

IS THERE REALLY A PAGEMAKER 7?

by Gordon Woolf

"A new version of PageMaker? We thought that was replaced by InDesign?"

Many seem to have been caught by surprise with the announcement by Adobe Systems that they have released a new version of PageMaker, the venerable page layout program which is reputed to have played the major role in the beginnings of "desktop publishing"

Indeed, the complete rewrite of the code of PageMaker, which began before Adobe took over the program from Aldus, is the new page layout program called InDesign.

Remember that PageMaker, even for the PC, began in the 1980s, when it ran under a "run-time version" of Windows that started automatically when you started PageMaker from DOS. It was well established before Windows 3.0, launched in 1990, became the GUI you started when the computer turned on.

Even at the time InDesign was going through its not entirely painless birth in 1999, Adobe officials (who are always loathe to make any "official" announcements for fear that they'll anger the gods who administer the USA's stock exchanges), carefully stated that there was still a PageMaker development team.

So, why, if InDesign is "the real PageMaker 7", is there now a version 7 of PageMaker?

Quite simply, InDesign is too big a jump for many users and would-be users. It requires a big jump in hardware power, and a much bigger jump in knowledge of what printing and publishing is about. Anyone who doubts this can sign on to the InDesign email list at Blueworld for a few days. The reward, if you persevere and decide to use InDesign, is the best quality of typesetting ever seen from a computer.

Many people preferred to stay with the old workhorse, PageMaker, and for those it was still doing a good job. Their problem was that it was beginning to rule out upgrades in operating systems. This was even more true for users on the Mac side, though setting up PageMaker to work with Windows 2000 involved a number of tricks such as manually closing phantom instances of the program after the program had seemed to close, and giving even lowly PM users full Administrator access. Getting the program to print in some instances also seemed to involve incantations and ensuring that one was facing Redmond.

PageMaker 7 is supposed to solve these problems, letting it work with Windows 2000 and ME (and even with Apple's new Unix-based OS X in "classic mode"). Many man hours of programmers' time have resulted in very little change in what you see; the work has been under the hood.

So this can best be called a "maintenance release" -- but it probably expresses how strongly its users are committed that PageMaker continues to dominate the business side of the page layout arena even though it has not seen a major update since 1997.

PageMaker 7 does include the ability to directly import native Photoshop and Illustrator files -- and, with the increasing dependence of publishing on Portable Document Format, many will see the upgrade as essential just to be able to place files created in the PDF formats used by Acrobat 4 and 5. It also works with PostScript 3 for both output and EPS placement.

An aside here: Page layout software is for the final assembly of pages and for outputting them in a manner which can be used for making printing plates, or as used in computer-to-press (CTP) direct-to-press printing. For this reason, page layout software has to be able to place files created in all the commonly used ad

and editorial creation programs and in formats which can be created by even the lesser-used ones.

Except for the creation of PDFs, which are now an essential step towards the press, page layout programs do not export well. PageMaker makes a half-hearted effort at exporting to HTML, and this can be useful provided one recognises that a print publication is seldom suited to web use without a great deal of work in a web-production program. (PageMaker does make a good job of converting print graphics to web-based graphics as part of its export-to-HTML facility). Export to HTML is also a useful way of getting text files from a complex document -- open the resultant HTML file in a word processor and convert to text in that.

For those producing long documents, there remain the table-of-contents and indexing tools within PageMaker. While these, and the table plug-in, are by no means perfect, they are better than in many other layout programs, if such programs have them at all.

I've already heard of some minor glitches that remain, and overall I'd suggest that anyone who uses PageMaker to the extreme will probably do better by upgrading to InDesign, but you'll need to upgrade your computer too.

For some users the new DataMerge plug-in will be worth the upgrade price in itself. I have written a PDF suggesting how this can be used for a simple ad booking system to suit a newsletter or small magazine and will be happy to email this to any MelbPC member who thinks it may be interesting (it will form part of my forthcoming book "Newspaper and Newsletter Production using PageMaker 7"). The existing ODBC filter will do more but it takes a good deal more work to use it successfully.

Another advantage is PageMaker's simple yet powerful scripting system and the fact that it is cross-platform (InDesign scripts are considerably harder to write and need work to translate from one platform to the other, while QuarkXPress can only be scripted on the Mac platform). The script engine has not been updated, so if there are things it won't do for you now, then PM7 won't do them either. Existing PageMaker 6.5 scripts will work, provided one allows for the new extension for PageMaker 7 files -- .pmd and .pmt instead of .p65 and .t65.

I'm not impressed by the switch from the old-style help to HTML help requiring a browser (but if you are upgrading you can keep the old help files and create a shortcut to lead to them).

Sadly, PageTools, the very useful set of toolbars and plug-ins no longer sold by Extensis, won't work with PM7, and I haven't been able to get any of the individual plug-ins within PageTools to work either.

PageMaker is a big jump up for users of Publisher, though many will want to use this more professional program. PageMaker 7 does convert Publisher 2000 files, and makes a reasonable job of that, as it does in converting QuarkXPress 4 files, though don't expect such conversions to be faultless.

There is also the big advantage over Publisher that PageMaker does not require one to go cap in hand to Microsoft for a new registration code every time you reinstall the program, or the operating system, or add more than a couple of pieces of new hardware.

Some existing users of PageMaker feared that the new release would be a "dumbed down" version. It is not. It is still very much the program you know but with additional artwork and templates such as were included with PageMaker Plus.

The template palette can be loaded with your own templates in place of, or additional to, the ones which come with the program. If you use many templates, it is worth planning to use the template palette in this way, and it opens automatically from the first button on the PageMaker toolbar, so you can safely uncheck the "Show every time PageMaker opens" checkbox at the bottom of this

palette.

In summary, if you need a basic page layout program (one that was considered advanced until two years ago) and are prepared to learn at least a little about the technical side of print production, then PageMaker 7 may well be for you. If you already use PageMaker 6.5, then consider whether you need the ability to place the latest versions of PDFs or whether extras such as DataMerge will be worthwhile.

If you are using PageMaker with Win2000 and have not mastered all the workarounds, then this could save a lot of trouble. At a \$229 upgrade (quite a bit more than a direct conversion of the US\$79) to a A\$1199 market price program, you certainly won't have trouble with mastering anything dramatically new (though it could be worth an upgrade just for the included Adobe Caslon, the elegant Trajan bold titling face, and several other top quality typefaces not included with 6.5).

Will there ever be a PageMaker 8? Time will tell. In the meantime it remains the DTP workhorse for most who produce print products whether they are business cards or local newspapers.

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captions:

Pic 1:

PageMaker lets the user place items direct on the page, or into prepared frames which can be used to prepare a page before text or graphics are ready; the choice is yours.

Pic 2:

The new DataMerge plugin brings in the headings from a spreadsheet file that can be placed anywhere on a page. As the records are clicked through on the palette, so the page layout changes.

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