Book Design & Page Layout Software: A Guide for DIY Authors

You’re an author, and you want to self-publish. After all, the juice seems to be flowing toward self-publishers, more authors are rethinking their approach to publishing, and new opportunities seem to be opening up to self-publishers every day.

The indie spirit in self-publishing leads lots of authors to want to take ownership of the entire process of book making, not just the writing. For most people trying to create a truly professional-looking book, the best solution will be to simply hire a professional.

But there’s no reason you can’t produce a reasonable-looking book if you’re willing to put in the time and educate yourself about books, and about the software you’ll use to create your book.

Here’s a guide to help you get oriented to this task if you decide to do it yourself.

### Guide to Book Design & Page Layout Software

There are three levels of software generally available to you if you decide to go the do-it-yourself (DIY) route:

1. **Word processors**—[Microsoft Word](http://www.thebookdesigner.com/2010/09/book-design-with-microsoft-word-the-art-of-moriah-jovan/) has long had a chokehold on the word processing market due to its complete domination of the corporate environment. And don’t forget all those PCs that came with MS Office pre-installed on them.  
     
   Most people use Word, and we also have the useful open source [Open Office](http://www.openoffice.org/)that reads and writes Word files, too. Other choices in this range include Apple’s [Pages](http://www.thebookdesigner.com/2010/10/the-writers-ipad-apples-pages-does-words-layout/); [Storyist](http://www.thebookdesigner.com/2010/06/storyist-software-offers-easy-epub-to-self-publishers/) and [Scrivener](http://www.literatureandlatte.com/scrivener.php), word processors that are also story development tools; [Word Perfect](http://www.corel.com/servlet/Satellite/us/en/Product/1208530087126?trkid=NASEMGglOP#tabview=tab2), the old PC warhorse still in production, and a host of others. These are the programs writers are most familiar with, and in which you’ve probably spent the last couple of years writing your book.
2. **Layout programs**—Since the advent of “desktop publishing” programs have been available that perform the functions usually taken care of by a layout artist.  
     
   Now we have programs like [Adobe InDesign](http://www.thebookdesigner.com/2009/12/adobe-indesign-cs4/) and [Quark Xpress](http://www.quark.com/) to perform these functions. They allow you to bring together all the parts of a publication and manipulate them, then output the resulting job to a variety of devices for reproduction.
3. **Hybrids**—There is also a midrange type of software that attempts to combine the word processing functions with layout functions. For instance,**Microsoft Publisher** is popular for flyers, business brochures and similar projects, and there are a lot of templates available to make creating jobs easier.  
     
   Likewise, **Apple’s Pages** is really a hybrid and can be used either as a word processor or as a layout engine, depending on the type of document you create. This category is showing the most growth in recent months, with more programs coming onto the market that attempt to be “all things to all people.”

Now Pages offers [EPUB output](http://www.thebookdesigner.com/2010/09/apples-pages-epub-export-first-look/), as does Storyist. Any program that provides a clean word processing environment as well as the ability to combine text, graphics and output to reproduction devices might fall into this category.

### Which Option is Right For You?

It’s pretty seductive to use your word processor for putting your book together. After all, you’re already familiar with the program and that should save you a ton of time. But a word processor is a poor choice for some kinds of books:

* Illustrated books—It can be very frustrating to try to position graphics with any precision in a word processor. These programs usually lack sophisticated color-handling also, limiting their use for illustrated books.
* Heavily formatted books—The more formatting involved, like sidebars, pull quotes, tables, charts, illustrations and anchored graphics, the less appropriate a word processor is as a layout solution.
* Typographically sophisticated books—Word processors do not have the very fine typographic controls you find in sophisticated layout programs. And hyphenation and justification of text simply will not look as polished as it would in dedicated software.

### Pros and Cons for Each Type of Software

No matter what you choose to use as a vehicle to publish your book, there are tradeoffs. They are not always apparent, and might not affect you from day one of your project, but before you lock yourself into one solution or another, consider these:

* **Word processors, Pro and Con**
  + Pro:You already know how to use it
  + Pro: The least expensive of the three alternatives, particularly if you already own it.
  + Pro: The shortest learning curve of the three types of programs
  + Con: You may not know how to use the functions you’ll need to do your book.
  + Con: Get ready to be frustrated if you’re trying to do exact placement of images on your pages
  + Con: Your options to output your pages may be severely limited, and you’ll have no support for color corrections, color calibration or many other advanced functions needed for some kinds of books.
* **Hybrids, Pro and Con**
  + Pro: Less expensive than dedicated layout programs.
  + Pro: Easier to learn than dedicated layout programs.
  + Pro: Pre-built templates are available to get you started.
  + Con: Compromised functions of both word processors and layout programs may fail to satisfy or give the range of options of either type of program separately.
  + Con: Idiosyncratic. These programs may use “dumbed down” functions and language to describe the processes in an attempt to appeal to the widest variety of users.
  + Con: You may be frustrated by the availability of some, but not all, the functions of a higher-level layout program.
* **Layout programs, Pro and Con**
  + Pro: You get complete control of your pages, with precise placement of all elements.
  + Pro: Robust support for output to all kinds of reproduction devices from low-end to high-end reproduction
  + Pro: Huge market of add-on and supplemental programs that supply even more functionality to these programs, and integrate with image editing functions as well.
  + Con: These babies are expensive to buy, and if you will only do one book, it may be hard to justify the expense.
  + Con: If you haven’t used this type of software before, get ready for some intensive training. And you can start by trying to figure out what a “pica” is.
  + Con: The variety and precision of commands and functions can be overwhelming for new users.

### Recommendations

What kind of software you end up using to do your book will rely on lots of factors. But generally speaking, I would recommend:

* Word processors if you’re on a budget, if your book is basically running text without much formatting, or if you only want to print up a few books for private use. You can dedicate yourself to learning how to manipulate these programs into producing a decent-looking book, but it may not be the best use of your time. **Microsoft Word** remains my choice here.
* Hybrid programs if you’re willing to pay a few dollars for software that will give you a lot more flexibility with page layout, effects, placement of non-text elements. And if you are only a casual user, these programs will be easier to learn. I’m impressed with **Apple’s Pages** for layout and output to EPUB.
* Page layout programs if you foresee doing more than one book a year, you like the idea of learning printing terms and procedures, or if you want to have complete control of an illustrated or heavily-formatted book. Keep in mind that the first books you produce will still look like first efforts. Plan to devote time to learning the software with some kind of training before diving into your project. Standards here include **Adobe InDesign** and **Quark Xpress**.

And if you do decide to design and produce your own book, check out the[Understanding Fonts & Typography](http://www.thebookdesigner.com/understanding-fonts-typography/) page on this blog. It will give you a leg up in getting your book to press

# Best Desktop Publishing Software

Desktop publishing software may be wise purchase because:

results will be more professional-looking, which translates into acceptance by bookshops and decent sales.

digital output (i.e. files) can be sent directly to commercial printers.

If you don't want to purchase the software yourself, then:

1. You can design the pages of your book with a word-processing package, and run off the camera-ready copy from your laser printer. You'll have limited control over complicated layouts, and the text won't look so pleasing, but that won't matter for the in-house publication or family history booklet.

2. You can get a friend, perhaps a graphics design student, to use her software (PageMaker, Quark Xpress or InDesign) to lay out the pages and save them onto CD. Half of professionally trained graphic designers seem to work outside their calling, and your friend may do a first-rate job for very little. (Or she may not: good layout comes with experience, and neither she nor you may spot what's immediately obvious to the trade.)

