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Collaborative Competition and SWF

Design and Layout Software
Macromedia Freehand 9

by Peter Dudar

“Many developers focus on workflow between their own products, but we choose to optimize functionality and workflow between the applications that our customers use most often for prepress or Web production, including *QuarkXPress*, *Adobe Photoshop*, and *Macromedia Flash* and *Director*.” So says Macromedia, engaging in collaborative competition.

Since *QuarkXPress* is a print application, only one of the above products is a competitor: *Adobe Photoshop*, a linchpin in just about every high-end graphics workflow. When you consider Adobe’s upcoming launches of *Illustrator 9* and *LiveMotion*, it may seem that *Flash* is Macromedia’s online linchpin.

Adobe Illustrator 9 is slated to have a suite of Web creation and optimization tools — and it will write Flash files (SWF). *Adobe LiveMotion* can be described in two words: ‘Adobe Flash’. Like *Flash*, *LiveMotion* creates vector-based motion graphics, plus it leverages the Adobe interface with drawing and shape tools that borrow from *Photoshop* and *Illustrator*. *Flash* started out as an animation tool (*FutureSplash Animator*), so its drawing interface is foreign to

the designers that Adobe has in mind. *LiveMotion* writes SWF files and relies on Macromedia’s *Flash Player* for delivery. Macromedia markets the plug-in; Adobe piggy-backs on it.

This is the context into which one drops *FreeHand 9*, which comes as a standalone product or bundled with *Flash* in a package called *Flash 4 FreeHand 9 Studio*.

VERSION 8 TO 9

FreeHand 8 created a buzz with its dynamic transparency capabilities, integrated support for *Flash*, one-button effects, a Magnify lens for creating dynamic zoom views, and a fully configurable user interface. To some extent, *Illustrator 9.0* is playing catch-up with *Freehand 8* and sometimes surpassing *Freehand 9*. It goes beyond *Freehand*’s solid object transparency, letting you apply transparency to any layer or object and provides all the relevant blending modes from *Photoshop*.

FreeHand 9 is being marketed as “the first design and layout software created specifically for cross-media publishing.” Its outstanding features include: advanced *Flash* integration, new creative tools, a better visual management environment for multi-page documents, and numerous workflow enhancements.

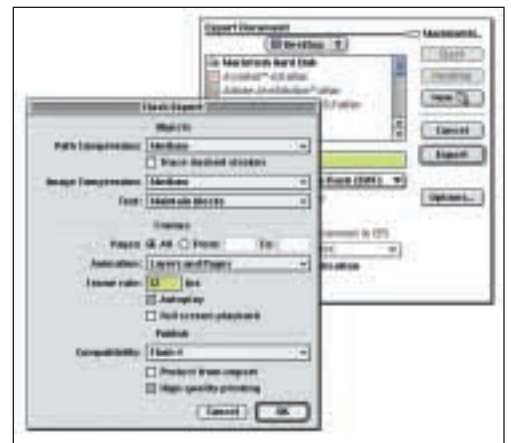
FLASH AND HTML INTEGRATION

The new *Flash* anti-alias display mode uses *Flash*’s anti-alias engine to preview



The **RELEASE TO LAYERS** feature creates animations and other motion effects without a timeline by translating layers into unique frames for Flash movies.

your *Flash* illustrations within *FreeHand*. Naturally, attributes that *Flash* does not support, such as PostScript and Lens fills (other than simple transparency) or text effects, do not preview. Lens fills apply only to objects on the same layer. (*Illustrator 9* provides a generic Pixel Preview.)



In the **FLASH EXPORT DIALOG**, select from several pop-ups, including: Path Compression, Image Compression and Animation type. Then export and quickly preview in Flash Player.



MACROMEDIA FREEHAND 9

System Requirements

Macintosh
PowerPC
OS 8.1
24 MB RAM
50MB disk space (70+ MB recommended)

Windows
Pentium-120
Windows 95/98/NT 4.0 (with Service Pack 3)

32MB RAM
50MB disk space (70+ MB recommended)

FreeHand 9 \$US399
Upgrade \$US149; competitive upgrades \$US169.
Flash 4 FreeHand 9 Studio \$US499
Upgrade from FreeHand or Flash \$US199.

Macromedia 800-457-1774
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and Trail. Note that applying the command to text blocks converts the text to paths. In the Export dialog, select from several pop-ups, including: Path Compression, Image Compression and Animation type. Then export and quickly preview in *Flash Player*. *FreeHand's* full screen *Flash* export ensures that the movie will scale to the dimensions of the target browser. A Protect from Import feature prevents your *Flash* movies from being downloaded from the web and imported back into an authoring tool. And of course you can also use the Release to Layers feature to build animations for other applications like *Fireworks*, *Photoshop*, and *AfterEffects*.

