

Adobe Illustrator 10.0 beta

Illustration software

PC ADVISOR In its mix of new features and unexpected extras, Adobe Illustrator 10.0 looks set to blur the line between web designers and creators. This beta version of Adobe's vector-editing application features all the expected internet design tools, wrapped in the familiar Adobe interface.

Slice of cake

Important but predictable web additions include a slicing feature, which allows illustrations to be split into smaller elements. This offers a more precise layout of web pages and faster download times. Just about every other illustration program, including Illustrator's sister program Photoshop, already boasts this feature, but its implementation here is surprisingly sophisticated.

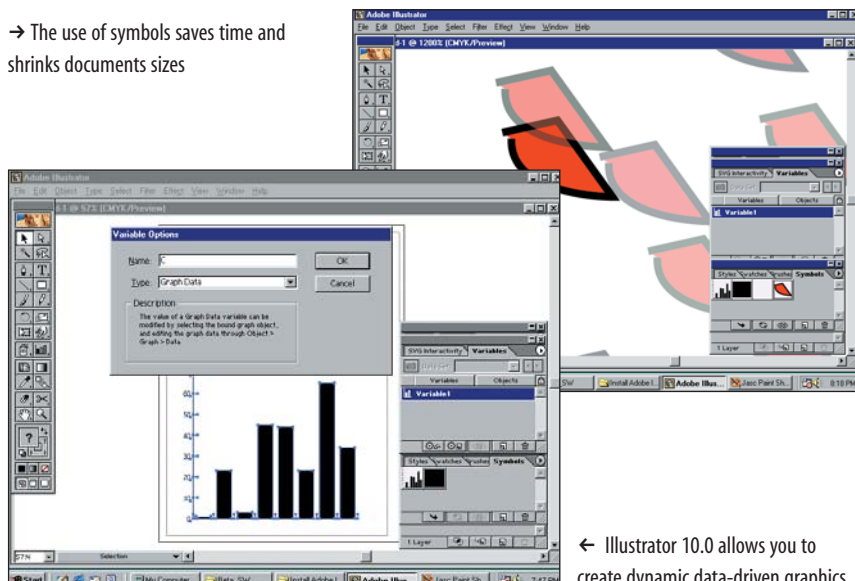
Not only can you specify the format and level of compression of each slice – ideal if your page contains discrete elements that would benefit from differing compression types – but you can also create object-based slices, which update automatically as a design evolves.

Simply select an object in your illustration and create a slice from the program's Object menu. Each slice is numbered and the slices change automatically as you alter the design. While the numbering and slice guides can be intrusive during the design process, you can elect to hide them in the same way as you hide other Illustrator guides.

Even layered objects can be sliced, thanks to Illustrator's support for CSS (cascading style sheets). This means that you can create web-ready images with overlapping layers, containing different text or graphics based on a web browser's own language or platform settings.

Elsewhere, changes have a significant – albeit not exclusive – web slant. There will be undoubted grousing about the continued absence of some interactive elements, such as rollover tools. But compensation has arrived in the form of native SVG (scalable vector graphics)

→ The use of symbols saves time and shrinks documents sizes



← Illustrator 10.0 allows you to create dynamic data-driven graphics

support – which allows you to open and save files in this increasingly popular Adobe file format, as well as improved support for Flash export.

Chart action

Illustrator has long been the choice for graphics designers who want to create complex charts and Version 10.0 takes this a step further. You can embed variables into objects and graphs and link these to a script – Illustrator supports JavaScript and Visual Basic. Alternatively, you can link it to an ODBC (open database connectivity) compliant database, which supplies dynamic data for the variables.

Of course, there are a limited number of designers versed in esoteric scripting languages. Thankfully, Illustrator 10.0 adds a host of other additions to its feature spec that will appeal to a broader range of users. These include a set of easy-to-use distortion tools – you can now bend, twist and warp placed images and objects while retaining full editing control.

Illustrator 10.0 also provides an array of tools for creating and amending symbols, which can be created from any object and added to a Symbol palette. A Symbol Sprayer tool duplicates the selected symbol throughout the document. Although every instance of a symbol can have unique properties – such as size,

transparency and colour – each will still reference the original symbol. This means you can quickly edit multiple instances of the symbol just by changing the original. An important benefit is that it streamlines file sizes – further good news for Illustrator's booming core web design market.