3. You can follow the practice of most small publishers and send the text out to a prepress company.

Typesetting is expensive, and it may be worth purchasing the best software and doing the job yourself if the plan includes more than the one book. Options:

## Word Processors

More can be done with packages like Microsoft Word and Corel WordPerfect than is commonly supposed.

Problems arise when you need to flow text around complicated arrangements, add appendices and make changes quickly. Not all commercial printers accept their file formats.

## Desktop Publishing Software

DTP software is not cheap, but the programs make it easier to integrate text and images, manipulate the page elements, create artistic layouts and multi-page publications such as newsletters and books. The better programs offer colour separations, imposition, and fine typographic controls. Not all are difficult to learn. Some suggestions:

Home Publishing: *The Print Shop, Sierra Print Artist*

Small Business Publishing: *Microsoft Office Publisher, Adobe PageMaker, Serif PagePlus*

Professional Page Layout: *Adobe InDesign, QuarkXPress*

Long Documents: *Adobe FrameMaker, Corel Ventura, InDesign CS2 V.3*

Business Publishing: *Adobe FrameMaker, Corel Ventura, Quark XPress*

Database Publishing: *Adobe FrameMaker, Corel Ventura, QuarkXPress*

## Graphics Programs

Fiction is mostly text, but there's no reason why it shouldn't be made more appealing with illustrations or well-chosen photos.

Illustration programs work with vector graphics formats, which allow more flexibility when creating drawings that have to be resized or go through multiple edits. Well known programs include *Adobe Illustrator, CorelDRAW*, and *Macromedia Freehand*.

Image editing programs, also called paint programs or photo editors, work with bitmap images, which are needed for work with photos, scans, or other "realistic" images. They are also best for web graphics. Well known programs include *Adobe Photoshop*, *Corel Photo-Paint* and *Jasc Paint Shop Pro*.

## What's Best?

For most purposes today, the choice is between InDesign and Serif Page Plus. Professionals in magazine art departments who do nothing else but layout use InDesign, in conjunction with Illustrator and Photoshop. I've used both, but would recommend Page Plus for those whose skills lie more with writing. The program is much cheaper, easier to use and comes with tutorials and a wealth of templates. Quality differences in output are indistinguishable, certainly in ePub format (which they both provide) but even in PDF format, either as a final product or as submissions to printers. Far more important than hairsplitting degrees of control are the aesthetics of overall design and content.

## DTP: Adobe Acrobat

Adobe Acrobat is not a page layout program but a way of compiling pages created by other programs, anything from simple HTML to pages set to the most discerning requirements with InDesign, etc. Pdf files can be large (especially in generic versions), but layouts are closely preserved, and pdf pages can placed inside webpages for Internet viewing. The program is increasingly used for company brochures and white papers, and will also make attractive literary documents.

The best desktop publishing software calls for design skill, and takes time to master. Do some reading before making up your mind.

## Professional Desktop Publishing Software

Desktop publishing is not for amateurs. The programs are expensive, call on considerable design experience, and take time to learn. Nonetheless, it may very well pay you to master these skills if you're self-publishing more than the one book.

A broad and somewhat subjective ranking of desktop publishing programs, based on our experience and Internet reading. Ranking is from 1 (missing) to 10 (superb).

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Feature | InDesign CS | Quark Xpress 6 | PageMaker 7 | Framemaker 7 | Corel Ventura 10 | MS Word |
| market | commercial design studios | commercial design studios | business users | long technical manuals | long technical manuals | home and business users |
| text flow | 7 | 8 | 6 | 7 | 7 | 4 |
| typographic control | 9 | 6 | 4 | 7 | 6 | 5 |
| master page control | 8 | 6 | 5 | 8 | 8 | 5 |
| section saving | 7 | 7 | 6 | 7 | 7 | 1 |
| drag and drop | 8 | 3 | 7 | 2 | 7 | 5 |
| program to program conversion | 7 | 5 | 7 | 7 | 5 | 3 |
| macros | 8 | 7 | 7 | 3 | 7 | 8 |
| layout tools | 8 | 8 | 6 | 8 | 8 | 5 |
| colour control | 8 | 5 | 6 | 3 | 3 | 2 |
| image manipulation | 9 | 5 | 7 | 6 | 6 | 2 |
| PDF handling | 9 | 8 | 8 | 7 | 7 | 2 |
| preflighting | 7 | 9 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 1 |
| integration with Adobe programs | 9 | 3 | 4 | 8 | 5 | 1 |
| backward convertible files | 1 | 9 | 9 | 8 | 8 | 9 |
| output to (non-postscript) printers | 5 | 8 | 5 | 7 | 7 | 9 |
| table creation | 6 | 5 | 5 | 8 | 8 | 8 |
| foreign language support | 8 | 5 | 7 | 5 | 3 | 6 |
| webpage output | 7 | 7 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 3 |
| ease of use | 7 | 6 | 8 | 8 | 7 | 8 |
| price | $700 | $950 | $350 | $500 | $700 | $400 (Office Suite) |
| price with extra tools (passport in Xpress) | $700 | $1800 | upgrade to InDesign: $350 |  |  |  |

The groupings are very general, but many graphic design studios are moving to Adobe's InDesign. Plug-ins exist for both InDesign and Xpress (indexing, tables, etc.), and for all shortcomings there are work-arounds. Backward convertibility remains an important issue (you can't read InDesign CS2 files with InDesign 2), but InDesign is a program engineered from scratch, and seems easier to learn. Corel Ventura and Framemaker address a loyal but specialist market (long, highly-structured technical manuals in XML).

Microsoft Word is not a page layout program but a word processing package with advanced features — one that, with basic image manipulation, macros and DBA programming, can be made to do most things in the commercial and scientific environments.

You will also need manuals to get the best from Desk Top Publishing programs, for which visit your local computer book store, secondhand booksellers like [Alibris](http://www.alibris.com/) and [Abebook](http://www.abebooks.com/), and/or booksellers like[Amazon](http://www.amazon.com/). Also consider sites and books on page layout. Some suggestions:

**Using Adobe Acrobat PDF for print production**

Adobe Acrobat was originally created to enable electronic distribution of documents. It was aimed at large corporations as a means to create 'paperless offices.' For this purpose, Acrobat was just one of several competing products and had no remarkable benefits as compared to the competition. However, Adobe 'got smart' and began giving away Acrobat Reader for free--and soon after, the World Wide Web was established on the Internet. Finally, electronic distribution of documents had a real reason for being--and Adobe Acrobat was well positioned to take advantage of the new situation.

Still, Acrobat was developed for electronic documents. It was not designed for efficient handling of printed documents--until the release of Acrobat version 3.0. None the less, you will find that many printers are not yet ready to deal with Acrobat files--but the future of the digital work flow is based on Acrobat--so, eventually, any printer working with digital files will be able to work with (and probably prefer) Acrobat PDF files. To learn how to purchase Adobe Acrobat, visit the [**Adobe**](http://www.adobe.com/) web site.

#### Book Publishers and PDF

Book publishers are generally well positioned to take early advantage of Acrobat PDF files. The insides of most trade books are still printed in one color (black), so the most difficult aspect of PDF, color files, is not an issue. Still, Acrobat needs to be 'set up' properly to get the best results for print publishing.