FreeHand now has a *Flash*-compatible Symbol Library that allows the use of master elements across multiple pages — just drag new symbols into the Symbols panel and drag instances out. To update, drag an instance from the panel, select Modify>Symbol>Release Instance, redo the graphic, and then drop it back onto its original name in the Symbols Panel. Click Replace when prompted and every instance of the symbol is replaced with the new ver-



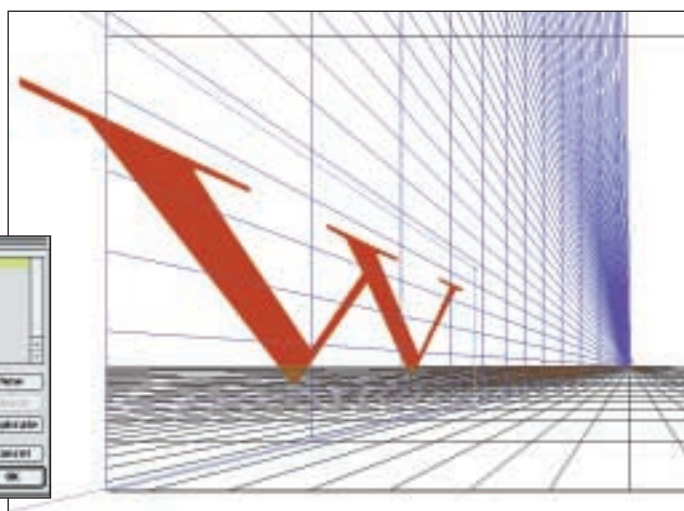
FreeHand's Flash-compatible SYMBOL LIBRARY allows the use of master elements across multiple pages — just drag new symbols into the Symbols panel and drag instances out.

sion. Since only one occurrence of the graphic is saved, you can build small *Flash* movies that download fast.

FreeHand 9 supports *Flash's* new printing technology, which enables high-quality print output from Web applications. For instance, animated banners can be made to call up full-page specification sheets.

Hyperlinks can be placed in *FreeHand* files using the URL Editor (an Xtra) and

The PERSPECTIVE GRID represents three-dimensional media, with customizable vanishing points, snap-to-grid guides, and live grid manipulation and updating.



exported with *Flash* files, PDFs and HTML. The Publish as HTML dialog provides a wizard/assistant to walk users through the process of choosing HTML settings and saving custom setups. *FreeHand's* HTML engine performs reasonably well compared to other automated HTML engines. With browser 3 settings, text is rendered pretty accurately using Cascading Style Sheets. GIFs based on *FreeHand's* vectors are fairly raunchy. The default setting turns your entire page into a *Flash* object, producing nicer-looking, but not very editable results. *FreeHand* generates HTML Output Warnings, but doesn't itemize them. And that's how it is with easy output. URL input in a drawing environment and automated HTML output are of some use only if you don't have a dedicated HTML editor. Professional Web developers won't care if *FreeHand* does this stuff well or not.

FreeHand 9 now enables you to use CMYK and RGB color spaces, and choose between Apple's ColorSync or Kodak's Digital Science for color management (Macintosh only). *FreeHand 9's* CMS also supports standard rendering intents (Windows and Macintosh). (*Illustrator 9* also provides a Web-safe RGB workflow mode.)

PERSPECTIVE GRIDS, ENVELOPES

The new Perspective Grid represents three-dimensional media in a two-dimensional drawing environment, with cus-

tomizable vanishing points, snap-to-grid guides, and live grid manipulation and updating. Just set parameters via the Define Grid dialog. Options include Vanishing points (1, 2 or 3), Grid cell size, and Grid colors (Left, Right, Horizontal). Using the Perspective Tool (which basically acts like the Pointer), click and drag to reposition the vanishing point and grid element. Unfortunately, attaching objects to the grid and further transformations require Byzantine combinations of mouse manipulations and keystrokes. Objects automatically scale as moved toward the vanishing points, and change perspective as moved up and down on the grid. An object that's attached to the grid becomes an envelope; the Release with Perspective command converts it to paths.

