Corel Chases the Five Hundred

Topic: After many years of being PC only, Corel releases a Macintosh version of its flagship product.

Column first appeared: August 2002, *Electronic Publishing* magazine.

Source of this file: The author's draft as submitted to the magazine.

Author's comment: As predicted, the Corel move to the Macintosh persuaded almost nobody to buy it, with the result that after a couple of years, some beancounter at Corel pulled the plug on it, restoring the programs to PC-only status.

The underlying theme of the column—that having a Macintosh version is key to acceptance by high-end users—nevertheless jumped up and bit Corel, nearly 11 years after it was written. In May 2013, in a disastrous public-relations move, Adobe announced that it would no longer develop software to be sold with a traditional perpetual license. Instead, those wanting the latest versions would have to "subscribe", that is, to rent the software by the month, with no ability to continue to use it if the subscription is dropped.

The announcement caused an a protest of unprecedented size and ferocity. Tens of thousands of Adobe customers publicly declared that they would not subscribe to the new model. Of these, many said they would not do business with Adobe again and would seek an alternative to Photoshop.

Other companies saw their opportunity. Within two days of Adobe's manifesto, Corel unleashed a campaign to woo its users, with discounts, promises that the traditional perpetual license model would continue, and a catch-phrase of "Corel Is All About Giving Users Choice."

Corel was the obvious company to benefit from the anti-Adobe sentiment, because, as noted in the column, its offering is a very reasonable alternative to Photoshop, or at least it was in 2002. But alas, a PC-only product has limited possibilities to impact the overall Photoshop market.

A week after the 2013 Adobe announcement, Gérard Métrailler, a top Corel official, had this to say: "Following…the Adobe Creative Cloud announcement, we've received a number of enquiries relating to Mac OS of our products to offer alternatives to those using Apple hardware.…Historically, the justification for creating a suitable Mac OS version of CorelDRAW Graphics Suite and other products did not warrant the investment required. Adobe's recent announcement will put the discussion back on the table. Getting a Mac OS native product to the market will take time and significant effort. We will continue to review our options."

The column opened with the advice, "reach the elite, and you reach the masses." Had Corel heeded it and continued Macintosh development, graphic arts history would have changed dramatically.

This archive, to be released over several years, collects the columns that Dan Margulis wrote under the *Makeready* title between 1993 and 2006. In some cases the columns appear as written; in others the archive contains revised versions that appeared in later books.

Makeready in principle could cover anything related to graphic arts production, but it is best known for its contributions to Photoshop technique, particularly in the field of color correction. In its final years, the column was appearing in six different magazines worldwide (two in the United States).

Dan Margulis teaches small-group master classes in color correction. Information is available at http://www.ledet.com/margulis. Many other articles and edited threads from his appliedcolortheory group are available there or at http://www.moderncolorworkflow.com

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The venerable Photo-Paint doesn't get much respect, but it offers most of Photoshop's functionality, a practical approach to workflow, and a few quirks. Buy CorelDraw, and they basically throw Paint in for free.

The difference is slight, to the influence of an author, whether he is read by five hundred readers, or by five hundred thousand;" wrote the iconoclastic American scholar Henry Adams. "If he can select the five hundred, he reaches the five hundred thousand."

The truth of this concept—reach the elite, and you reach the masses—is proven by Photoshop. We are accustomed to think of it as having a near-monopoly on high-end image manipulation, but in fact it has a long-standing contender with a nontrivial market share, a contender that in some ways is a better application than Photoshop itself is.

How come nobody knows this? It's a matter of the five hundred and the five hundred thousand. Suppose the question is: what's the leading high-end vector graphics (illustration) program?

Most readers of this magazine would probably guess Adobe Illustrator, although some would say Macromedia FreeHand. I'd be very surprised if more than one in ten would know the correct answer, which, I am almost sure, is CorelDraw.

Underestimating this Canadian company runs across applications. It may not be widely known that Draw has that kind of market share, but knowledgeable people are aware that it's a formidable competitor to Illustrator and FreeHand. Its companion app, Corel Photo-Paint, isn't so lucky.

Paint is Corel's version of Photoshop. It gets little respect, in spite of its age, capabilities, and market penetration. In early June, I checked amazon.com to see what books I could read about the program. There are two. One is out of print. There were 429 titles listed for Photoshop. My publisher tells me that around 140 of them are currently available.

