of Acrobat Distiller and extended PDF authoring support. This allows you to create tagged PDFs, which reflow according to the capabilities of the reading device.

Like other Adobe products, FrameMaker 7.0 is now WebDAV (web-based distributed authoring and versioning) capable, which

means you can collaborate more easily over the internet, but that will offer little solace to those in FrameMaker's traditional print constituency who will have to make do with more limited usability enhancements. This includes the ability to freely reorder customised master pages and tie them to particular page elements.

Long-awaited features such as multiple undos are still missing from FrameMaker and the interface is virtually untouched. It's now beginning to look positively ancient alongside the common look and feel shared by most other Adobe products.

Verdict

For long document creation there's still nothing that can touch FrameMaker. And if you're involved in XML-based content creation, version 7.0 offers an affordable entry point. For others there is precious little to get excited about. ■

Tom Gorham

Adobe FrameMaker 7.0 beta

System requirements: Pentium processor; Windows 98/2000/Me/NT 4.0/XP; 64MB RAM; 150MB hard disk space.

Adobe: 020 8606 4000

Website: www.adobe.co.uk

Price: £580 (estimated), upgrade £250

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Ease of use								7			
Features								7			
Value for money								7			
Overall								7			

File management software

Ontrack PowerDesk Pro 5.0

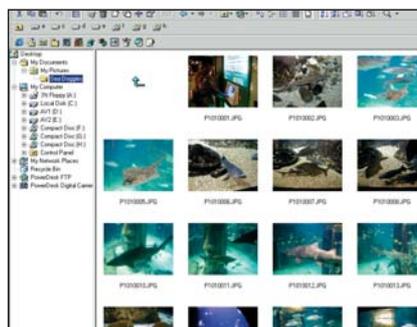
Many utilities and programs that are supposedly designed to make our PC-working lives easier have a knack of doing the exact opposite, over-complicating what should be fairly straightforward tasks. So it's nice to see a product like PowerDesk that genuinely makes the day-to-day process of using Windows a lot simpler and much more productive.

The standard version of PowerDesk often comes as a bonus add-on to some of Ontrack's more heavyweight utilities, such as SystemSuite. It's always been a handy application to have installed on your system, and this Pro version has plenty of extra features that add to its usefulness.

Effectively, PowerDesk is a replacement for Windows Explorer. If you've ever tried to track down an elusive document, digital photo or MP3 file using the operating system's standard tools, then you'll know just how frustrating it can be. PowerDesk includes a built-in viewer pane, so that you can actually see files as you browse through them on your hard disk.

PowerDesk 5.0 Pro supports a myriad of different file types, including all the most popular word processing and graphics formats, so you won't have to trawl through misleading filenames again. If your virtual filing cabinet is really messy, then you can use colourcoded icons to differentiate between certain folders and even annotate files to make them easier to identify.

Easily accessible from the main interface are tools for zipping up your files so that they take up less disk space, or encrypting them to keep them safe from prying eyes. New features in this version include some excellent organisational utilities aimed directly at digital camera owners and people who use their PCs to store digital music.



↑ Take control of your hard disk once and for all with this easy-to-use utility, PowerDesk 5.0 Pro

Ontrack PowerDesk Pro 5.0

System requirements: 486 or Pentium processor; Windows 95 or above; 32MB RAM; 40MB hard disk space.

Ontrack: 00800 1012 1314
Website: www.ontrack.co.uk
Price: £25

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Ease of use										9	
Features										9	
Value for money										9	
Overall										9	

Verdict

PowerDesk 5.0 Pro is what many PC owners have been waiting for – the chance to really get to grips with the contents of their hard disks. ■

James Bennet

Antivirus software

Kaspersky AntiVirus Personal Pro 4.0

Those helpful Russians at Kaspersky Labs have been protecting our PCs from viruses since 1997. However, the company's products have a reputation for user interfaces that are about as self-explanatory as a tax return form.



