

# Creative Suite 3: Third Time's the Charm?

By Ron Roszkiewicz

In the first part of our two-part series on Adobe's ever-expanding product matrix, we look at ready-made Creative Suite applications, supporting programs and plug-ins.

**N**avigating the breadth of Adobe's product line, with all of its families, suites, extensions, servers, development environments and plug-ins, is a daunting task. The matrix grows broader with each Creative Suite iteration, and it is easy to overlook some opportunities to rationalize workflow and decrease operating costs.

It's a product trend that's been building for a while and has only gotten more confusing with the blending of Macromedia products into the mix. On one level, a real effort has been made to standardize the look and feel of the applications with a consistent user interface; on another, the effort has been to extend applications with hooks and where it is needed to provide the technology to develop these extensions. The result is an extensive matrix of programs, programmer's tools and standards. A look at programmer's tools will be the subject of Part 2 of this report. The first part is devoted to ready-made Creative Suite applications, supporting programs and plug-ins.

Since the dawn of the desktop revolution, we have been forced to use outsize tools to solve relatively simple problems. By "outsize tools" I mean Photoshop and by "simple" I mean converting from one format to another format, changing color mode to sRGB for Web use or changing image resolutions to 96 ppi for the Web. Other applications, such as Graphic Converter, appeared but didn't resolve this natural tendency. Of course, this resulted in more copies of Photoshop bought, borrowed and upgraded — an obviously good situation for Adobe but painful for cash-strapped individuals and companies.

Standardization of formats has helped simplify the process. Prior to the ubiquity of PDF, it was necessary to mail native XPress file formats around for review. A matching copy of the XPress program was needed at both ends to make the apples-to-apples comparison. It seemed like a waste, but it was all part of doing business — an inefficient business that required unnecessary skills, maintenance and bigger budgets.

Over the past few years a welcome phenomenon has changed this reality for the better. First we reached the limit of what each program can do. Using word processors acting as layout programs was rejected, as were layout programs attempting to act as full-featured Web design tools. Apple created iLife and iWork. Open Office for Linux appeared with a suite similar to Microsoft Office,

Google introduced its own menu of mini-apps as sort of entry-level applications for those of us confounded by the "real thing." Most of these applications are well-suited to the home and student user. But try as many of us have, using one of these alternatives in a professional setting is a non-starter. Missing features for collaboration and a lack of seamless interoperability are the most common issues.

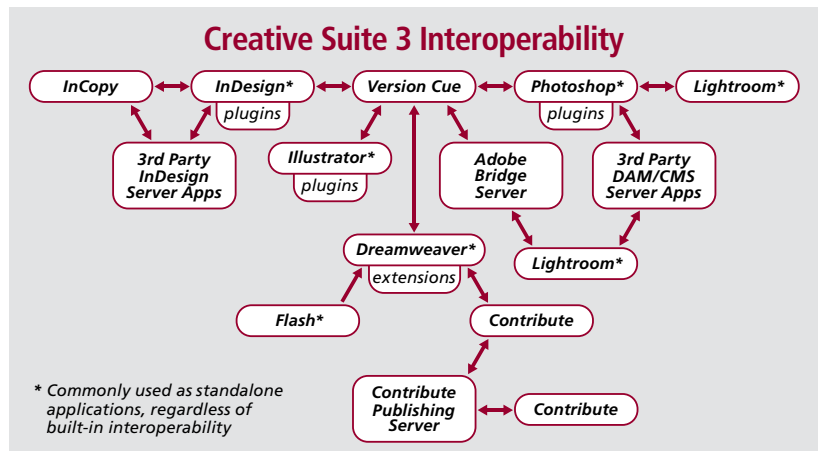
But the times they are a changin' for the professional user and as is often the case, the charge is being led by Adobe. What Adobe seems to have in mind for us is a concept of Creative Suite core applications acting as hubs, with links to extensions and applications that extend into professional and consumer markets. Thanks to this trend, it's now possible to outfit an office with a mix of interoperable applications while reducing costs and training but maintaining complete compliance and data integrity. One assumes that this will broaden the market and not cannibalize the Adobe products. It certainly hasn't hurt Adobe's revenues, with profits tracking higher and higher with each successive quarter.

For the workgroup it also enables contextual collaboration, meaning that the extended functionality remains consistent with the look and feel of the host or primary application. Extensive training is not necessary and more users and stakeholders can be involved with a digital workflow process to the extent they need to be. Since collaboration is the latest workflow nut to crack technologically, the timing is perfect.