#### Advantages of Acrobat PDF

Most book printing is based on files output through a PostScript driver. These PostScript files can be quite large. PostScript, developed by Adobe approximately ten years ago, was never intended as a means to exchange files, but was a 'page descriptions programming language' intended to drive a printer. (Indeed, the combination of Apple Macintosh computers, Adobe PostScript, Aldus PageMaker, and (relatively) inexpensive laser printers set off the "desk top publishing" revolution that is still reverberating through the graphic arts, printing, and publishing industries.)

Acrobat PDF has clear advantages over PostScript. Distiller, the PDF file creation program, processes the base PostScript file and simplifies it to specifically describe the pages. PostScript has commands that 'flow through' the whole document that eliminates the possibility of interrupting a job and 'fixing' an individual page--the whole PostScript document must be resubmitted. PDF is 'page independent.' No page depends on commands that may have been made globally or were on another page. PDF allows font embedding. PostScript files must have the font installed on the computer. PDF files are quite compact as compared to PostScript files.

**The process**

First the document is prepared in a professional page layout program (Quark Xpress, Adobe PageMaker, Adobe Framemaker, or Corel Ventura) then the file is 'printed' to disk or saved as a PostScript file. Next, the PostScript is 'distilled' with Acrobat Distiller to create the PDF file. To include any changes made to the original document in the 'parent' program, you must repeat the steps of creating the intermediate PS and distilling the PDF file.

Acrobat consists of various parts: Reader (available for free) that allows you to view and print a PDF document. Exchange, that allows editing of PDF documents. And Distiller, that creates PDF documents from PostScript files. Another PDF creation utility is also available, called PDF-Writer. Writer was developed to create PDF files from 'simple' word processors and was often bundled with such products. It will not create usable PDF files from professional page layout programs and it will not create PDF files that print with the highest possible quality--in other words, avoid PDF-Writer for professional work.

Adobe PageMaker has a 'create PDF' selection on its file menu. *This is a trap for the unwary*--it's intended for Internet-low resolution files. To create high quality files for print reproduction, you must use the 'print' command and select the 'Acrobat' PPD (Printer Personality Description) then "print to disk" to save the document as a PostScript file. You will need follow a similar procedure with Xpress, Framemaker, and Ventura. **A PostScript printer driver must be installed**(use LaserWriter driver 8.5.1 on the Macintosh and the latest available PostScript driver for Windows computers) even if you do not have a PostScript printer.

To print out a PDF file, you use Acrobat Reader or Acrobat Exchange. If the file was distilled with the appropriate settings, Acrobat Reader will print the file at the highest resolution that the output device is capable. If you are using a computer with a non-PostScript printer, you need to install Adobe Type Manager to get accurate PDF output.

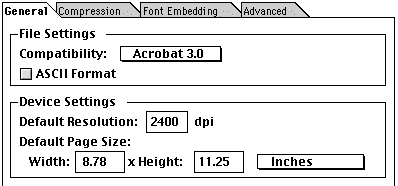
**Note:** The following suggestions cover setting up **Acrobat Distiller 3.0.** Acrobat Distiller **4.0**and later has included easier controls and "sets" of default settings to assist proper set up of the program. **You should always check with your printing service provider for their specific recommendations.**Action Printing has sponsored a web site, [**CreateAPDF.com**](http://www.createapdf.com/) with simplified instructions for setting up versions 4 and 5 of Acrobat Distiller. The following discussion is considerably more detailed.

**Setting Up Acrobat Distiller**

Obviously to use Adobe Acrobat Distiller, you must have a copy of the program. It is available separately as a stand alone application and is included on the CD with Adobe PageMaker and may be available bundled with other Adobe products.

## Start with Job Options - General

Open your copy of Adobe Acrobat Distiller. From the menu "Distiller" menu, select "Job Options" to open the dialog box. Select the "general" tab if it is not immediately displayed.

As shown in the image, select **"Acrobat 3.0"** as the **Compatibility**. This option gives the option of more advanced image compression settings which are beneficial in reducing the PDF file size for transportation and ripping (Raster Image Processing). A smaller file is processed faster. (Versions 4.x and 5.x you may select Acrobat 3.0 compatibility if you know that a potential receiver of the file does not have a current version of Acrobat Reader or the full Acrobat program. For files going to printers and service bureaus, "Acrobat 4.0" compatibility is the usual choice.)

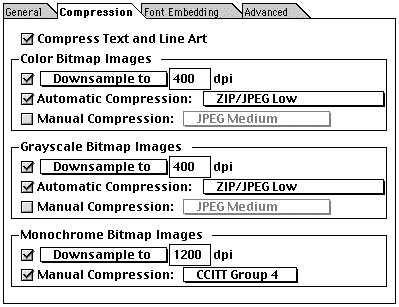
**Do not select the checkbox "ASCII Format"** as that will create a much arger file. This setting is only helpful if you wish to open and examine the file in a text editor.

In the **Device Settings**, enter the **resolution of the targeted output device**. The value you enter affects only vector-based (object-oriented) EPS files which might contain device resolution dependent elements, such as gradients or blends. 2400 or 2540 are relatively safe settings for print output. Most trade books would be output at 1200 or 1270 dpi. A higher number won't affect the quality of the output file.

**Default Page Size**: Most high-end application programs (such as Adobe PageMaker or Quark Xpress) include a paper size, **so you can ignore this setting.** However, many word processors and other applications only reference a page size, which you must enter here. Normally you might use 8.5 x 11. The value entered in the figure represents a 'letter-extra' page size used by our targeted output device. You should **select a page size supported by the final output device.**Incidentally, the 8.78 inches would become 632 points (actually making 8.77 inches) when distilled, not 632.16 points as calculated mathematically; Distiller rounds measurements to the nearest point. (The slightly oversize page is "Letter Extra" common on many high resolution output devices.)

Now select the tab marked:

## Compression

The compression tab displays the controls that affect file size and image quality.

**Select "Compress Text and Line Art."** This is the default and may be preselected. Compression of text and line art (vector EPS graphics) uses a "loss less" method and will not affect output quality, but will reduce the file size.

Set **Color Bitmap Images** and **Grayscale Bitmap Images** to **Downsample to 400 dpi.**This creates the standard for the amount of image to be included in the PDF file. For example, if an image has been scanned at 300 ppi (points per inch) then scaled down to fit a layout, the actual image resolution is increased accordingly. The downsampling option will correct these situations and create a smaller, more efficient Adobe PDF file. **Do not** use the *Subsampling* option as that will generate a lower quality image. Subsampling is appropriate if you wish to create a FPO or proof image only. Subsampling causes a significant loss of sharpness and detail in the image.

Note: if you are preparing a file for *black and white* output, you should *convert your color images to grayscale in Photoshop* or a similar program before you distill your document. In this situation the color information only enlarges the file size and the 'automatic' grayscale conversion done by the output software may give inferior results.

Set **Automatic Compression to ZIP/JPEG Low.**In this case low means high-quality by applying only a 'low' amount of compression. JPEG is a 'lossy' compression method that discards some information from the image during compression. The low setting will not reduce the image size, but will also not 'damage' the image. JPEG Medium-Low and Medium compression may also generate good results depending on the image content. Highly detailed images can afford less 'image loss' caused by the higher compression settings, so some experimentation may be required to find the optimum setting for your content.