A live enveloping tool enables users to warp and distort graphics in real-time. Macromedia describes it as "especially useful for text effects". (Do I hear Claude Garamond spinning in his grave?) An envelope behaves like *Silly Putty* when squeezed or pulled from the side, but also like skin when grabbed from a corner, so you can visually flip the corner. Use the Show Map command to get a better visualization of what's going on. And though the Envelope Toolbar comes loaded with presets, you'll probably get more interesting results by sticking with rectangular text boxes and doing custom distortions. Add and delete points for more precision. You

can save custom envelope frames created from paths drawn in *FreeHand*, and envelopes are searchable.

The enhanced Trace tool traces any onscreen object: TIFF, EPS, text, or native

boards. For instance, you can storyboard entire *Flash* sites with *FreeHand* and export them as *Flash* movies for client approval. Adding Magnify lenses (a version 8 feature) enables non-pixelated zoom views from anywhere in the *FreeHand* document.

FreeHand 9's new Page tool (which also acts like the Pointer) lets users manipulate pages directly on the pasteboard by first clicking or dragging selections. It works in conjunction with the Document Inspector, which contains a miniaturized view of the pasteboard and thumbnails for each page. Each has its advantages for increasing efficiency. For instance, if a page is offscreen it can be made visible via the Inspector,

and so on. You can also Option/Alt double-click to name a page, change its orientation, set the exact size of individual pages numerically, or add new pages. And you can save templates.

Version 9's interactive transformation capability saves on trips to the Toolbox. Double-clicking an object or selection of objects activates the transformation handles and double-clicking away from the object deactivates them. Both skewing and resizing from centre functions are integrated into the transform handles; and the centre of rotation can be dragged anywhere.

Simple Step and Repeats can be done using the Copies option in the Move Transform panel. The option also resides in Transform panels associated with the Rotate, Skew, Scale, and Reflect tools. So let's say you want to scale a series progressively (for instance, copy one of the origi-

nal is scaled to 80%, the copy of copy one is scaled to 80%, and so on). Just set the Copies option to the desired number and then click.

FreeHand has new selection commands for modifying paths, layers and locked objects. So you can invert your selection, select everything on a layer, and subselect objects in groups and clipping paths. For instance, if you've just pasted an object inside another, Subselect enables you to grab and reposition it.

The new vector lasso tool lets you quickly select free form areas. And a user-definable Contact Sensitive option allows the lasso and pointer tools to select any object they touch or only objects completely surrounded by the selection marquee. (*Illustrator 9.0* provides a lasso and direct-select lasso tool.)

To streamline layer management, the Layer panel now has options to Merge selected layers or foreground layers; toggle layers on and off; and move between preview and keyline modes. And to streamline link management, the new Show button (in the Links dialog) changes the view



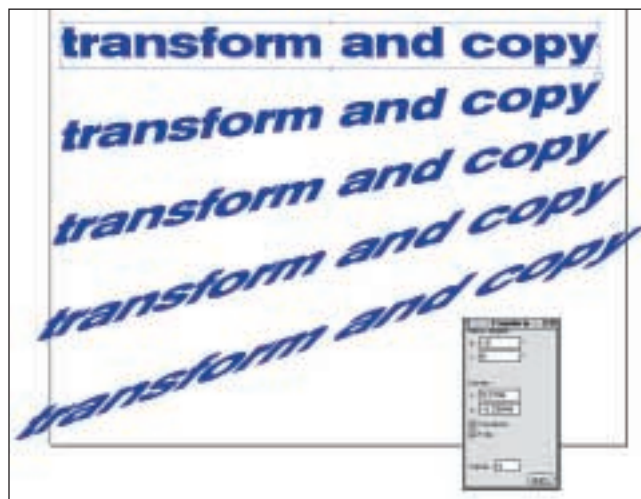
A live ENVELOPING TOOL enables users to warp and distort graphics in real-time. Macromedia describes it as "especially useful for text effects".

graphics. And does so according to settings in its dialog box: settings include Color mode and Path conversion options, plus sliders for Trace conformity, Noise tolerance and Color tolerance. The new Magic Wand tool enables automatic tracing of unique sections within an illustration. Just click to select continuous areas of color in bitmaps or vector objects and then convert the selection into a new path or tracing.

Other enhancements include an updated Blend function for managing more complex blends between composite paths and groups; and a slider that adjusts the precision of the *FreeHand* tool. The Text tool now reverts to the Pointer after you remove it from a text block; and double-clicking a text block makes the Pointer revert to the Text tool. *FreeHand 9* has added characteristics to text style settings, including kerning, text effects (such as underline), baseline shift, rules, and hanging punctuation.

A SLEEKER INTERFACE

FreeHand 9 provides new page management functions for the production of multi-page documents such as Web site story-



Simple Step and Repeats can be done using the COPIES OPTION in the Move Transform panel. The option also resides in Transform panels associated with the Rotate, Skew, Scale, and Reflect tools.

of the current document to indicate a particular linked file.

