Real People Reviews by Daniel M. East
Product: Illustrator CS
Manufacturer/Vendor/Developer: Adobe
MSRP: 499.00 FULL/169.00 UPGRADE

Review date: May 10, 2004

PULL QUOTE: "Worth the money if you have the Mac for it..."

DESCRIPTION (What's it do? What's it got?): If you don't know Illustrator as a design/graphics person, get to know CS. If you want or need the premier design tool for anything from flyers to business cards to CD covers and logo creation, it does the job. With the usual Adobe learning curve, Illustrator CS will work for nearly anyone from novice to advanced professional and do it well.

MIN. SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: PowerPC, G3 or later, OSX 10.2 or later, 192 MB RAM (256 recommended), 470 Mb available disk space, CD ROM drive

FIRST IMPRESSIONS: A tremendous upgrade featuring the tools and abilities that end-users talk about all the time. Not only has Adobe redefined what being "the standard" is, but they have eclipsed the competition with a design tool that works for nearly any level of need.

LIKES : It is the obvious favorite for me, but the addition of 3D effects means that there is one less application to launch when designing ads and package images as well as wonderful effects that make their way over from Photoshop. It is also great to use an easier method of maintaining transparency from Photoshop images. Add to that the Open Type font (OTF) support and font integration along with a new advanced PDF engine, and you can deliver exactly what you see to your clients, printer, home office or other outlet. The entire CS suite works interchangeably and I found "flying in" elements created in Photoshop, InDesign and even "out" to GoLive to be incredibly easy and effective. The additional support for more file types, including SVG and SWF, add even more tools to

the "belt."

DISLIKES : The entire CS package is really RAM "thirsty" and I'd recommend maxing your Mac's RAM for these products. While I really love some of the features, Adobe has added a few that I feel are simply "there because they can" and unnecessary for most things. Exporting transparencies could be made easier by adding that option in a single step, but it is far better and faster in this version than previously. Once you learn the route, getting there is easier; however, Adobe never makes it too easy for those still learning this type of application.

HOW DOES THIS PRODUCT COMPARE? : In my opinion, Quark has lost too many steps in the so-called battle with Adobe. Both InDesign and Illustrator offer easier integration, easier output options and, of course, better PDF creation and control. Even though so many are still in Quark of whatever version, Adobe's foot hold is gaining as their superior abilities, pricing and customer support (although now a fee-based option) gain respect in the professional communities and with designers of all levels.

WHO MIGHT ENJOY THIS PRODUCT? This is a version for any previous Illustrator user who meets the system requirements. It fulfills your wish-list and is really worth the money if you have the Mac for it.

TEST SYSTEM: Apple Titanium PowerBook G4 500 - 1Gb RAM - 10.3.3

FINAL THOUGHTS: For those who are still feeling like these professional design tools might be a bit over your heads, I was right there with you for a long time. Adobe's introduction of the entire CS suite makes learning the Adobe type of interface and palettes even easier. If you have a seminar, reseller or even a local Apple consultant who may also be one of Adobe's specialists along with a creative flair or a wish to design your promotional materials in-house or just want to use that power of that new G5 (don't I wish), it is well worth the time and effort. Illustrator addresses the things I use the most and makes it more intuitive. I'd also recommend, expert or novice, looking into some of the tutorials on Adobe's website for nearly any CS application in the suite.

OVERALL RATING: 4.5 out of 5 EXCELLENT

For more information, visit: http://www.adobe.com/products/illustrator/

Daniel East is the founder and president of The Mid-Atlantic Macintosh User Groups Team (MaMUGs); a member of The Apple Consultants Network (ACN); a panelist on "PC Talk Radio;" a live speaker/presenter and a freelance columnist for several Mac publications.