Verdict

Even ignoring the data-crunching features, Adobe Illustrator 10.0 is emerging as a powerful web tool in its own right. While many of the program's new features will appeal only to web designers, this upgrade will further extend the appeal of the program into new professional markets. ■

Tom Gorham

Adobe Illustrator 10.0 beta

System requirements: Pentium II or better; Windows 98/Me/2000/XP; 128MB RAM; 180MB hard disk space.

Adobe: 020 8606 4000

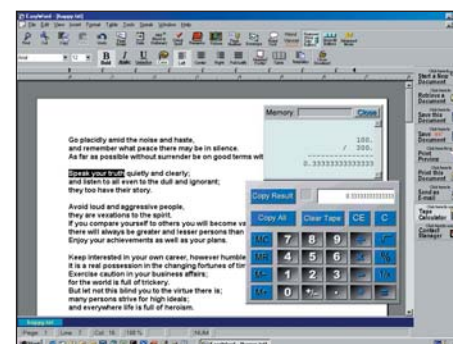
Website: www.adobe.com

Price: TBA

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

EasyOffice Premium

Office suite



↑ The larger toolbar buttons and integrated calculator can make life simpler in EasyWord

certainly feels easy to use with program toolbars that are, by default, large, colourful and self-explanatory. An advanced toolbar mode is available for a more traditional look.

So what comprises EasyOffice Premium and how does it shape up against the Microsoft competition? First, there's EasyWord, a fully featured word processor that is Word-compatible, comes with an integrated, searchable contacts manager and allows you to create PDF documents – although a patch was needed to create multipage PDFs.

On a powerful PC, EasyWord's built-in speech recognition also worked smoothly. It incorporates voice commands plus read-back of spelling mistakes or entire documents – a feature absent in the pre-XP version of Microsoft Office.

Next up is EasySpreadsheet, which replicates most of the main functions in Excel, but excludes advanced features such as pivot tables and macro support. There's also EasyPresentation, for template-based slideshow presentations, a very basic web page creator and a straightforward money program called Easy Bookkeeper. EasyOffice even comes with a bar coding program and its own zip utility, but no relational database software.

Verdict

Each program within EasyOffice Premium may not be as fully featured as its Microsoft Office counterpart, but this suite has some nifty additions together with enough power for new users who place an emphasis on ease of use and value for money. ■

Jalal Werfalli

EasyOffice Premium

System requirements: 200MHz Pentium; Windows 9x/Me/2000/NT 4.0; 32MB RAM; 60-300MB hard disk space.

Series 4 Ltd: 023 8086 6377

Website: www.e-press.com

Price: £29.95

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

Illuminatus Opus Pro

Multimedia authoring software

A raft of improvements have been added to Illuminatus Opus Pro, firmly targeting it at the experienced yet budget-minded user. It offers a comprehensive range of features



↑ Opus Pro offers plenty of good ideas

including text, graphics, audio, video and animation for the production of professional-looking websites, presentations and screensavers. These can be published to CD-ROM, the internet or floppy disk.

Those already familiar with the Illuminatus interface will be pleased to see that it has changed little from the basic Opus version (see *PC Advisor*, August 2001, page 82). It's still intuitive, simple and includes an extra CD containing a vast library of royalty-free resources to help you on your way.

To target it at the high-end market a few extras are present. In addition to Opus Pro's extensive prewritten actions for objects, there is now even more scope for customisation through the inclusion of the software's own scripting language – OpusScript. Although this means learning the syntax of this script, it should be familiar as it is based on JavaScript.

The other major addition is database support via ODBC (open database connectivity) drivers, which lets developers link a database into a web page so users can access large amounts of information – such as product catalogues or location lists. It also allows data to be written to a database from within the publication – building a database of usernames and passwords, for example.

A resource manager allows you to easily update, move and delete resources in a publication. Other useful features are collision detection, advanced vectors, multiframe objects and rollover frames.

Verdict

Illuminatus Opus Pro is a comprehensive and easy-to-use package that is capable of some complex results. The database support along with a reasonable price tag will be attractive to SME businesses. ■

Steve Palmer

Illuminatus Opus Pro

System requirements: Pentium 166MHz; Windows 95/98/Me/2000/NT 4.0; 32MB RAM; 20MB hard disk space.