It's surprising that Macromedia hasn't introduced Live Effects into *FreeHand 9*, though they've been a large part of Macro-

media *Fireworks*' success. Adobe, not Macromedia, has picked up the live effects ball and run with it by loading *Illustrator 9* with all sorts of them, including live applications for shapes, transformations, distortions, path modifications, soft drop shadows, glows, feathering and 50+ Photoshop filters. That's got to be embarrassing.

And since history palettes are now de rigueur in both Adobe and Macromedia graphics applications, why isn't there one in *FreeHand* (don't look for one in *Illustrator 9* either)?

IMPORTING AND EXPORTING

Interactivity between *FreeHand* and *Photoshop 5.x* images has been enhanced; *Photoshop* layers are now created and exported from *FreeHand* (and are also accepted by *Adobe AfterEffects*). But the process is one way: imported *Photoshop* files are flattened. And since interactivity is limited to images, *FreeHand* doesn't export editable text into *Photoshop*. *Illustrator 9*, on the other hand, is promising editable text export, plus support for layers, layer masks, clipping masks and layer transparency in both directions.

Because *FreeHand* is a multi-page environment (*Illustrator* is not), it can open, create, and edit multi-page *Acrobat PDF* files in one go. It also supports PostScript 3 gradients. *FreeHand 9* imports and sets hyperlinks in PDFs, imports and places PDF notes, and exports PDFs with embedded fonts.

But working with imported PDFs is no fun at all. *FreeHand* doesn't open PDF pages; it imports the page elements on to the pasteboard. And although imported text is editable, you may find that all lines of text (and even partial lines) have been placed into separate unlinked boxes. Also, the PDF Import Xtra doesn't automatically substitute or activate fonts; so even if you have the necessary fonts on your system, you have to kill the import in order to activate them.

FreeHand 9 has new optimization options for GIFs and JPEGs. The GIF Export dialog includes four dithering levels,

an Optimize option that removes unused colors from the palette, and an elementary Websnap Adaptive option. But you have to dig through several levels of export dialogs to get at the options; and you can't preview the results. *Illustrator 9*, meanwhile, is using a Save for Web window with four preview panels, like the ones we've become accustomed to in *Photoshop* and *Macromedia(!) Fireworks*.

THINGS TO COME

Perspective Grids and Envelopes are fun. But everyone wants to talk Web features, and *Flash* integration in particular. Some of *FreeHand 9*'s 'flashier' functions, like Release to Layers, *Flash* anti-aliasing and support for *Flash* transparency are being replicated, more or less, by *Illustrator*. The *FreeHand* edge, it appears, is its *Flash*-compatible symbol library, support for *Flash* printing and multi-page animation capabilities.

FreeHand's multi-page environment continues to be a standout feature for Web developers. In version 9, it's a welcome enhancement, rather than an outright innovation. And it's lucky that *FreeHand* was built that way, because it's something that *Illustrator* hasn't been able to replicate.

Despite characterizing *FreeHand* as a cross-media solution, Macromedia has failed to incorporate innovations from its Web applications like *Dreamweaver* and *Fireworks*. These include History panels, Live Effects and state-of-the-art Web graphic export. Duplicating too much functionality in your product line can undermine sales of other products — *Flash* isn't helping *Director* any. But in the spirit of collaborative competition, if Macromedia doesn't add the features then Adobe will. Adobe even cannibalized *ImageReady* by rolling it into *Photoshop*, to secure *Photoshop*'s position as its premier cross-media product. Though *FreeHand 9* is considerably better than *Illustrator 8*,

Adobe has generated sufficient pre-release buzz on *Illustrator 9* that a lot of users will wait to compare the version 9 products.

Collaborative competition means that you collaborate when your back is against the wall (admit that SWF is the Web standard and exploit it), but always look for an edge. Adobe is hoping that the SVG format will provide that edge. SVG is an open standard currently being developed by the W3C, and written using XML (Extensible Markup Language) and CSS (Cascading Style Sheets). Of course, Adobe is providing the free plug-in with *Illustrator 9*.

Macromedia is countering by using SWF to embrace Adobe and all others. They're releasing *Flash Player* and file-format software developers kits (SDKs) to ac-



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celerate the proliferation of *Flash* in new communications and information devices like Internet set-top boxes, handheld computers and mobile phones. Macromedia is also providing sneak peeks of *Flash 5*, which will feature a revamped interface "more familiar" to professional users. Whither goest *FreeHand* in all this? **G**