## Photoshop, Lightroom & Album, Part 1

Photoshop is a big, comprehensive application that has humbled many an amateur and pro alike. It started life

**Are we there yet?** Interoperability among applications in Creative Suite 3 — along with supporting applications, extensions and server technology — is one factor in building a cross-media publishing system. Third-party server solutions are available to replace Bridge and Version Cue as robust data management resources. Development kits are available for extending CS3 applications and Adobe-based servers. (See the sidebar *The Adobe "Back Office"* for a partial list of publishing system and DAM/CMS partners.)



as a relatively simple scanning program, not unlike the typical scanning driver and applet we use today. The problem is that over the years the functionality has been expanded and layered to the point that there are often multiple ways to solve a problem — none of them obvious. This fact has brought many a competent professional shooter to his knees. Switching from film to digital was hard enough, but now they were required to assume the skills of the color processor and plunge their hands into unknown, occasionally toxic digital chemistry.

Adobe introduced Album as a consumer digital shoebox for sorting and storing digital images. Like Apple's iPhoto, Album's user interface is accessible and a surprising number of professionals and advanced consumers have used it as a first step to organizing their folders and directories of images. Of course, the limits soon became apparent. Professionals needed to be able to tweak images beyond red-eye control and cropping and add metadata to the file to identify its origins and content. Since none of the low-end products appeared to be headed in the direction professionals needed, a gaping hole remained for many years before Adobe reluctantly but dutifully filled this gap with Photoshop.

It wasn't just a bit of image tweaking that was missing; it was also the need for more powerful archiving and storage capabilities. Professionals required some sort of digital asset management solution. Adobe's first attempt at this was to include the File Browser in Photoshop and use the operating system's directory structure as database structure. It worked reasonably well but was not set up to serve other applications. With Creative Suite 2, File Browser morphed into Bridge and became the de facto hub of Adobe's design workflow.

As a result of years of feedback and requests, Adobe this year introduced Adobe Photoshop Lightroom, which is the company's attempt to blend the ease-of-use simplicity of the low-end products, leapfrog the power of Apple's Aperture, and provide the archiving capabilities of Bridge by acting as a photo editor's metadata gateway. It's also an opportunity to build from scratch some image-tweaking functionality with new user interface conventions not possible in Photoshop. All of this comes at less than half the price of standalone versions of Photoshop. So far, professionals and advanced amateurs have universally embraced Lightroom. The upgrade from 1.0 to 1.1 also showed some hoped-for and unexpected improvements.

Lightroom will satisfy all of the needs of many freelance users. In a workgroup as part of a mix of Photoshop, Bridge and Version Cue, Lightroom provides another workflow option. An efficient photo-editing workflow can be developed based on Lightroom's built-in workflow modules. Adobe Camera Raw (ACR) can be used as a pre-processor for adjusting white balance and exposure and the batch can be converted to Digital Negative format (DNG) for further processing and storage. Numerous opportunities are available for adding metadata via templates and automating the process during the import of images.

## The Adobe "Back Office"

### InDesign Server Partners

**Cacidi Systems** (Cacidi Extreme)  
**Lizard Research** (AdLizard)  
**Managing Editor** (K4 Publishing System, etc.)  
**Peter Schmidt Group** (iBrams)  
**Sansui Software** (PublishNow! OPEN, etc.)  
**Silicon Publishing** (Silicon Directory, etc.)  
**Wave2 Media Solutions** (Artemis, etc.)  
**XMPie**  
**Woodwing Software** (Smart Layout, etc.)

### Partial List of DAM/CMS repositories for Lightroom

**Artesia** (Creative Desktop)  
**Canto Cumulus 7.5** (support for RAW and XMP metadata)  
**Documentum** (Desktop for Mac & Windows)  
**Extensis** (Portfolio, metadata support in development)  
**North Plains** (TeleScope Studio)

For companies already using Bridge as their DAM system for storage and sorting, the same level of ACR processing and metadata embedding can take place there. Tweaking images or preparing them for other media can be done in Lightroom. It's only when special filters are needed to special effects, processing involving layers and channels, and all those other things Photoshop is so good at does Lightroom pass the file appropriately to Photoshop.

Lightroom fills the photographer's need for a stripped-down Photoshop to take into the field for quick sorting and some basic pre-processing. For workgroups that need to import images from outside the organization, Adobe provides an automated "watched folders" function. Files can be routed to a watched folder, named, assume selected development settings and have metadata assigned. This is a great advantage because it gets the organizational and tagging part of the process started as soon as possible.