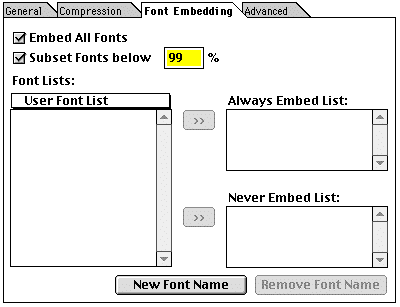
For **Monochrome Bitmap Images** select **Downsample to the resolution of the target output device** (in the example 1200 dpi is used). Again, this is to adjust scanned images that may have been reduced in size resulting in "oversampling." Since all compression choices for monochrome images are loss less, select CCITT Group 4 to achieve the smallest file size.

Note: Distiller also supports loss less ZIP compression for images, but this usually results in much larger PDF files. Use the loss less ZIP compression choices only when absolutely necessary. (Keep in mind the kind of images, the printing process to be used, the line screen setting, and the paper type being used. e.g. a Docutech only supports an 85 lpi screen, so the image quality will be somewhat less than standard printed books (that usually use a 133 line screen). Images printed on uncoated paper stock will be less sharp than images printed on coated paper.)

Now select the tab marked:

## Font Embedding

Font embedding is used to specify which fonts are included in the PDF file to prevent font substitution at print time. Distiller never embeds the 'standard 13' fonts (Helvetica, Times, Courier, and Symbol font families) because they are available on all PostScript devices.

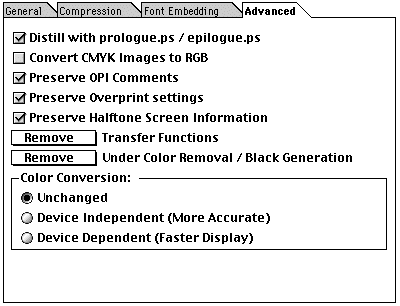
Select **Embed All Fonts** so that Distiller includes all the fonts used in your document in the PDF file. Select **Subset Fonts below and specify 99%.** With this option Distiller includes only the characters used in the document for each typeface and *renames the subset fonts in the PDF file to prevent an available font with the same name from being used at print time.*This ensures that any customization to your font (such as kerning tables) will be used and reduces the chance of other unexpected results caused by an unintended font substitution. This option, however, does prevent last minute editing (by the print service) using the Acrobat Exchange 'touch-up' tool. (There are work arounds to allow 'touch-up' tool edits, but then the font embedding information is lost requiring the original font(s) used to be installed on the computer(s) processing the document.)

(In Versions 4.x and 5.x, the "subset" value can remain at the default 100%.)

Now select the tab marked:

## Advanced

The **default** options listed under the Advanced tab **are tailored for online documents.** You must make sure that you select the appropriate options for your print documents. These options affect the images in your document whether you are distilling for online or for print.

**If**your document **includes Spot Colors, select the "Distill with prologue.ps/epilogue.ps" checkbox.** Then move the "prologue.ps" and "epilogue.ps" files from the high\_end folder in the Xtras folder to the folder holding the Acrobat Distiller 3.0 application (Macintosh) or move them from the Distillr/Xtras/High\_end directory to the Distillr directory (Windows). Distiller uses these files to include spot colors in the PDF file instead of converting the spot colors to process colors. (See the Acrobat Distiller 3.0 Online Guide for more information about this topic.) **If you do not have Spot Colors in your document, leave this box unchecked.**

Note: Some designers using spot colors will set them to Cyan, Magenta, or Yellow, so that the normal CMYK separation will be used. In this case, the spot color(s) will be output on the C, M, or Y plate rather than a plate named for the spot color. As long as CMYK colors aren't also used in the project it's a safe way to avoid some complexity in getting the print drivers to output plates as expected.

**Deselect the Convert CMYK Images to RGB.**This option 'undoes' the work you had to do in Photoshop to convert your images to CMYK in preparation for printing. Failing to select this checkbox is likely to cause your color images to be incorrectly separated on the imagesetter.

If you are **using the Open Press Interface (OPI)** to substitute final hi-res images for the images included in your document, then you need to select **"Preserve OPI Comments."**If you did not 'embed' all images in your original document you will need to use this option. It doesn't hurt anything if you select it, but have no OPI comments to preserve. (Some printers need to have "Preserve OPI Comments" deselected due to output problems with particular high resolution devices. Be sure to consult with your printer before generating a PDF for their use.)

**Select the "Preserve Overprint settings" checkbox**to include any overprint setting included in your document. You may not be aware of making any such selections, but it is wise to select this option to avoid any unpleasant surprises. Likewise, **select the "Preserve Halftone Screen Information" checkbox** if you have set any special screening attributes. If you haven't made any such selections, then this checkbox will have no effect. Caution: if you experimented with custom halftone settings, be sure you have them set as you wish or have reverted them to their default condition before distilling the document.

You can apply, remove, or preserve the **Transfer Functions** and **Under Color Removal/Black Generation** information from your original PostScript file in the resulting PDF file. We suggest **Remove** in both cases. By choosing the Apply option, the options are applied to the PDF file and are viewed on-screen. However, once these options have been *applied,* they are *not included* in the PostScript print stream from Acrobat. To include these options for final print production, you must select the *Preserve* option. It is best to consult with your commercial printer regarding these options. Since these options are somewhat dependent on the printing press used, it is generally best to Remove these functions. (The printer will be able to select the specific function values when the file is processed on their imagesetter.) These functions apply to color material and have no effect on plain black and white files.

In the **Color Conversion** section, **select Unchanged** to ensure no color conversion takes place. However, device-independent colors that do not map directly to Calibrated RGB or LAB are converted to LAB. For more information about the other color conversion options, see the Distiller User Guide

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What is Desktop Publishing Software?

Desktop publishing software is a tool for graphic designers and non-designers to create visual communications (brochures, business cards, greeting cards, Web pages, posters, etc.) for professional or desktop printing as well as for online or on-screen electronic publishing.

Programs such as Adobe InDesign, Microsoft Publisher, QuarkXPress, Serif PagePlus, and Scribus are examples of desktop publishing software. Some of these are used more by graphic designers. Others are used more by office workers, teachers, students, small business owners, and non-designers.

[Ads](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/software/f/software_list.htm)

[WizIQ Plug-In for Moodle](http://www.googleadservices.com/pagead/aclk?sa=L&ai=CtWHqcxQ9VIuVFtiougTm9YH4BsrwvZoEitX53KcBooehw_4BEAEgn_3YICgFUMXyjK36_____wFg5fLlg7QOoAGOtLflA8gBAagDAaoEkwFP0Fg8Pzk5IS4XuqEpfyk_eviRolnS3qJpaAe1RhjGdq6lHPulXbahwWpjbFYn3E1npO6knctO9khNh-YPKqt8Tkeb-EKD1rkRLtTCSDa77NeFfNPzVAtQ8Mzfnm5qSV6MbAud2JB-Asi4wgCOWdMC37y0yq4NkdswFk9c3lpizizNcscr1WAlQRw9I7D8LXN-RviIBgGAB9rLyBo&num=1&cid=5GgvXWC9thGHrRJVChQdYqY7&sig=AOD64_3hX6aVmiCJd1J3QmZPuI6EwzIQfg&client=ca-aj-about-premium&adurl=http://www1.wiziq.com/moodle-adword/%3Futm_source%3DGoogle%26utm_medium%3Dcpc%2520%26utm_campaign%3DMoodle%2520Unbounce)