Photoshop thereby has gotten its half million readers, largely because Corel forgot the five hundred that counted. There may be far more Windows sales possibilities, but the power users use Power Macintoshes, and without their approbation it's very hard for a graphics app to get taken seriously.

Furthermore, once an application gets a reputation for inadequacy, it's awfully hard to shake it. PageMaker is the best example. At the time it was replaced by In-

Design as Adobe's highest-end page makeup app, it was fully the equivalent of QuarkXPress, its competition. But buyers, remembering past versions that weren't so good, plus a plethora of PC Pagemaker puffheads, refused to believe it, so a new name was needed.

After many years of being PC-only, Corel now sells its software on both platforms, but was so late in doing so that its Macintosh penetration even for Draw is just about nil. Given dissatisfaction with recent releases of Illustrator, particularly version 9, Corel thinks that Draw, its franchise app, has an opportu-

Photo-Paint can read not just Photoshop layers, but their blending modes, opacities, and layer masks. The corresponding palettes show how a complicated 20-layer file opens identically in both applications.
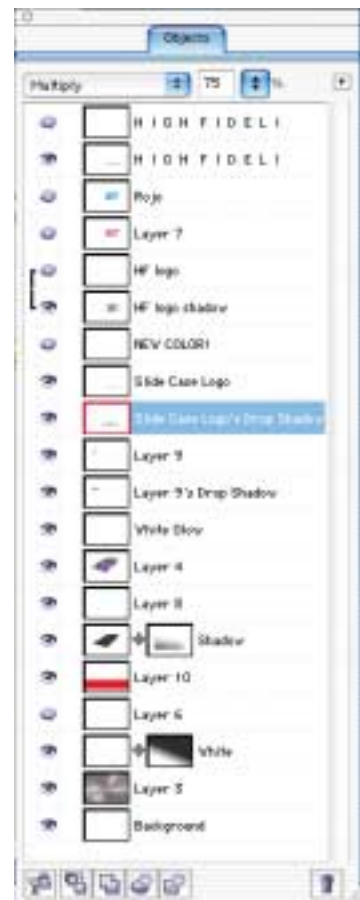
The Lens feature is Paint's version of Photoshop's Adjustment Layers, but it offers many more options.

nity. But it has so little hope for Paint as a Photoshop competitor that it has discontinued selling it as a stand-alone. It used to go for $320 street, but now we can get it only in combination with Draw and Corel's web vector effects app, Rave, plus a font manager, a trace program, and for all I know a kitchen sink, at a street price of $470.

While this price is attractive, Adobe sells the considerably more valuable suite of Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign or PageMaker, and Acrobat for $1000 street. As against that, Corel is likely to offer its suite at some shockingly discounted competitive upgrade price to Illustrator users. Meanwhile, Corel claims that 40% of the PC vector-graphics market owns its suite. That's an awful lot of copies of Paint.

But the point is that Corel has in effect decided to make a freebie out of Paint for those who are willing to give Draw a try. At that price, I thought it was worth a look.

A plus here and a minus there

The PC emphasis isn't the only way in which Corel and Adobe have different philosophies. Adobe doesn't like people to write in-depth about its beta software, a policy that makes a lot of sense. Corel does, so this column is based on its Graphic Suite version 11, which should be shipping by the time you read this.

Furthermore, unlike Adobe, Corel typically doesn't withdraw older versions of software just because an upgrade has come out. You can still get Graphics Suite 10, and you'll have to if you're a user of Mac System 9.x. While Graphics Suite 11 can handle any version of Windows from 98 up, on the side of the five hundred, System 10.1 is *required,* which is a bit surprising because the large majority of graphics professionals haven't decided to adopt OS X just yet.

I duly fired it up, although I wasn't too sure of what league this interloper was playing in. I didn't doubt that there would be a clone tool, some rudimentary layering capability, and a few flashy filters. I went looking for more sophisticated stuff, like multiple undo, compatibility with Photoshop plug-ins, the ability to work in LAB, and layer masking. It's all there, in some cases better implemented than in Photoshop.

On the first page is an impressive display of compatibility. Paint advertises the ability to read Photoshop-format files, but still one might think that a 20-layer document with several different blending modes and opacities would pose a problem. Not so, as you can see.

Perhaps so that we won't notice the, shall we say, striking similarity with Photoshop, Paint uses some different terminology. What Photoshop calls a Layer, Paint terms, confus-

ingly, an *Object.* What Photoshop terms an Adjustment Layer, an edit of lower layers of the document that can be modified by subsequent layers and then removed or edited, is called a *Lens.* Paint's version is better than Photoshop's, which supports only a few basic commands in an Adjustment Layer. As shown at left, Paint can have a filter as well.