Passing images around for review and approval takes a digital leap forward thanks to Lightroom. Selects from a shoot do not have to be printed in full size or on a contact sheet. A Flash, HTML representation or self-running QuickTime slideshow can be created with only a few clicks. This can reduce the application requirement down to a basic browser-equipped PC.

## Photoshop Extended, Part 2

In the past, any extension to a core application such as Photoshop was the responsibility of the developer publishing it for sale or the company creating a vertically integrated solution for its business. Adobe changes this paradigm with extended versions of Photoshop. The Adobe Photoshop Extended series covers scientific

researchers, 3-D and motion designers, manufacturing professionals, medical professionals, architects and engineers and includes a special version for education. Some solutions were developed in-house and some were licensed from third parties outside the company, but all are cost-effective ways to add time-saving functionality to the familiar Photoshop user interface. It will be interesting to see the adoption rate of these extended versions over more purpose-built tools doing similar work.

Before moving on, we must mention Adobe After Effects as an extension to both Photoshop Extended and Flash CS3 Professional. With it you can create high-impact communications combining moving imagery, still images and graphics, text and sound in 2-D or 3-D space and then animate virtually any aspect of each element.

One more application must also be mentioned here and with all applications from Adobe and other vendors: Adobe Connect, a Web conferencing suite that enables collaboration in the same way Webex and other similar products do. Connect is integrated into some but not all of the Creative Suite applications, but it applies to all of them. With it presenters and guests can review designs, add a comment and approve them remotely. This functionality applies to all Adobe applications and is hosted and sold by Adobe directly to users. So far, this new service seems both well-designed and competitively priced.

### **Acrobat Pro and Acrobat**

Acrobat has grown a lot over the past five years and has become a robust commercial quality prepress file format, host application for PDF editing and manipulation (as in packaging design and imposition), interactive forms development environment and lately a trigger for initiating document review. With this last feature, a user of Acrobat Pro can initiate a review session from within the application to a team, distribute the PDF file through one of the channels mentioned above, and embed a trigger that transforms Acrobat Reader from a simple reading tool to an annotation tool, where reviewers can mark up the file in a non-destructive manner and see each others' comments. This functionality has been available for a couple of versions of Acrobat Pro, but it was underutilized at its inception because Safari did not have the plug-in for Acrobat for its browser. Color management vendors in particular bemoaned this situation.

This markup is very similar to reviewing text in Microsoft Word, a popular way for workgroups to edit and revise text documents. Once again, the Acrobat/Acrobat Reader interactivity demonstrates how Adobe provides ancillary programs to a core application to support collaboration. In addition, Portable Document Format files are also metadata-enabled. This is important since PDF is widely accepted as an archiving format of choice.

One last workgroup-related feature of Acrobat is its Distiller application. Distiller is important for transforming files into secure PDF/x-style files and through the use of presets preparing the file for a particular type of output. By relying on Distiller as the exit ramp of our workflow, we maintain consistency in output.

### **Dreamweaver, Contribute & the Contribute Publishing Server (CPS)**

It's safe to say that every designer who works in print has had at least a passing acquaintance with design for the Web. Vendors tried to help us along the way with graphically oriented design tools that hid the nasty HTML or CSS coding in the background. Products such as FrontPage, PageMill and even GoLive all featured a drag-and-drop mode. Chances are they will all disappear in the near future and be replaced by applications such as Contribute, which is designed for the content provider. There is no code to touch, no HREFs or DIVs to screw up; there's no need to break out BBedit and clean messed-up code either. The whole premise of Contribute is that simple tasks such as changing a price, a block of body copy or an image does not have to be done by the main code guy working in Dreamweaver (their tool of choice), but can be entrusted to those directly responsible for the content. This control also extends to changes to item links and fonts. Further protecting the integrity of the site are functions to save the draft for later, when it can be reviewed and approved, and the notion of rollbacks. Rollbacks, the number of which can be set in Contribute Preferences, are the number of times the file changes can be rolled back to previous editions. It's like a multiple revert to original.