[www.wiziq.com/Moodle](http://www.googleadservices.com/pagead/aclk?sa=L&ai=CtWHqcxQ9VIuVFtiougTm9YH4BsrwvZoEitX53KcBooehw_4BEAEgn_3YICgFUMXyjK36_____wFg5fLlg7QOoAGOtLflA8gBAagDAaoEkwFP0Fg8Pzk5IS4XuqEpfyk_eviRolnS3qJpaAe1RhjGdq6lHPulXbahwWpjbFYn3E1npO6knctO9khNh-YPKqt8Tkeb-EKD1rkRLtTCSDa77NeFfNPzVAtQ8Mzfnm5qSV6MbAud2JB-Asi4wgCOWdMC37y0yq4NkdswFk9c3lpizizNcscr1WAlQRw9I7D8LXN-RviIBgGAB9rLyBo&num=1&cid=5GgvXWC9thGHrRJVChQdYqY7&sig=AOD64_3hX6aVmiCJd1J3QmZPuI6EwzIQfg&client=ca-aj-about-premium&adurl=http://www1.wiziq.com/moodle-adword/%3Futm_source%3DGoogle%26utm_medium%3Dcpc%2520%26utm_campaign%3DMoodle%2520Unbounce)

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[cleartrip.com/Kanyakumari](http://www.googleadservices.com/pagead/aclk?sa=L&ai=Ck79McxQ9VIuVFtiougTm9YH4Buj79t0FwOWyxKgBsrC-leUBEAIgn_3YICgFUMbmgIn9_____wFg5fLlg7QOoAGQh5fgA8gBAakCEGRecJF9UT6oAwGqBJQBT9A4KoMmIBsWpQm0WX4_J2XjjqJcxZLtamUdtBxVynQZfiaouV2y69RqKG1AP8NWeKTrs9GETftSTN2rAyjpPEUMx-RLkdWvAjmeiwFqp-XFhmrA5G44VerLhdhyc6Tcj63JmhVavhDCTUG7jLA4wRdcXztf-2fYNBLLLShZYMw8KITEqxUk1LcfPy--HMv3VGQEQogGAYAH2PjoHw&num=2&cid=5GgvXWC9thGHrRJVChQdYqY7&sig=AOD64_2fV5btU38ZWxcc0x7BL-2Hcm2P4g&client=ca-aj-about-premium&adurl=http://dashboard.communicate2-apps.com/clearTrip/hotel-tuxedo-city.aspx%3Fday%3D14%26city%3DKanyakumari%26state%3DTamil%2BNadu)

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[www.fedena.com/Management-System](http://www.googleadservices.com/pagead/aclk?sa=L&ai=Cq-nFcxQ9VIuVFtiougTm9YH4Bs3Pnf4ElZ_Sr6UBwI23ARADIJ_92CAoBVDdmsX5-v____8BYOXy5YO0DqABi__M3wPIAQGpAhBkXnCRfVE-qAMBqgSRAU_QGCmOLyAaFqUJtFl-Pydl446iXMWS7WplHbQcVcp0GX4mqLldsuvUaihtQD_DVnik67PRhE37UkzdqwMo6TxFDMfkS5HVrwI5nosBaqflxYZqwORuOFXqy4XYcnOk3I-twZq1VCyNmJp764xx2CrUprTNrviW27DjyKnfWnA7Pzjxh69gZ9BAEj_NtvG_Xb2IBgGAB92AsyA&num=3&cid=5GgvXWC9thGHrRJVChQdYqY7&sig=AOD64_0KMzaluWNHpyJLnBty-a6r4G6GHA&client=ca-aj-about-premium&adurl=http://www.fedena.com/%3Futm_source%3Dgoogleadwordsp%26utm_medium%3Dcpchp%26utm_content%3Dcchp%26utm_campaign%3Dcnhp)

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* [Publisher Software](http://desktoppub.about.com/z/js/o.htm?k=publisher%20software&SUName=desktoppub&d=Publisher%20Software&r=http%3A%2F%2Fdesktoppub.about.com%2Fod%2Fsoftware%2Ff%2Fsoftware_list.htm)
* [Application Software](http://desktoppub.about.com/z/js/o.htm?k=application%20software&SUName=desktoppub&d=Application%20Software&r=http%3A%2F%2Fdesktoppub.about.com%2Fod%2Fsoftware%2Ff%2Fsoftware_list.htm)
* [Software Programs](http://desktoppub.about.com/z/js/o.htm?k=software%20programs&SUName=desktoppub&d=Software%20Programs&r=http%3A%2F%2Fdesktoppub.about.com%2Fod%2Fsoftware%2Ff%2Fsoftware_list.htm)
* [Graphics Design Software](http://desktoppub.about.com/z/js/o.htm?k=graphics%20design%20software&SUName=desktoppub&d=Graphics%20Design%20Software&r=http%3A%2F%2Fdesktoppub.about.com%2Fod%2Fsoftware%2Ff%2Fsoftware_list.htm)
* [All Software](http://desktoppub.about.com/z/js/o.htm?k=all%20software&SUName=desktoppub&d=All%20Software&r=http%3A%2F%2Fdesktoppub.about.com%2Fod%2Fsoftware%2Ff%2Fsoftware_list.htm)

**Answer:**

The term desktop publishing was [originally coined to describe Aldus (now Adobe) PageMaker](http://desktoppub.about.com/cs/beginners/f/when_dtp.htm) and among professional designers refers primarily to high-end page layout software applications including Adobe InDesign and QuarkXPress.

### Desktop Publishing Revolution Increases Software Options

However, an explosion of consumer programs and the associated advertising hype stretched the use of "desktop publishing software" to include sofware for making greeting cards, calendars, banners, and other crafty print projects as well as all the peripheral programs for handing fonts, graphics, and later Web design. It also resulted in a wider range of low-cost, easy-to-use software that didn't require traditional design and prepress skills to understand and use.

### Desktop Publishing Software Becomes a "Catch-All" Phrase

Other applications and utilities often lumped into the "desktop publishing software" category are better classified as graphics, Web publishing, or presentation software, and any number of utilities and plug-ins for specific related tasks such as

[software](http://googleads.g.doubleclick.net/aclk?sa=L&ai=CIDetcxQ9VIuVFtiougTm9YH4BvePlvEFz4z-x9kBwI23ARAEIJ_92CAoBVDHwtzy-_____8BYOXy5YO0DsgBAagDAaoEjQFP0FheJTk8IS4XuqEpfyk_eviRolnS3qJpaAe1RhjGdq6lHPulXbahwWpjbFYn3E1npO6knctO9khNh-YPKqt8Tkeb-EKD1rkRLtTCSDa77NeFfNPzVAtQ8Mzfnm5qAV4iY43SqJG9SCNZcuuMQ9M31FSzOCkNkds2Fttc3lrgjjjNcsepm2QwRLuxl4KAB9e10DM&num=4&sig=AOD64_3TaZP2OFsYR2oLI1OkOP3J6_tjxA&client=ca-aj-about-premium&adurl=http://itsupplystation.com)

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[Graphic Design: Register](http://www.googleadservices.com/pagead/aclk?sa=L&ai=C7ws7cxQ9VIuVFtiougTm9YH4BvqOyvYG6taQ-G3AjbcBEAUgn_3YICgFUNzS1tP______wFg5fLlg7QOoAGS3Lz2A8gBAakCEGRecJF9UT6oAwGqBJEBT9AYGtgnIBwWpQm0WX4_J2XjjqJcxZLtamUdtBxVynQZfiaouV2y69RqKG1AP8NWeKTrs9GETftSTN2rAyjpPEUMx-RLkdWvAjmeiwFqp-XFhmrA5G44VerLhdhyc6Tcj63BmpJtS5uYmnvrjHHYKtSmtM2u-JbbsOPIqd9acDs_OPGHr2Bn0EASP822vsUWlIgGAYAH1qPDCQ&num=5&cid=5GgvXWC9thGHrRJVChQdYqY7&sig=AOD64_0cKB9MpLb4DS_0lirC_GJP_0R1CA&client=ca-aj-about-premium&adurl=http://www.shiksha.com/customizedmmp/mmp/templateForm/308)