Illuminatus: 0870 120 2186

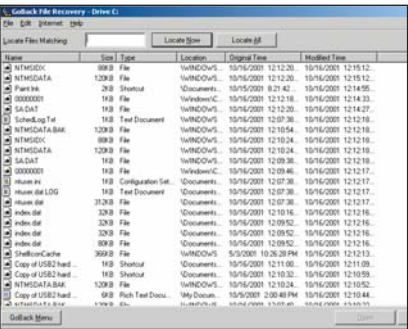
Website: www.digitalworkshop.com

Price: £206; upgrade from Opus £85

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

GoBack 3.0

File recovery software



GoBack's File Recovery window provides quick access to recently deleted files

your hard drive for changes, recording any alterations. If you then accidentally delete a file, or something does for you (like a virus), you can simply recover it to its original state. It even protects you against absent-minded errors like clicking Save instead of Save as, plus allows you to recover previous versions of a document.

By default, GoBack occupies 10 percent of your hard drive. This gives, on average, two weeks worth of history, depending on usage. This should be more than enough time, as you will want to recover most files fairly soon after deletion. Once GoBack fills its allotted space, then the oldest operations are removed first, providing a rolling window. As it only has a limited history (and resides on the drive you are protecting) GoBack doesn't replace the need for regular backups.

The interface has been tweaked and there's an additional file recovery window for quick restoration, but GoBack 3.0's main appeal is Windows 2000 support. There's an update available for Windows XP, but we experienced serious stability issues and wouldn't recommend GoBack for use on Windows XP systems.

Verdict

The interface is a bit easier to use, but the main reason to upgrade would be for Windows 2000 support. For new users the low price makes GoBack a near essential utility after virus protection. For £25 you get an additional safety net that protects you against not only malicious attacks but also user absent mindedness, something you can't really put a price on.

Will Head

GoBack 3.0

System requirements: 166MHz Pentium; Windows 9x/NT/2000 (free update for XP); 32MB RAM; 200MB hard disk space.

Roxio Europe: +49 2405 4508 70
Website: www.roxio.com
Price: £25

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

WinProxy 4.0

Internet connection sharing software

An increasing number of people own more than one PC, so it makes practical and economical sense to network such hardware together and share resources like printers, files and other peripherals.

However, that leaves the tricky question of web access. Who gets priority when two or more people want to surf simultaneously? And which PC gets the broadband connection when you sign up for cable or ADSL (asymmetric digital subscriber line)? One solution is a hardware router than enables internet connection sharing; another is WinProxy 4.0, a smart software-only alternative.

With flexibility comes complexity; you too can be a system administrator

WinProxy uses your existing network – be it an ethernet card, USB cable or wireless setup – to route all internet activity through just one PC. This way, every system on the network shares the same connection without the need for further wiring or hardware. Installing the software isn't exactly a breeze – there's enough proxy server and IP lingo to tax the novice – but it's no more difficult than setting up a LAN (local area network) in the first place. Moreover, you only have to do it once on the host computer: a simple tweak to each satellite computer's TCP/IP settings is all it takes to set up the sharing. That, incidentally, is the golden rule: make sure that your network is running smoothly before introducing WinProxy.

We were impressed to find both antivirus protection and a firewall integrated at the host computer level, thereby offering network-wide security at a stroke. Families may also appreciate the opportunity to filter website access, according to white lists and blacklists.

Verdict If your PCs already have a LAN in place, WinProxy 4.0 is a cheap and effective way to share a single web connection.

Kyle MacRae

QuarkXPress 5.0 beta

Desktop publishing software

If PageMaker started the DTP (desktop publishing) revolution back in the 80s, it was QuarkXPress that turned it mainstream for professionals. But Quark has never been a company to churn out regular product upgrades just for the sake of it: the last major release came out five years ago. So when the company announced its long-awaited upgrade would appear before the end of this year, everyone sat up and took notice. We tested the public beta of QuarkXPress 5.0, international Passport edition.

