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## Valor e-Business Professionals

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Monday, August 01, 2005

### ➔ Will Adobe manage to replace industry work horse Quark Express by giving Adobe InDesign for free?

And **kill the best layout software in the process** of gaining market share?

by G. Arlov and S. Steele

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Heard about the Quark "killer"?

Adobe InDesign CS2. Will it really "kill" Quark? Adobe has been saying

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“it will” for the last six years or so, but it hasn’t happened. Adobe Pagemaker didn’t kill Quark, either, but was instead replaced by InDesign. And InDesign is also at a distant second place so far.

Let’s start by saying that it would be a good idea to wait for any new purchases or “conversions” until the upcoming release of the next version of Quark Xpress.

Some of the features that Quark has unveiled (Job Jackets for example, for workflow streamlining and increased productivity) as part of their new version, in our view are very compelling and offer more value than InDesign.

Other features are necessary updates that fulfill current needs and put it on par with available technologies currently provided by other programs (i.e. transparency support, Open Type font support, etc, so InDesign and Quark have standard common features). There are plenty of reviews out there detailing all the new features of Quark and we encourage you to read them, you will find the new Quark a very useful ally in your road to productivity.

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### **Adobe: positioning a product at any cost**

Recently Adobe acquired Macromedia, because Adobe couldn’t compete with Macromedia’s web software, another area where Adobe is weak.

In our view and that of many people we interviewed, that was the only way Adobe could obtain a leading position in the web design arena: by buying out their competition. The lead Adobe has with Photoshop, doesn’t translate to a lead in other fields.

For the last few years, Adobe has been trying to position InDesign against Quark as the leader in the publishing area without success.

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## **Bundling InDesign: the key strategy of Adobe to gain market share**

The strategy used by Adobe is very similar to some of the strategies Microsoft has used in the past to eliminate their competition.

It's a well-known fact (painstakingly proven by Microsoft) that among other things you can do to gain market share, you can kill your competition by giving your product for free (or way below the real cost of the product) and forcing people to acquire it through bundling or embedding it with other necessary software that people MUST buy anyway.

Which is one of the reasons why Microsoft has been sued in every country they have sold software. They have engaged always in proven, documented unfair and illegal competition practices; and their "product bundling" practices force consumers to use products that they would have never looked at otherwise. Adobe is doing the same.

Of course, Adobe can say that InDesign sold alone has a street price. But, like everybody else in the field of graphic design, you MUST buy Photoshop, and very likely, Illustrator or/and Acrobat. If you compare the price you must pay for these applications, it becomes cheaper to buy the full Creative Suite. And you get for the same price, InDesign, GoLive, ImageReady, and other things that come bundled in for free.

So the situation is that people are getting InDesign as part of a bundle. In other words, for free. See the price comparison we included to verify this. And don't forget that the upgrade versions are even cheaper (usually 50% off or more)!

For reference, just check out the prices: Creative Suite 2 full (includes Photoshop CS2, Illustrator CS2, InDesign CS2, Adobe Bridge, GoLive CS2, Acrobat 7.0 professional, Version Cue CS2, and more.

Only for \$1119.12, the highest price I found, at:

-  
<http://www.provantage.com/buy-7EMRL9K3-creative-suite-2-premium-mac-adobe-systems-retail-18040290-shopping.htm>. There are other, much lower prices out there for the full version or the upgrades.

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**Compare with purchasing the individual products: the full cost of the retail versions is:**

Adobe Acrobat 1 user: \$383.73

Adobe Golive \$386.15

Adobe Illustrator \$480.67

Adobe InDesign \$676.79

Adobe Photoshop \$548.51 (only Photoshop + Illustrator are \$1030 at these prices)

The value of the retail products is \$2475.85. so, InDesign is absolutely FREE.