[www.shiksha.com/Graphic-Designing](http://www.googleadservices.com/pagead/aclk?sa=L&ai=C7ws7cxQ9VIuVFtiougTm9YH4BvqOyvYG6taQ-G3AjbcBEAUgn_3YICgFUNzS1tP______wFg5fLlg7QOoAGS3Lz2A8gBAakCEGRecJF9UT6oAwGqBJEBT9AYGtgnIBwWpQm0WX4_J2XjjqJcxZLtamUdtBxVynQZfiaouV2y69RqKG1AP8NWeKTrs9GETftSTN2rAyjpPEUMx-RLkdWvAjmeiwFqp-XFhmrA5G44VerLhdhyc6Tcj63BmpJtS5uYmnvrjHHYKtSmtM2u-JbbsOPIqd9acDs_OPGHr2Bn0EASP822vsUWlIgGAYAH1qPDCQ&num=5&cid=5GgvXWC9thGHrRJVChQdYqY7&sig=AOD64_0cKB9MpLb4DS_0lirC_GJP_0R1CA&client=ca-aj-about-premium&adurl=http://www.shiksha.com/customizedmmp/mmp/templateForm/308)

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[color calibration](http://desktoppub.about.com/cs/colorcalibration/a/cal_monitor.htm) , font management, or imposition. The DTP software lists below are those that do the core task of desktop publishing - composing text and graphics into page layouts for publishing.

[Desktop Publishing in the 21st Century](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/gethelp/a/DesktopPublishing.htm)further expands the meaning of desktop publishing and thus broadens the definition of desktop publishing software to include software for Web design and other forms of visual communications beyond print design.

### Who Makes Desktop Publishing Software?

The main players in the field are Adobe, Corel, Quark, and Serif with products that stick close to the original use of desktop publishing software for professional page layout. Additionally, Microsoft, Nova Development, Broderbund and others have been producing consumer or print creativity and business desktop publishing software for many years. Xara is increasingly topping the lists with their hybrid graphics/page layout software.

[**Adobe**](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/adobe/p/Adobe-Desktop-Publishing.htm) makes many software packages used by designers. You've probably heard of Photoshop, for example. But these other programs are not page layout software applications for print publishing. They are graphics software, Web design software, programs for creating and working with the PDF format, such as Adobe Acrobat, and other related software tools. The primary desktop publishing software or page layout software applications are:

* [Adobe FrameMaker](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/adobe/p/framemaker.-D0f.htm)
* [**Adobe InDesign**](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/indesign/p/Adobe-InDesign.htm)
* [Adobe PageMaker](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/pagemaker/fr/PageMaker.htm)

[**Corel**](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/findsoftware1/p/corel.htm) is best known for its graphics suite that includes CorelDRAW and Corel Photo-Paint. In the past it has produced creative printing or home publishing programs used for desktop publishing too but the primary page layout software from Corel is:

* [Corel Ventura](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/findsoftware1/p/corel.htm)

[**Microsoft**](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/findsoftware1/p/microsoft.htm) produces Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and various consumer graphics and creative printing programs used alone or in conjunction with other applications to do some form of desktop publishing. Their entry into page layout for print is:

* [Microsoft Publisher](http://desktoppub.about.com/cs/software/p/mspublisher.htm)

[**Quark**](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/findsoftware1/p/quark.htm) has other software but the one most closely associated with desktop publishing is QuarkXPress and its many XTensions (produced by many third party vendors) that enhance and expand the basic capabilities of QuarkXPress.

* [QuarkXPress](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/findsoftware1/p/quark.htm)

[**Serif**](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/findsoftware1/p/serif.htm) produces a suite of applications for graphics and Web design but the core desktop publishing software application is:

* [Serif PagePlus](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/findsoftware1/p/serif.htm)

[**Broderbund**](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/findsoftware1/p/Broderbund-Desktop-Publishing-Software.htm) produces a number of design and publishing programs in the consumer desktop publishing arena. Although some users do use these programs as freelance designers, the programs are not typically considered professional or high-end tools. The primary audience for Broderbund creative printing software are individuals wanting to create personal projects and some small business owners. The two titles most closely associated with desktop publishing are:

* [The Print Shop](http://desktoppub.about.com/u/reviews/findsoftware1/The-Print-Shop-User-Reviews/)
* [PrintMaster](http://desktoppub.about.com/u/reviews/findsoftware1/Broderbund-PrintMaster-User-Reviews/)

[**Xara Group**](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/findsoftware1/p/Xara-Group-Ltd.htm) has been making software since 1981. The current Xara product line combines print and Web graphics and design capabilities.

* Xara Designer Pro (2011 About.com Readers' Choice as Best Desktop Publishing Software)
* Xara Photo & Graphic Designer

[**Specialty programs**](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/osspecialtysoftware/) primarily designed just for greeting cards, calendars, or other specific print tasks are also frequently changing names, changing hands, and changing focus. These include programs such as Calendar Creator and Scrapbook Factory.

### Types of Software Used in Desktop Publishing

In addition to the sometimes fuzzy division of desktop publishing into professional, home, and business categories, there are other types of software closely associated with desktop publishing. Of the [four types of software for desktop publishing](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/softwarehardware/tp/Software_Desktop_Publishing.htm) , the Page Layout category encompasses the programs also known as desktop publishing software. The others are specialized or auxilliary tools used in desktop publishing. But the lines are blurred. Much of the [best design software](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/softwarehardware/tp/Design_Software.htm) is used for both print and Web and sometimes doubles as both page layout and graphics software or creative printing and business software or other combinatons.

For the most complete list, see the [A-Z Really Big List of Desktop Publishing Software](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/findsoftware1/tp/Big-List-Of-Desktop-Publishing-Software.htm).

All the FAQs: [Career & Business](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/faq/tp/Desktop-Publishing-Career-and-Business-FAQs.htm) | [Software](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/faq/tp/Desktop-Publishing-Software-FAQs.htm) | [Design & Layout](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/faq/tp/Graphic-Design-and-Page-Layout-FAQs.htm) | [Graphics](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/faq/tp/Graphics-FAQs.htm) | [Type & Fonts](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/faq/tp/Type-and-Fonts-FAQs.htm) |[Prepress & Printing](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/faq/tp/Prepress-and-Printing-FAQs.htm)

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There are four general groups of software used in desktop publishing software most designers need. These types of programs make up the core of your toolbox. Additional utilities, add-ons, and specialty software not covered here can enhance the basic desktop publishing software arsenal. Within some of the four general groups of software are additional sub-categories.