↑ An impressive virus scanner, Kaspersky can be a bit pricey to upgrade

This Personal Pro edition features some enhancements over the standard version in the form of a behaviour blocker and integrity checker. The behaviour blocker can sniff out macro-virus action while the integrity checker keeps tabs on files, ensuring they don't get corrupted.

Disappointingly the interface is still too complicated. But beneath the initially confusing interface lies a very powerful virus scanner. Not only can you schedule standard and custom scans, there's a script blocker and heuristic analysis for detecting unknown viruses. The email scanning, however, only really integrates with Microsoft Outlook; it will scan the databases of other email clients, such as Eudora and Netscape, after the mail has been downloaded to your hard drive.

Like Norton and McAfee, purchasing Kaspersky entitles you to a year's worth of updates, after which you have to pay a subscription fee. In this case, it works out as a 30 percent discount at the time of upgrade – about £35. This is almost four times the price of Norton, which allows you to purchase a subscription for updates to just the virus definition files.

Verdict

Once you get over the confusing interface, Kaspersky AntiVirus is a very powerful virus scanner. If you opt for the downloadable version you can save yourself £3.49 over the cost of the boxed version, but overall the comparatively high price of subscription renewal is off-putting. ■

Niall Magennis

Kaspersky AntiVirus Personal Pro 4.0

System requirements: Pentium processor; Windows 95/98/Me/2000/NT 4.0/XP; 32MB RAM; 25MB hard disk space.

Kaspersky: 0870 011 3461
Website: www.kaspersky.com
Price: £50

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Ease of use						5					
Features									8		
Value for money							6				
Overall									7		

Music sequencing software

Emagic Logic Audio Platinum 5.0



There are few music tracks released these days that haven't gone through a PC at some stage of the production process, and the software installed on those computers is usually either Steinberg's Cubase VST or Emagic's Logic Audio. Both companies have been fighting it out in the music sequencing market since the Atari ST days, and neither has yet won. With this upgrade to Logic Audio, Emagic is hoping to steal a march on its rival.

Logic Audio Platinum is the top-of-the-range product in Emagic's sequencing portfolio. Essentially the software allows you to record audio and midi (musical instruments digital interface) information and then edit and arrange those recordings into a final composition.

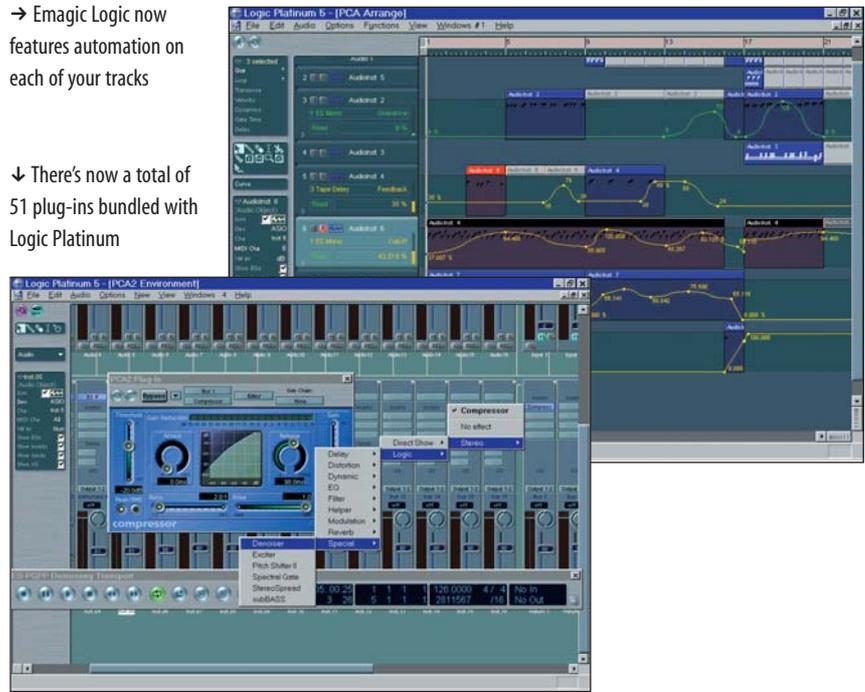
The reason Cubase and Logic became so popular is that they take a very visual approach to both the editing and arranging process. In fact, both packages take such a similar tack that the two companies have always battled to outdo each other with the sheer number of features offered. However, this release of Logic makes some fundamental changes.

