

Adobe Indesign 1.5 Review

I am a Graphic designer with many years of experience using Quark (beside Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Illustrator) and I thought, at this present time, with Quark still not supports the newest Apple operating system which I planned to use exclusively, also I always wanted to try other alternatives application that powerful enough to handle DTP work, yet fully support DTP standard – InDesign was my first choice to give it a try – Since Indesign is part of Adobe family, the interface was similar to its sibling, so the learning process was so much easier for those who using Adobe products such as myself.

With that in mind, I decided to explore Indesign to see if I can adopt that missing tool needed for my DTP “collection” and found more and more interesting features from this application. With the new released InDesign 1.5, just months after version 1.0. This improved version has far more useful new features than its first released, such as text wrap around objects and inside them, an option to drag and drop colors onto objects, and separate rulers for each page to name a few added features. Version 1.5 is an elegant alternative to Quark for professional desktop publishers who produce multicolored layouts.

InDesign, a great program with enough muscle to get virtually any DTP tasks done. InDesign appears to be an attempt by Adobe to take back the high end of the category it virtually created way back in the mid-80s with PageMaker. InDesign, previously known as K2, isn't some mere rewrite of PageMaker. PageMaker, since its inception, used a pasteboard metaphor onto which text and graphics could be poured or placed as desired. Quark, meanwhile, employed a so-called frames-based metaphor for its text placement that ultimately proved more favorable to many designers especially those who had accidentally clicked on one of PageMaker's text columns and pressed Delete. In PageMaker, that text was gone, in QuarkXPress, it would simply re-flow the text to the next column. InDesign uses these Quark style frames, but enhances them with a variety of fancy edges, including rounded and cut-out corners, sophisticated multi-colour gradients and strokes.

The program provides many of the features found in Adobe's other programs: unlimited undo and redo, customizable palettes, document wide layers, the above-mentioned Bezier pen tool and native import of Photoshop, Illustrator and PDF (Portable Document Format) files. You can also create compound paths from multiple objects and, if you want to reuse items, quickly add items or entire pages to a Library. And InDesign can resize a whole group of objects at once (and unlike QuarkXpress 4, undo this step later, if desired!)

PDF import and export support is nicely implemented in InDesign – and that's a good thing, because it add even rudimentary colour-separation capabilities to its Acrobat family of products. InDesign makes good use of the color management system profiles that can be embedded in Photoshop files.

InDesign not only provides a set of shortcut keys that exactly match those in QuarkXpress, but InDesign actually loads QuarkXPress files (versions 3.3 through 4.0). It also loads files created in PageMaker 6.5. It does not, however, load XTensions for QuarkXPress (or plug-ins for PageMaker).

InDesign also handles images or gradients inside text with ease – you can even edit text after a gradient or stroke has been applied. Creating a clipping path around an imported Photoshop graphic? This task is automatically handled by InDesign; even better, the program, unlike QuarkXPress, bases its edge-detection routines on the actual resolution of the image, not the screen representation.

InDesign provides four types of kerning, including an “optical kerning” system that, when used on a left margin, moves letters such as “T” and “V” a little to the left to more gracefully balance to text block. Single-character ligatures such as “fi” are automatically supported and even be spell-checked or re-edited as if a standard character pair. There’s a unique feature called Multi-Line composition that looks at several lines above the line you are working on, to help eliminate words stranded on a separate line or page. These features provide InDesign users with better typographical control than any other DTP package currently available, character-based styles are also supported.

Multiple Master Pages are a nifty feature of InDesign. You can, for example, specify a Master Page and then apply its attributes to another Master Page. Placing a PDF document in Adobe InDesign yielded better results than with any other program I tried. The file was imported and displayed very quickly and the image imported perfectly, complete with multipage and cropping options.

With performance like this, InDesign should do much to restore Adobe’s reputation as a leading developer of DTP applications on the Macintosh and Windows platforms. Note, however, that the two versions are not strictly identical in their feature sets. The Macintosh version, for example, is unable to print to non-PostScript printers (although PDF export provides a possible workaround); the Windows release, as noted in the InDesign literature, does not share this limitation.

There are a few tricky features that could potentially prove troublesome, at least until a Quark or PageMaker user becomes familiar with InDesign’s new paradigm. For example, there is a polygon feature that can create anything from a triangle to a starburst. However, if you use it to create a box and then rotate that box 45 degrees, any text typed into that box will also be rotated 45 degrees. Some other important features missing such as: lacks support for TOC, indexing, imposition, database import and footnoting. Hopefully will be provided by third parties building plug-ins for the program, as many developers have done for QuarkXPress.

Pros: Optical Kerning and Multi-Line composition provide better typographical control than any other DTP package. Excellent HTML+CSS output. Automatic creation of sophisticated clipping paths. Interface and commands will be familiar to users of Adobe or Quark products. Unlimited Undos. Imports QuarkXPress, PageMaker 6.5 and PDF documents. “Pre-flight” checking and packaging.

Cons: Limited support for RGB image files. No built-in indexing, trapping or long document features in v1.0. InDesign does not support Korean, Japanese and Chinese double-byte character sets. No support for non-PostScript printers in the original Mac 1.0 or 1.5 versions; this feature was added as of version 1.52. (The Windows version supports standard Windows printer drivers, however.)

Conclusion: Even-though there are currently a number of issues surrounding the printing performance and trapping features of this product (Version 1.5) – InDesign indeed a major step forward in DTP programs from Adobe and it will do much to restore Adobe’s reputation as a leading developer of DTP applications on the Macintosh and Windows platforms.