Microsoft Word 2010 Box Shot and Sample Template.Microsoft Word 2010 Box Shot and Sample Template; Box shot courtesy of PriceGrabber

### [Word Processor](http://wordprocessing.about.com/cs/programs/a/WP_Programs.htm)

You will use a word processor to type and edit your text including spell and grammar checking. You may even be able to format specific elements on the fly and include those [formatting tags](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/textacquisition/a/tagged_text.htm) when you import text to your page layout program, simplifying some formatting tasks. While you can do some fancy, advanced layouts in your word processor software they are best suited to simply working with words, not for page layout. Additionally, if your intent is to have your work commercially printed, word processing file formats are generally not suitable. Choose a word processor that can import and export a variety of formats for maximum compatibility with others.  
Adobe InDesign CS4 with open document. Adobe CS4 Screenshot by J. Bear

### [Page Layout (aka Desktop Publishing Software)](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/software/f/software_list.htm)

These are the programs most closely associated with doing desktop publishing. This kind of software for desktop publishing allows for the integration of text and images on the page, easy manipulation of page elements, creation of artistic layouts and multi-page publications such as newsletters and books. High-end or professional level tools include more prepress features while software for home or small business use have more templates and clip art:

* [**Professional Page Layout**](http://desktoppub.about.com/cs/software/p/sw_pagelayout.htm)  
  Also See Professional Programs:[*Windows*](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/softwarehardware/tp/Desktop_Publishing_Software.htm)|[*Mac*](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/softwarehardware/tp/Mac_Pro_Desktop_Publishing.htm)
* [**Home Publishing**](http://desktoppub.about.com/cs/software/p/sw_home.htm)  
  Also See[*Best Print Creativity Software*](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/crafts/tp/Holiday_Gift_Making.htm)

 Adobe Photoshop CS4 with photo open for editing.Adobe CS4 Screenshot by J. Bear

### [Graphics Software](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/software/a/graphics_sw.htm)

For most print publishing an illustration program and an image editor are the types of programs needed. Some graphics software programs may incorporate a few features of the other type, but for most professional work you'll need each one.

* **Illustration**  
  Illustration or drawing programs work with vector [graphics formats](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/graphicformats/a/graphicformats.htm) and allow more flexibility when creating artwork that is to be resized or must go through multiple edits. Adobe Illustrator is one example.  
  See Illustration Software: [Windows](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/win/tp/Windows-Vector-Illustration-Software.htm) | [Mac](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/mac/tp/Mac-Vector-Illustration-Software.htm)
* **Photo/Image Editing**  
  Image editors, also called paint programs or photo editors work with bitmap images such as photos and scans. Although illustration programs can export bitmaps, photo editors are better for Web images and many special photo effects. Photoshop is a Never Forget Your Passwords Again. Over 50 Million Downloads To Date!

Adobe Dreamweaver CS5. Adobe Dreamweaver CS5; Image courtesy of PriceGrabber

### [Electronic or Web Publishing](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/transitionprintweb/tp/Print_Design_vs_Web_Design.htm)

Many of today's page layout programs and other software for desktop publishing now include a variety of electronic publishing capabilities. If your work is exclusively Web Design or you wish to have separate tools for Web Publishing, such as [Adobe Dreamweaver](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/adobe/ss/Adobe-Creative-Suite_10.htm). Please visit[About.com Web Design / HTML](http://webdesign.about.com/) for help choosing the appropriate tools. Otherwise, see the categories above that best fit your print publishing then compare their additional features for Web and electronic publishing. [More »](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/transitionprintweb/tp/Print_Design_vs_Web_Design.htm)

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**W**hich software is best for desktop publishing? The answer: There is no single *best*program. There are, however, specific programs that are better suited for certain tasks than others. We can roughly divide desktop publishing tasks into six general categories. Some software programs fit only one category, others are found in multiple categories.

**Professional Page Layout Software**  
Desktop publishing software as a whole is page layout software. But page layout is also a sub-category. Single page artistic layouts or short documents that combine text and graphics require a page layout tool that provides extensive typographic control and graphics handling capabilities. The typical projects for page layout tools include ads, fliers, brochures, newsletters, posters, and business cards. Programs in this category are generally tailored to professional designers.   
[[**PROFESSIONAL PAGE LAYOUT SOFTWARE**](http://desktoppub.about.com/cs/software/p/sw_pagelayout.htm)]

**Long Document Composition**  
Book length publications and other complex, structured documents require a program that can handle repeating elements (headers, footers), table of content and index generation, page numbering, and integration of graphics and perhaps other elements including spreadsheet and database elements. Ideally these programs combine word processing, desktop publishing, and graphics in one package. Extensive text handling capabilities, pagination, and automation of repetitive tasks are characteristic of these tools. Due to their complexity they also have a steep learning curve.  
**Database-Assisted Publishing**

Catalogs, directories, and price lists are examples of documents that are frequently created from database information. These are both long and short documents. The software used should handle the import of and formatting of internal or external data either independently or through the seamless operation with front-ends, add-ons, or "bridges" between the database and the typesetting and formatting software.  
**Business or Enterprise Publishing**  
Page layout, long document, and database-assisted publishing solutions are often all found in a corporate environment. While marketing and promotional materials may be outsourced, other types of business documents that require high-end typesetting and document composition, management, and distribution, (which may include group collaboration for creation and revisions and on-demand printing) and Intranet or Internet-based technologies may be handled in-house.  
[[**CORPORATE aka BUSINESS OR ENTERPRISE PUBLISHING SOFTWARE**](http://desktoppub.about.com/cs/software/p/sw_enterprise.htm)]

**SOHO (Small Business) Publishing**  
Often small business owners want to produce their own marketing and collateral materials. Users are seldom professional designers so these programs feature ease of learning, ease of use, and a variety of templates for common business documents. The better programs for SOHO use provide PostScript or other export capabilities that make commercial printing of digital files possible as well as desktop printing.  
[[**SOHO (SMALL BUSINESS) PUBLISHING SOFTWARE**](http://desktoppub.about.com/cs/software/p/sw_soho.htm)]

**Home Publishing or Creative Printing**  
Programs for creative printing and computer crafts are primarily designed for desktop printing and simple Web publishing. Ease of use, templates or design wizards, plus large font and clip art collections are characteristic of this class of program. Typical home projects include greeting cards, posters, banners, and photo albums.  
[[**HOME PUBLISHING or CREATIVE PRINTING SOFTWARE**](http://desktoppub.about.com/cs/software/p/sw_home.htm)]

**Web and Electronic Publishing**  
Many of today's page layout and other document publishing programs now include a variety of electronic publishing capabilities. If your work is exclusively Web Design or you wish to have separate tools for Web Publishing, please visit our [About Web Design GuideSite](http://webdesign.about.com/) for help choosing the appropriate tools. Otherwise, see the categories above that best fit your print publishing then compare their additional features for Web and Electronic publishing.

Even if Web publishing is not part of what you do, one electronic publishing tool that is becoming increasingly important, even for print publishers, is Adobe Acrobat or similiar tools for producing (not just viewing) PDF files.  
[Descriptions and Examples for PDF](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/pdf/)

**All-Around**  
If you can get only one program and your needs encompass several categories such as page layout and long document publishing, there are currently two programs that best fit the all-around category. QuarkXPress and Corel Ventura are both capable programs for both page layout tasks and the specific needs of long document publishing. Adobe PageMaker can handle some long document publishing as well and may be more suitable for those who need a cross between a long document and a SOHO publishing tool.

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Of all the types of desktop publishing software, page layout software is the key component of a desktop publishing system. The primary purpose of page layout software is to make it easy to combine text and graphics to create publications. There are many sub-categories of page layout or desktop publishing software. Page layout software refers to software suitable for single page artistic layouts or short documents. Page layout software may also be used for long document publishing although it may often be paired with special add-ons and other software suited to the special needs of long document or book publishing.

**Page Layout Software is used for:**

The typical projects for page layout tools include [ads](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/ads/), fliers, [brochures](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/brochures/), [newsletters](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/newsletters), posters, and [business cards](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/businesscards).