On the right track

Emagic has rejigged the automation system so that it now takes a much simpler, track-based approach. Automation is very important in a midi sequencer because it allows you to control different elements of your arrangement, from simple fade-outs at the end of a track to complex gating 'stutter' effects.

→ Emagic Logic now features automation on each of your tracks

↓ There's now a total of 51 plug-ins bundled with Logic Platinum



In previous versions of Logic you had to change to the Hyper Edit window in order to create controller curves. In Platinum 5.0 you can now do this directly on each track in the main arrangement window. Although it sounds like a minor change, it has a huge impact on how you approach arrangements. It's now easy to create controller data, so you can play with effects to alter or delay times or reverb settings over the course of a track.

The new master

Emagic has upped the mastering muscle of Logic, so you can produce a final cut of your tune that's fit for sending straight to the mastering house. This additional power comes courtesy of a whole heap of mastering plug-ins. The DeEsser removes harsh 'ss' and 'cch' sounds from vocal tracks, the Denoiser cleans up dodgy recordings and a Multi Band compressor called the Multipressor tightens up your mix. Other new mastering plug-ins include a Limiter and Adaptive Limiter for boosting the overall volume of your finished master and a tool for broadening stereo width.

However, plug-ins aren't just limited to mastering. There's three new software

synths and plenty of track-based effects bringing the total number of plug-ins shipped with Logic Audio Platinum to 51. Other improvements include the ability to import Rex 2.0 files from Steinberg's Recycle software and an overhaul for the software's audio engine which means it's now capable of playing back up to 192 tracks of 24bit/96kHz audio.

The only down side with this release is that some VSTi (virtual studio technology instrument) plug-ins from third-party software houses still don't function correctly. However, this is perhaps more to do with sloppy programming on the part of the VSTi developers than a major fault in Logic.

Verdict

With Logic 5.0, Emagic has introduced new features that benefit the average user. The addition of the track-based automation is so good that Steinberg is looking to include it in its forthcoming update to Cubase. But for now, Logic users can feel smug in the knowledge that Emagic is once again leading the way in the midi sequencing world. ■

Niall Magennis

Emagic Logic Audio Platinum 5.0

System requirements: 500MHz Pentium III processor; Windows 98/Me/2000/XP; 128MB RAM.

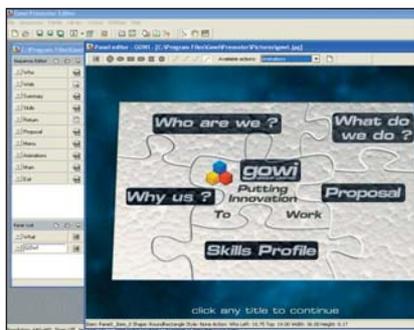
Soundtech: 01462 480 000
Website: www.soundtech.co.uk
Price: £552

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Ease of use								7			
Features										9	
Value for money									8		
Overall										9	

Multimedia presentation software

Gowi Presenter Professional 1.12

Gowi Presenter Professional is a multimedia authoring tool for creating business presentations. However, it lacks both the flexibility of high-end products like Macromedia Director and the accessibility of entry-level competitors, such as Microsoft PowerPoint.



↑ Presenter Professional's sequenced panels can contain navigation elements that add interactivity to a presentation

The application is divided into an Editor and a Player. The Editor is used for creating presentations by combining multimedia objects together. It supports Microsoft Excel and PowerPoint formats as well as image, video and sound files. Each presentation has a Main Sequence, which is initiated when the file starts. This can contain interactive controls for launching other sequences.