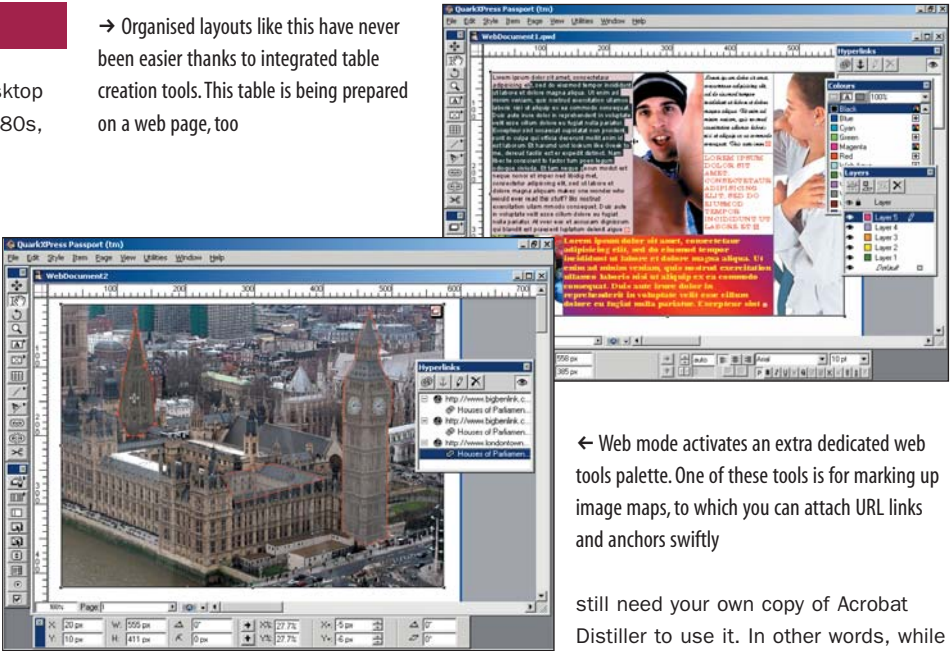
Print or web: you decide The big news is that QuarkXPress 5.0 presents two exclusive working modes: print and web. Designing pages in print mode is much the same as before, but the web mode is completely new. There's also a new web toolbar, which provides image map markup tools, along with a set of internet form creation tools for lists, radio buttons, checkboxes, text fields and so on.

These web pages can be sent to your preferred web browsers for an instant preview and, when you export the final job to HTML, XPress can also optionally convert the graphics to GIF, Jpeg or PNG. It's hardly a full web design package, especially since it lacks any support for integrating Flash, Java and streaming media, but it's one that existing XPress users will find easy.

As predicted, XPress 5.0 comes with XML (extensible markup language) tools for next-generation electronic publishing. Don't get overexcited, though, because these just turn out to be a bundled copy of Quark's existing commercial XML plug-in, currently sold as Avenue.quark. Also be warned that it's not a solution for the faint-hearted: be prepared for a lot of coding.

The other big news is that XPress now comes with a table tool. At last you can

→ Organised layouts like this have never been easier thanks to integrated table creation tools. This table is being prepared on a web page, too



← Web mode activates an extra dedicated web tools palette. One of these tools is for marking up image maps, to which you can attach URL links and anchors swiftly

draw a box and turn it into a tabular layout within the program, adjusting columns and rows spreadsheet-style by dragging on the cell borders. Our only concern is that the tables were rather glitchy in the beta software we tested, and it wasn't clear how to disable rule markings between cells without leaving white gaps.

Beyond the new web mode and tables, most of the enhancements in XPress are small improvements – for example, the indexing and list functions are more flexible. You can apply stylesheet changes at any point and accommodate 'reversed' index phrases (so that people's names can be listed in the index by surname before first name). Some long-awaited features have made a belated appearance, too, such as the Layers palette and a 'Fit Box to Picture' command.

A bit of a let-down Judging from this beta, some XPress users are going to be disappointed with the features that have not been upgraded. The confusing multiwindow Print dialog boxes are still there, no new vector tools have been added and the ancient two-colour gradient blends haven't been touched.

The PDF Export filter now lets you prepare bookmarks and hyperlinks, but you

still need your own copy of Acrobat Distiller to use it. In other words, while existing XPress users should upgrade as soon as their output bureaux give the nod, don't expect to be showered with new features. That said, the integrated table tool alone is going to be worth the expense for many people at any price.

Verdict Contrary to expectations, QuarkXPress 5.0 is not vastly different from 4.1. In terms of retraining costs, this is definitely a good thing. On the other hand, apart from a few enhancements plus the new table tool, there's not a great deal to get excited about. Let's hope Quark is going to be realistic about the price when the time comes.