Paint also reads a squadron of esoteric image formats that Photoshop doesn't. It can deal with, for example MacPaint, GIF, and Picture Publisher files, yet the incompably more common Photoshop EPS files are read only with difficulty and Photoshop duotones convert into grayscale in Paint.

Those are big omissions, but basically the programs are equivalent. One is better than the other in silly little ways. Both have a Dust and Scratches filter that cleans garbage out of files, but Paint's implementation, which has a Threshold control as well as a Radius, is better than Photoshop's. Both have a hue/saturation adjustment, but Photoshop lets you save its settings and Paint doesn't.

Because these programs feed on one another in each upgrade, few features are totally missing from one, although sometimes workarounds are necessary. Paint doesn't have a sponge tool or a dodge/burn tool, but there are less convenient ways of doing the same thing with layer masks, which both programs have.

Paint uses ICC color profiles but can't generate them itself. Those needing this feature could make such profiles in Photoshop or elsewhere. Paint has a helpful feature that's missing in action in Photoshop: when opening a file containing an embedded ICC tag, Corel can extract it and save it for later use. Now if either of these apps included the ability to *edit* such foreign profiles, then perhaps the percentage of persons actually using them in production might rise to above one percent, but that's another story. Meanwhile, the inability to edit GCR settings in Paint is a major minus.

As a moderately experienced Photoshop user, it's hard for me to evaluate ease of use, but if I try to imagine a novice trying to pick up either program, I believe that Paint is more logical. Paint has borrowed Photoshop's layering interface; Photoshop has returned the compliment by basically appropriating, starting with Photoshop 6, Paint's icon-based command interface line.

On the other hand, even if those 429 Photoshop books didn't exist, Photoshop's documentation leaves Paint eating dust. The manual isn't even half as long as Photoshop's; the on-line help is badly designed and incomplete, often merely tantalizing the user.

I've already noted how Paint's handling of dust and scratches is better than Photoshop's. It also has an unbelievable 11 additional blur filters with some degree of user control, several more than Photoshop. Given how important such filters are in noise control, one would have to suppose that this is a major advantage for Paint, Investigating what these tempting-looking filters actually do, however, is up to us. The documentation gives about one sentence to each,

Corel PHOTO-PAINT 11   File   Edit   View   Image   Effects   Mask   Object   Web   Window   Help

Paint's icon-based command interface has been around longer than Photoshop's.

which is like trying to explain how to cook duck a l'orange in one sentence.

Similarly, Paint's mask generator can be, in the proper hands, a more powerful selection tool than anything Photoshop has. The interface is shown on the next page. All you have to do is figure out what it does and what HSB values are all about. The documentation is of very little assistance, which means that for the majority of users this powerful option might as well not be there.

Of Painting and Productivity

Photoshop's most glaring superiority is in an area you might not suspect: despite its name, Paint isn't a good painting program, particularly in comparison to Photoshop 7, which has added a lot of new functionality. Brushes are more difficult to configure, and certain convenient tools are omitted.

Paint's selection and masking tools appear better than Photoshop's, on the other hand. But its biggest advantage is its straightforward approach to workflow, especially given the Byzantine Adobe political and marketing considerations that have transformed Photoshop 7 into a rhinoceros dancing a minuet (see "The Upgrade from Marketing," June EP). As

ludicrous as it sounds, despite some of the deficiencies enumerated above, Paint handles the production essentials more expeditiously than Photoshop 7. Consider these factors:

•If you want to save a layered file in its proprietary .cpt format, Paint doesn't even bother to ask whether we want an unnecessary composite version attached, whereas Photoshop 7, in an effort to promote other Adobe products, attempts to coerce us into doing so. The 20-layer file shown on the first pages weighs in at 17.1 mb in Paint, 19.3 mb in traditional Photoshop, and a portly 27.4 mb if we do what Adobe's marketing department wants. With fewer layers, the gain in not saving a composite is even more extreme.

•Ask Paint to save a TIFF, and you get a real TIFF, not one of the only-for-Adobe-apps versions that Photoshop 7 tries to trick us into using.