Presenter Professional stores multimedia files in an Object Library which can be dragged and dropped into a sequence. However, there are no time controls associated with sequences, so it's impossible to know how long your presentation will last. The Object Library also contains commands in Gowi's proprietary scripting language. These can be used to make a presentation interactive by adding controls to sequenced 'panels'. Each panel can hold up to 80 buttons.

Presentations are stored in Presenter Professional's own format. Although there's an export control, in practice the file didn't export correctly. There's also no choice of destination file type.

Getting used to Presenter Professional is frustrating, as the online help only provides an overview of the product. If you're prepared to spend more money on top of the asking price of £250, Gowi also offers a £50-a-year maintenance plan. A £500 update to the product, version 2.0, is expected soon.

Verdict

Presenter's tools need to give more control. The limited online help means that if you really want impressive results, you'll have to consider investing in the additional, and costly, maintenance plan. ■

Maggie Williams

Gowi Presenter Professional 1.12

System requirements: 233MHz Pentium II; Windows 98/Me/NT 4.0/2000/XP; 64MB RAM; 15MB hard disk space.

Gowi Group: 0870 727 4433

Website: www.gowigroup.co.uk

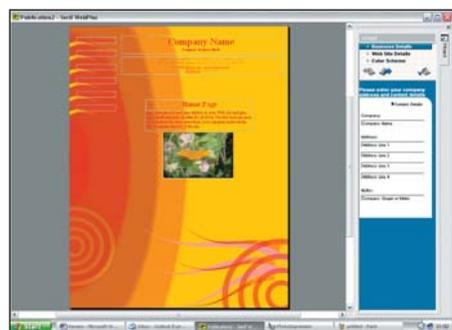
Price: £250, plus £50 pa for maintenance

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Ease of use						5					
Features						6					
Value for money						6					
Overall						6					

Web design software

Serif Internet Design Suite

Internet Design Suite wraps up three titles, providing everything you need to take your first steps into the world of web design. At the heart is WebPlus



↑ WebPlus 7.0, the core of Serif's Internet Design Suite, provides a simple and easy way to build an internet presence

7.0, the current version of Serif's

web-design package, plus PhotoPlus 6.0 and 3DPlus 2.0 for photo editing and 3D design (both programs supplied are a version behind the current release).

Internet Design Suite has plenty of features that are aimed solely at the novice. There are logo creation wizards, tables and calendars plus over 100 templates that will get your website set up quickly and easily. You can store favourite objects in the portfolio section or access ready-made objects and animations from the gallery. There's also a studio bar, providing fast access to colours, artwork and fonts.

Despite being aimed at beginners WebPlus 7.0 offers the latest internet technology, including gradient fills, multimedia support, custom HTML (hypertext markup language) and JavaScript editing, with full support for HTML 4.0. The built-in layer checker allows you to spot and automatically fix design problems and automated FTP (file transfer protocol) support provides a simple way to upload your pages.

If you're used to DTP (desktop publishing) packages, creating a web page is easy, whether you use the templates to get going or start from scratch. PhotoPlus 6.0 is a fairly sophisticated photo-editing package and, although it may be a little complicated for first-time users, it's a program you could grow into. 3DPlus 2.0 is fun to play with and, although its use may be limited, it's still a good bonus.

Verdict

Internet Design Suite gives amateurs a flying start in web publishing. It enables novices to deliver a sophisticated web presence in record time. At just over £40, the bundle offers good value for money. ■

Louisa Verth

Serif Internet Design Suite

System requirements: IBM-compatible PC; Windows 98/Me/NT/2000/XP; 32MB RAM; 128MB hard disk space.

Serif: 0115 914 2000

Website: www.serif.com

Price: £43

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Ease of use								7			
Features								7			
Value for money								8			
Overall								7			