Alistair Dabbs

QuarkXPress 5.0 beta

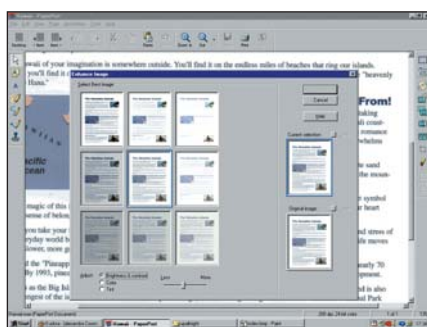
System requirements: Pentium processor; Windows 95/98/Me/2000/NT 4.0; 32MB RAM, 100MB hard disk space.

Quark: 00 800 1787 8275
Website: www.quark.co.uk
Price: TBA

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

PaperPort Deluxe 8.0

Document management software



PaperPort started life as a companion to Visioneer's range of sheet-fed scanners before developing into a standalone product in its own right. It's essentially

↑ Simple image-editing tools include a mid-range document management application, aimed at small businesses.

The software allows you to import pictures and documents from any Twain or WIA- (Windows image acquisition) compatible device, such as a scanner or digital camera. It can also index documents you already hold on your hard drive. Once you've got your documents into PaperPort you can use its basic editing tools to clean up the images before saving them for archive purposes. Image-editing tools include the ability to sharpen scanned text and images that are slightly blurred, straighten scans of skewed documents and even correct red-eye in photos. Version 8.0 features a new OCR (optical character recognition) engine that does a good job of recognising printed text. It doesn't, however, work on handwritten documents. You can also save highlights and digital sticky notes you have added to documents without affecting the raw scan.

Saved documents are indexed as thumbnail pictures, and if they are in a format that contains text (such as PDF and Word files) they can be searched for keywords. You can also group thumbnail indexed images together without moving the files that they refer to.

As a bonus, ScanSoft has bundled a one-year free subscription to the PaperPortOnline website. Here, you can securely store up to 25MB worth of documents online and share them with other users even if they don't have a copy of the software.

Verdict

PaperPort is the ideal companion for small businesses who want a quick and easy way to get on top of their filing. It's not going to give you a paperless office, but it will make managing your paper mountain a lot easier. ■

Niall Magennis

PaperPort Deluxe 8.0

System requirements: Pentium or higher; Windows 9x/Me/2000/NT 4.0/XP; 32MB RAM; 80MB hard disk space.

Scansoft: 0870 870 8085

Website: www.scansoft.com

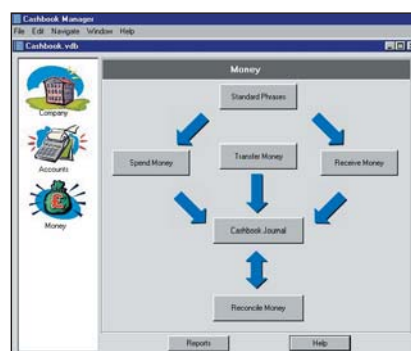
Price: £51

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

Cashbook Manager

Business accounting software

A cash book is, of course, the simplest form of bookkeeping, merely recording cash in and out. However, there is room for some basic analysis. So it is with Cashbook Manager; if you want to record credit sales/purchases, or use standard VAT accounting, this program is not for you.



↑ The Money Navigation window shows the optional invoicing and contact management modules

Cashbook Manager comes on a single CD, priced at £34. However, there are two supplementary packages – invoicing and contact management – accessed by an unlock code at an extra £17 each or £25 for the two.

The program is not without its idiosyncrasies. For example, Cashbook can only end its financial year at the end of month, disallowing 5 April. You can only reside in Great Britain (which excludes Northern Ireland) instead of the more usual UK. Businesses that understand the difference between an estimate ('don't hold me to this'), a quotation ('this is a firm offer but read the small print') and an invoice ('yes, it is a lot, isn't it'), will find the definitions, as merely variations on a payable invoice, confusing.

Cashbook Manager has all the facilities you would expect from a basic program, but there is no interaction between them. The cash book journal, for instance, can only display individual categories or accounts and does not add up and total the entries displayed. All transactions have to be completed manually. While this gives some control over posting or transferring data between modules, it also adds to the tedium of keeping your accounts.

Verdict

Cashbook Manager's ideal customer would probably be an unreconstructed 19th century clerk. However, the program is still under development and does have serious potential. Wait a few months and look at it again. ■

James Taylor

Cashbook Manager

System requirements: Pentium 166; Windows 95/98/2000; 32MB RAM; 20MB hard disk space.

Ontrack: 01752 895 100

Website: www.torsoft.co.uk

Price: £34

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