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**Compare with Quark 6.5 that retails at \$707. Upgrades are priced lower.**

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<http://www.atomicpark.com/xq/asp/quark/prodline.y/familyid.6123/buy.software/qx/productlist.html>

So, after verifying that in fact we are getting InDesign for “free” and assuming that Quark was successfully muscled out of the market, for how long do you think that InDesign would remain “free”? not long. It would be unbundled right away, and sold separately. Think of programs such as Premiere, etc.

In this market, eliminating your competition means also eliminating the reasons to innovate. Historically, competition proves beneficial to

the end user, assuming that it is done with fairness, focusing in product quality to win the user, instead of resorting to a marketing, sales and business strategy to trick the user into "converting".

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### **Cost is a part of the equation**

Think about it: entities such as universities need to cut costs, and they teach students the software that they will use in their future jobs, so getting the software for free is a HUGE incentive to switch. We have read about some people saying in their advertising-paid columns that several universities (which ones, exactly?) are saying that they will soon switch to InDesign (when will they switch, exactly?). That sounds kinda cheesy given the fact that you need to know Quark to get a job nowadays, anywhere. The reason being manifested is mainly economic, without any practical reasons actually mentioned to justify such a decision. However, that choice will likely mark the future of many designers out there who will likely find themselves subject to having to take additional training courses to learn BOTH programs. Not funny at all.

There is nothing like a "free lunch". So how much does it really cost to "switch"?

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**Training time: Quark 12 hrs vs. InDesign 50+ hours to migrate, 3-6 months learning curve.**

In our experience of several years providing training and private/group coaching to hundreds of students in the use of Adobe / Quark software, the average training time required to learn InDesign up to an advanced level, is usually about 32 hours, and involves a much longer training curve to become an expert user (usually 50+ hours) if you don't have any previous experience with Adobe products,

particularly if you need to use the integration features of the Adobe Creative suite (Adobe Bridge, etc.), learn to use third party plugins, styles, compatible features from other Adobe programs, etc.

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**Mastering the program takes at least 3-6 months of use, after receiving full training.**

Most people who take InDesign seriously enough to migrate, will spend a lot of time in re-training (see above) and many more months of researching and re-learning things (the dreaded "learning curve") will be spent outside of the training room, figuring out how to do things that they already knew how to do well with Quark. That's some very expensive "converting". Did you know that it was going to be that long? All that lost time is lost productivity, and therefore lost money (and lost nights), too.

Of course some users will tell you that they already know InDesign and it was easy to learn. You bet they were old Adobe Suite users already. Unless they are seasoned pros, with 10+ years in the field, knowing every nook and cranny of most graphic design programs, particularly Adobe programs, it is VERY unlikely it was a short time learning InDesign. But if they are truly novice users, ask them how long it really took them to master (if they do) InDesign. You'll be surprised at the answers. Most people use barely 20-25% of the program, because learning the whole thing is overwhelming in practice.

Compare this with Quark training, where in barely 8 hours or less you can be working with most program options. Quark advanced level is achieved in 16 hours, and expert level in 24 hours. AND you don't need experience with other Adobe programs.

In our experience, mastery of the program is at your fingertips, since

mostly everything you need to do is rather easy to achieve in Quark and there are myriads of tutorials on the Internet documenting every imaginable Quark trick.

In other words, training in InDesign takes 2 - 3 times more than learning Quark. And the learning curve is much higher than Quark, since you need to learn to "integrate" InDesign with other applications that you may or may not know. The novice user will have the hardest time, since he will be expected to learn not only one but at least other 2 or 3 programs (Photoshop and Illustrator, and lately, Acrobat) in order to be able to use InDesign to its fullest potential.

Which is one of the most overwhelming reasons we have seen always for people choosing Quark over InDesign over the years: A kid can use Quark. It's easy.

In fact, many parts of the interface used by InDesign, are very similar to the one developed by Quark. Adobe decided to do things the way Quark was doing things in order to improve their program.