•Save a CMYK JPEG file with a white area, and it stays white in Paint. In Photoshop 7, a nasty bug turns pure white to 1C1M1Y, which is unusable in many cases, and also embeds a surplus EXIF tag, which chokes many readers. As of
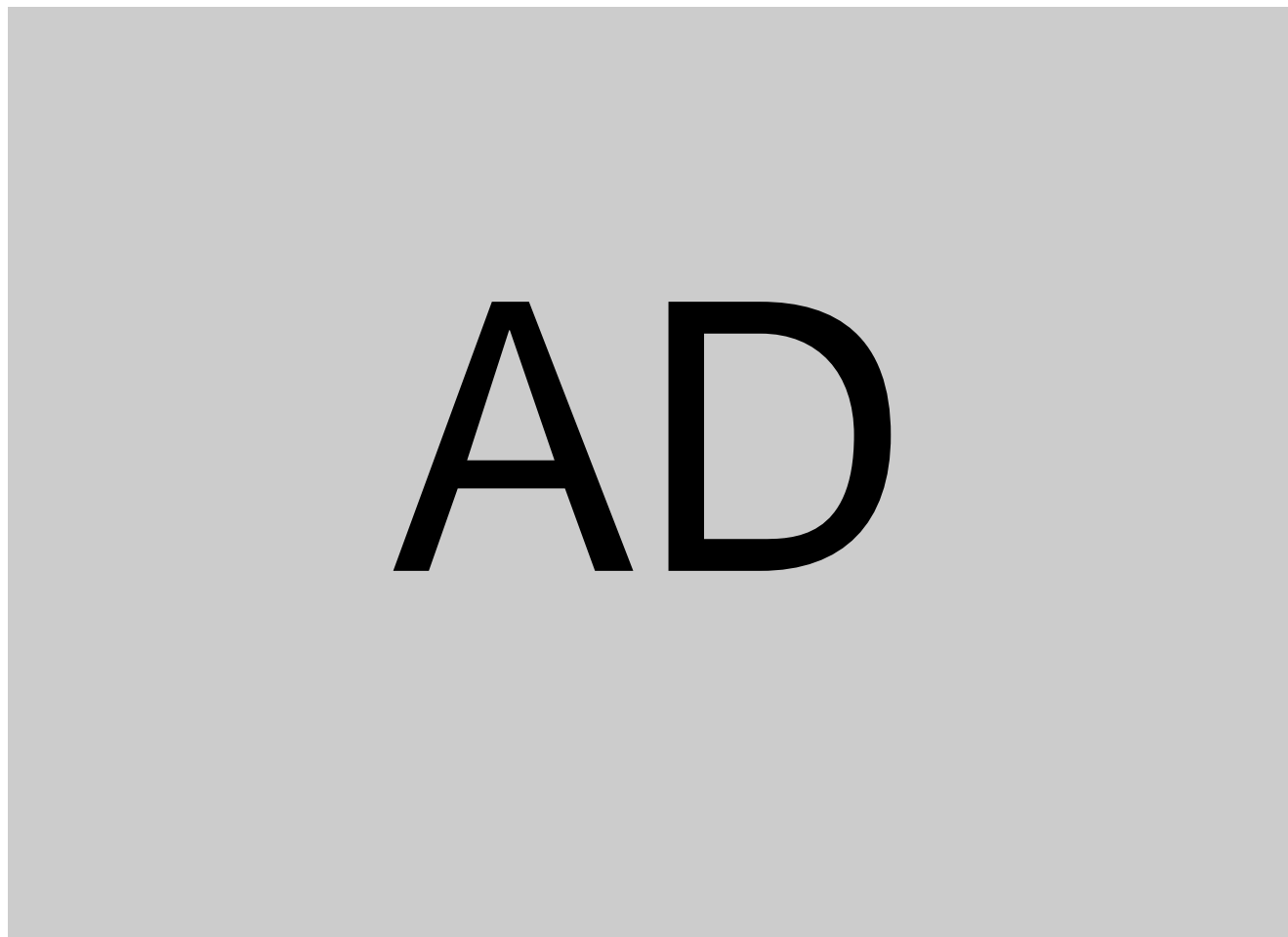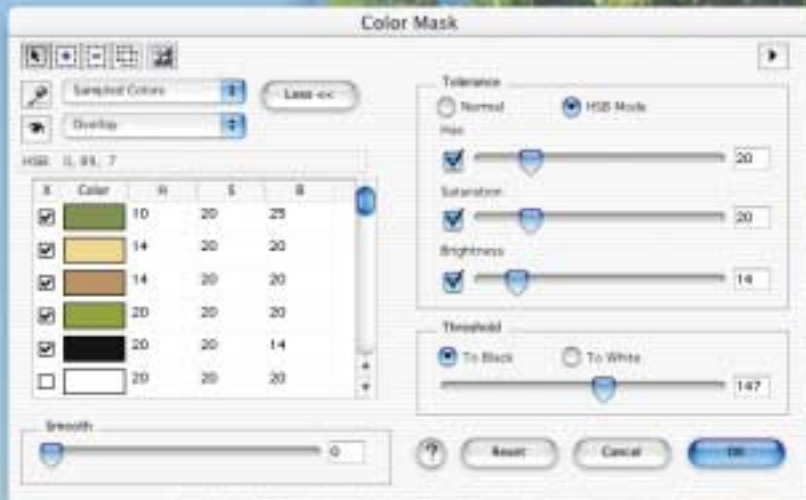
Color Mask

