

The Web: Designing like an expert online

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Design and graphics software used to be targeted solely at commercial art professionals -- creative directors at ad agencies and magazine production editors. And, perhaps, rightly so. But the Internet is changing all that, experts tell UPI's The Web. Now, entrepreneurs in small businesses, and middle managers in corporations, are the focus of marketing efforts for Corel Corp. and other graphics and design software makers.

"We have become focused on specific market segments," Nick Davies, general manager for graphics at Corel Corp., told The Web. "We're now focusing on occasional users -- people who have their own businesses. Many of these people have an aptitude for graphics, but are not trained."

Most of the time, these professionals are designing and developing their own Internet sites, and own Internet adverts, as well as creating their own brochures and business cards.

So, Davies said, the latest version of Corel Draw Graphics Suite has been made easier to use than earlier versions. "We're not dumbing down the product," said Davies. "We're just making it easier to use the application."

For instance, Corel is including some training videos on CD-ROM with the new version of the software, CorelDraw Graphics Suite X3.

"Entrepreneurs and small-business owners want that -- because they don't want to spend two hours out of the office, at a class learning about the software," said Davies.

What's more, inspired by other software vendors, like Microsoft Corp., as well as their own consumer markets research, Corel has added a "Hints Doctor" to its latest software. "When you are using it, you get hints as to how to use it better," said Davies. "The Hints Doctor gives you pointers, or additional information, should you so desire. That has been very well-received by the users. They can explore things they have not discovered. As with most applications, many who use graphics applications only have explored 20 percent of the program."

Corel decided to make the changes primarily on customer input. The market research helped them prioritize the new features in the product. This has been particularly intense during the last three years, Davies said. Many of the surveys were in person -- because customers often don't know what they want until they talk about it with someone who knows the software inside out.

"We survey our users -- and know that they create business cards, logos and objects for the Web. The uses go from simple to complex. All the way up to the design of large-scale billboards," said Davies. "But, the Web is the most appealing communications vehicle for them."

One new feature that came out of the focus-group process reduced the number of clicks it takes to create a graphic in the new program.

Interestingly, a lot of entrepreneurs use the product at home, for personal projects too, blurring the line between work and hobby, Davies said. "The latest version was launched at the beginning of the year. This is the follow-on version," said Davies. "Marketing and sales departments are a key market, as well as small businesses."

The overall trend that is driving all of this is the demand for "visual communications," said Alexis Gerard, co-author of "Going Visual: Using Images to Enhance Productivity, Decision-Making and Profits" and a

principal analyst at Future Image, an industry consultancy.

"We are entering an age where visual communications has become more essential than ever to improving our work and personal lives while fostering our social networks," said Gerard. "People are taking thousands of new images each year. New developments in imaging software will now make it easier for consumers and businesses to access and share those images."

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