The idea is that sales or marketing can make day-to-day changes to the site if they don't involve changes to the structure of the site. All of the changes are made to an offline page and go back online live only when the changes are published. Unfortunately, I don't believe that Contribute has quite enough functionality yet to achieve Adobe's goal. For example, it's still necessary to go to Dreamweaver to generate an image map with hot spots. Contribute can import images but cannot assign hot spots with corresponding links to it. Almost every other type of link can be created, however. Hot spots created on an image map in Dreamweaver can be edited in Contribute. The hot spot can be highlighted and the link it represents can be changed.

Adobe realized that companies need to control their assets and Web presence and Contribute users would have to have permissions assigned to them through some secure administration functionality. With Dreamweaver 8, sites can be set up with a Contribute Publishing Server (CPS). The administrator of a CPS has full control of defining roles for the Contribute editors. The CPS integrates with Active Directory and LDAP. All changes made to the site are logged and

time-stamped. When rollback is enabled and the number of rollback states are set in the program preferences, the administrator has some recourse over errors introduced to the site or pages.

For organizations where the notion of a CPS is a bit much, Adobe has created Connection Keys. A system administrator creates Connection keys through the use of a wizard and they are either sent through e-mail to Contribute editors or placed on a central server for users to access. Either way, the Contribute/Dreamweaver tandem means fewer late nights poring over code looking for the instance that brought the site down.

### InDesign CS3, InDesign InCopy and InDesign Server

InDesign and InDesign InCopy are not new, but they do exemplify the core application and satellite application extensibility being discussed in this article. Once again, a simpler, less-expensive application can be used for basic content creation and editing and link directly to the host application.

For companies wishing to automate and extend the InDesign workflow even further, there is the InDesign CS3 Server, which supports the ability to create custom user interfaces using HTML, Java, Flash or Flex. Its development environment supports SOAP, JAVA AppleScript, JavaScript, Visual Basic or C++, and it runs on Microsoft Windows Server 2003 or Mac OS X servers.

Of course all of this power begs the build vs. buy question, but at least it is a technology that is available to enterprises where no off-the-shelf solution will suit their unique needs. A number of developers provide publishing solutions that work with Adobe InDesign. (See sidebar, *The Adobe "Back Office"* on page 11.)

### Illustrator CS3

Although in many ways Illustrator seems to be the neglected relative in the family (even though it did win the FreeHand/Macromedia rationalization), it might be one of its hardest-working unsung members. For many, Illustrator is a great setup tool and its control

over vector graphics and text is unmatched in any other applications. For that reason, many users prefer to do a lot of the staging they need for designing Web sites and animation in Illustrator.

With CS3, the designers of Illustrator have added the ability to copy and paste or import artwork from Illustrator into Flash with anchor points, gradients, clipping points and symbols intact. This means that it's now possible to design with precision for both static print based on Photoshop output and Flash-based animated output.

### Conclusion

With the publication of the original Creative Suite it seemed that the end of the road was in sight for some applications. Some anticipated that change, when it did come, would be incremental and upgrades would not be as necessary. As we review Creative Suite 3 today, none of this has happened. In fact, major changes have made the GUI more consistent from application to application. Backward compatibility has not only been maintained but initiatives in meta-data and image formats (DNG) have been introduced to bring consistency and control to legacy data and the industry as well.

What has changed is the support for vertical applications. Extending the core applications to support medical and scientific uses and creating new applications to support Web content providers and photographers are evidently broadening Adobe's reach but not cannibalizing its established base.

Enterprise support for scaling Creative Suite applications is also a key ingredient to enabling unlimited collaboration. These server-based products bridge the gap between ready-made and build-your-own solutions. These comprehensive solutions recognize legacy requirements and provide hooks for future developments.

In Part 2 of this article we will look at the ways Adobe is adopting technology and creating development environments to allow the build-it-yourself crowd unlimited flexibility to extend Creative Suite applications. **TSR**

### Our Take

As Adobe candidly admitted during pre-release events, Creative Suite 3 is the upgrade that CS2 should have been. It is certainly the most ambitious product release the company has ever attempted. Even without the demands of the Macromedia acquisition, the idea of simultaneously releasing this many major upgrades staggers the mind. Product interoperability, a longstanding Adobe mantra, has taken several substantive steps forward, but it will take time to thoroughly assimilate so many applications originating from former competitors.

We were pleased to see advances in the realm of core server technology, where third-party development can rapidly meet the needs of vertical publishing markets. Adobe's decision to pursue its own vertical market strategy also seems to avoid (at least for now) obvious conflicts with its current developers. We expect this trend to continue, with nimble third-party developers staying one step ahead of Adobe, while those that fail to adapt become yesterday's news.