Why? Adobe had to design something that could be easily related to Quark, in order to facilitate the transition from Quark to InDesign, since PageMaker failed to convert people to Adobe's way of doing layouts, as it was a lower-end, very expensive and limited program that couldn't remotely compete with a high-end program such as Quark. For these and other reasons, Pagemaker always played second to the Quark powerhouse, even to programs such as MS Publisher, which are cheaper and more powerful.

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### **Training Costs:**

Let's think now about the training costs involved in switching all your designers to the new software. Training costs for 2 people only are more expensive than buying the full Creative Suite 2.

That is, from \$349 - \$800 in average per person, for the 8-hr, 1 day seminar only. Usually 3 days are required, or \$2400+ (group) - \$5400 (individual), for up to 6 people. In some cases, it can be higher depending on other factors.

These are corporate training prices, according to the prices of several schools in New York that provide this training and don't include advanced or expert training costs, nor do they include the costs of learning additional Adobe programs, or the integration features. So the real cost of learning InDesign is much higher than Quark.

Quark, average training price on the streets: \$199.

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#### **Hardware costs:**

Now include the cost of buying new computers (since you will need to get a new computer to run InDesign due to the sluggish performance that the new Creative Suite 2 has unless you have a 3 GHZ+ CPU Pentium IV or a MAC G5 with 1 - 2GB RAM or more computer). If you have a 2GHZ and 512mb ram, forget it, your computer is not good enough for the creative suite 2. And don't even think about installing it on your laptop and run several applications at the same time, or you will be waiting for a very long time to do anything.

Because let's face it, older computers (let's say 1 year old) will choke and kill your productivity trying to run the new Creative Suite 2, and waiting for anything to load, and run. You need a new computer to run the software, period. And if someone tries to say otherwise, try to run Photoshop, Illustrator and Indesign plus Adobe Bridge at the same time in your laptop, to take full advantage of the "integrated" features of Creative Suite 2. Have fun waiting while your competition is selling to your clients. A new MAC computer with the necessary specs will cost you in average \$2000, not including the price of the warranty for your new computer.

So, after totaling the cost of installing and getting your people and equipment up to speed in the migration to InDesign, you will have spent in average about \$5000 or more per user, including the licensing and the necessary hardware, etc. This is far, far more expensive than just upgrading to the next version of Quark. If you are a medium-sized company, it's going to be, let's say a hundred thousand dollars in training, learning curve, lost productivity expenses, new equipment, and software licenses. If you are a large corporation, your cost is in the millions. Yay!

Did you think about that one yet?

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**Is there truly a reason to switch?**

Overall, compelling arguments to choose InDesign over Quark are difficult to find, even among those who have already made the jump. We will see what the new version of Quark brings.

Adobe still has to deal with the WHOLE industry being trained in Quark. It would seem obvious that Quark is wisening up, improving their customer support, asking users what they need, analyzing and creating tools to improve production flow, and thinking ahead in order to bring enhanced, truly compelling productivity features, and this is a good thing for users.

It remains to be seen if people are going to dump their existing life-time expertise, spend their money in new training and invest in new hardware and software to make Adobe feel satisfied about their sales and stock profits.

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**In our view, simplicity wins always.**

Adobe wants design professionals to adopt a far more complex,

harder to learn, more expensive to run and more difficult to handle program (InDesign) over a simpler, easier to use, and much more intuitive program: Quark. That makes no sense.

We think that INSECURITY is not really a reason to switch. Which is the desired result of the marketing strategy of "the whole industry is moving to InDesign, what are you doing?" that Adobe has been running for several years. Why would you switch otherwise, particularly considering that the upcoming version of Quark is far more powerful and productivity-enhancing than InDesign? We think Quark is living up to their promises and will deliver a superior product. We shall see if they manage to do what they have promised.

Right now, don't buy anything unless you have a very specific and particular need that ONLY InDesign could possibly satisfy, and that will not be provided in an upcoming version of Quark. What might that be?

Please feel free to publish this article and resource box in your e-zine, newsletter, offline publication or website. A copy would be appreciated at [articles@valorcrossmedia.com](mailto:articles@valorcrossmedia.com).

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