Photoshop's beta period involves testing by some of the industry's leading users, including many of the authors of those 429 books, and still bugs like that CMYK JPEG one slip through. What lurking dragons are there in Paint, which isn't commonly used for operations as complex as those Photoshop users demand? And, if we need help with Photo-Paint, where will we find experienced people to hire? There's no shortage of experienced Photoshoppers, particularly in the current wretched economy.

These intangibles are scary enough to deter me from making the shift to Paint. Most Photoshop users wouldn't anyway, because even though many of the commands are the same there are enough variations to pose an annoying learning curve. For example, to toggle back and forth to see the effect of the latest correction, Mac users are used to keying Command-Z. In Paint, Command-Z is still the undo, but to redo, it's *Shift*-Command-Z. Undoing a curve is one thing, undoing a lifetime of contrary experience another.

The idea for this column came after seeing a demo of Microsoft Publisher, which, for those who might not know, is a page makeup application with several times the market penetration of Quark, InDesign, and PageMaker put together.

Because it is theoretically targeted at a lower-end user, most people suppose that Publisher is a toy incapable of serious work, much as people supposed the same thing about the Macintosh in the early 1990s or earlier about Quark.

Unfortunately, my order for a review copy of the Macintosh version of Publisher apparently got misplaced, so I decided to test Paint, a product more aimed at the sophisticated user.

The conclusion for each is approximately the same. If Quark and Adobe both went out of business tomorrow, it's not as big of a step down to Publisher as a lot of people might think. And anybody who says that Paint isn't a reasonable substitute for Photoshop is only kidding themselves.

But, of course, the substitution won't happen. What might have been, though, is an interesting question, had Corel not concentrated for so long on the PC market in preference to the vastly smaller but vastly more influential Mac world. If that had occurred, this worthy pixel editor might now be eating some of Photoshop's lunch, rather than being a freebie tacked on to a drawing application.

press time, Adobe's programming team, typically, refuses even to acknowledge that these are errors, and suggests we avoid using CMYK JPEGs. There is no need to do that in Paint, which, in addition to traditional JPEGs, also offers an even better alternative, the new JPEG 2000 format. The Adobe team was apparently too busy finding ways to stiff competitors to implement that one in Photoshop 7.

•Paint's color management has almost all of the capabilities of Photoshop's, but is more unwieldy for expert users. That is outweighed by what it does for novices. In Paint, one doesn't embed ICC tags without checking a preference that allows it. One can only shake the head and imagine how much further along the color management cause would be today had Photoshop been as sensible.

•Best of all, open a series of files just to look at them and Paint allows you to close them again without undue hassle. In Photoshop 7, the Adobe team's misguided view of color management doesn't always allow this, particularly for users of consumer digital cameras.

Paint's Mac version doesn't have automated scripting in the sense of Photoshop's Actions. The PC version does, and the Mac version has for some time supported AppleScripting, which didn't arrive in Photoshop until version 7.

The intangibles

Refusing to cater to the power users has, one must suspect, cost Corel in a way that can't be proven.

Our industry, led by our service providers, has an unhappy history of confusing the abilities of users with that of their software. The idea that the Macintosh does superior graphics work to the PC is misguided. The idea that Macintosh users as a whole are more sophisticated than PC users is not. Photoshop commands the high end, so a Photoshop user is likely to be more experienced than somebody employing Paint. Hence, the prevailing impression that Paint itself is responsible for the errors of its unsophisticated user base.

This misconception isn't a problem for those who realize that it's Mac chauvinism, but the following is a real worry.

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