**Page Layout Software is used by:**

Most programs in this category are generally tailored to professional designers. Non-designers can and certainly do use them, but the high-end features, learning curve, and price make them less attractive for [home](http://desktoppub.about.com/cs/software/p/sw_home.htm) and small office or home-based [business](http://desktoppub.about.com/cs/software/p/sw_soho.htm) use. However, there are programs in this category that rival the industry standards that also offer lower prices and a less steep learning curve.

**Key Features of Page Layout Software:**

Extensive typographic control and graphics handling capabilities are typical features of page layout software. These programs have good built-in or add-on graphics features or integrate well with standalone graphics software programs. These are also programs that are suitable for commercial printing and generally well-accepted by service bureaus and commercial printers.

Other increasingly important features include PDF import, export, and editing, Web design and publishing features, and collaboration features.

**Primary Software in the Page Layout Category:**

Although these programs may also have features that make them suitable to other sub-categories of desktop publishing, they are generally the best choices for the projects and users described in this profile.

* [Adobe InDesign](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/indesign/p/Adobe-InDesign.htm)
* [QuarkXPress](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/findsoftware1/p/quark.htm)

**Secondary Software in the Page Layout Category:**

Once in wide use by individual graphic designers, [Corel Ventura](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/findsoftware1/p/corel.htm), [Adobe FrameMaker](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/adobe/p/framemaker.-D0f.htm), and[Adobe PageMaker](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/pagemaker/fr/PageMaker.htm) are now used primarily by businesses and for long document publishing. Neither Ventura or PageMaker are being further developed by their respective publishers.

[Microsoft Publisher](http://desktoppub.about.com/cs/software/p/mspublisher.htm), as part of the Microsoft Office suite, is used extensively by business professionals. It's often also found in educational settings and is considered an easy-to-use option for individuals.

**Alternative Software in this Category:**

Although primarily classified as graphics software, vector illustration software is also suitable for many of the uses described for page layout software and generally have most of the key features required. Top choices include:

* [Adobe Illustrator](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/illustrator/p/Adobe-Illustrator.htm)
* [CorelDRAW](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/findsoftware1/p/corel.htm)
* [Inkscape](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/findsoftware1/p/corel.htm)

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For personal publishing, [SOHO/small business](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/freelancedesign/g/soho.htm) publishing, and even freelance desktop publishing, if the final product comes from your desktop printer or if a desktop printer is used to produce [camera-ready artwork](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/camerareadyart/) , then the minimum requirement is any type of page layout application (the primary type of [Desktop Publishing software](http://desktoppub.about.com/cs/software/f/best_software.htm)) from the creative printing programs such as The Print Shop to the industry standard[QuarkXPress](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/findsoftware1/p/quark.htm) or [Adobe InDesign](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/indesign/p/Adobe-InDesign.htm) . As long as the desktop publishing software can print to your printer and your desktop printer prints acceptable quality then you can spend from under a $100 to over $1000 and still be able to do desktop publishing for fun and possibly for profit.

### Desktop Publishing Software Needed for Commercial Printing

Whether using a quick print shop or producing 4-color work on an offset press if you need to provide digital files to your service provider, the minimum desktop publishing software requirements become more stringent. Programs used primarily for home publishing, such as The Print Shop and PrintMaster are generally no longer an option

The bare minimum in terms of cost will be programs such as

[Ads](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/software/f/minimum_sw.htm)

[Microsoft Publisher](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/findsoftware1/p/microsoft.htm) , [Serif PagePlus](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/findsoftware1/p/serif.htm) , and [Adobe PageMaker](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/pagemaker/fr/PageMaker.htm) because they can produce digital files acceptable for commercial printing.

For serious freelance desktop publishing a minimum suite of desktop publishing software tools would be:

1. **Word Processing Software**
2. **Page Layout Software** (and/or Web Design Software)
3. **Graphics Software** (two kinds)
4. **Word Processing Software**  
   Your word processing software doesn't necessarily need to be the latest versions of Microsoft Word or Corel WordPerfect but should provide features such as spell checking and be able to import/export file formats that are compatible with your page layout software including RTF and TXT. If not producing text-intensive documents, word processing software could be forfeited in favor of utilizing the less robust text editors found in most page layout software. For a full-featured but less costly option consider the free [OpenOffice](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/findsoftware1/p/OpenOffice.htm) suite.
5. **Page Layout Software**  
   The industry standards of QuarkXPress and Adobe InDesign are not the only [available choices](http://desktoppub.about.com/cs/software/p/sw_pagelayout.htm) for desktop publishing software but should be seriously considered. Where cost is a major issue, Microsoft Publisher, Serif PagePlus, Xara Designer Pro, and Adobe PageMaker offer most of the essential features required. [Scribus](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/findsoftware1/p/Scribus.htm) is a free page layout option worth considering as well. Where multi-page documents are not needed, Illustration programs — primarily Adobe Illustrator, CorelDRAW, Macromedia Freehand, and Inkscape — could stand in for page layout software. Many of today's page layout programs can also be used for creating Web pages and may be sufficient for your Web design needs. If you do primarily Web design or need more options, a program such as FrontPage or Dreamweaver may be necessary.
   * [Top Desktop Publishing Software for Windows](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/softwarehardware/tp/Desktop_Publishing_Software.htm)
   * [Best Free Desktop Publishing Software for Windows](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/findsoftware1/tp/freedtpsoftware.htm)
   * [Top Desktop Publishing Software for Mac](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/softwarehardware/tp/Mac_Pro_Desktop_Publishing.htm)
   * [Best Free Desktop Publishng Software for Mac](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/findsoftware1/tp/Free_Mac_Desktop_Publishing.htm)
6. **Graphics Software**  
   For most print publishing an illustration program and an image editor are the types of programs needed. Some graphics software programs may incorporate a few features of the other type, but for most professional work you'll need each one. If you are engaged exclusively in Web design then you might be able to do without an illustration program.
   * **Illustration**  
     Illustration or drawing programs work with vector graphics formats. Vector-based drawing programs allow more flexibility when creating artwork that is to be resized or must go through multiple edits. Logos, for example, should be created first in illustration programs.  
     **Examples**: [Adobe Illustrator](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/illustrator/p/Adobe-Illustrator.htm) | [CorelDRAW](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/findsoftware1/p/corel.htm) | [Inkscape](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/findsoftware1/p/Inkscape.htm)
   * **Photo/Image Editing**  
     Image editors, also called paint programs or photo editors work with bitmap images. Bitmap graphics tools are needed for working with photos, scans, or other "realistic" images. Although illustration programs can export images in bitmap formats, paint programs are still usually superior for final output of images for the Web or for many special effects to photos.  
     **Examples**: [Adobe Photoshop](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/adobe/ss/Adobe-Creative-Suite_3.htm) | Corel Photo-Paint (part of the [CorelDRAW Graphics Suite](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/findsoftware1/p/corel.htm)) | [The GIMP](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/findsoftware1/p/GIMP.htm)

**Mix and Match Desktop Publishing Software to Meet Your Needs**: Try out one of these combinations of [Page Layout + Image Editing + Drawing For Professionals and Non-Designers](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/findsoftware1/ss/DTPSoftwareMix.htm). Just add a word processor to round it out.

**Top Reasons to Upgrade or Not Upgrade Your Desktop Publishing Software**: Even if you go with the bare minimum in software, when should you consider upgrading or adding to your toolbox? Is it OK to stick with software that is several versions behind or that has been discontinued or is no longer supported? Should you *upgrade* from a word processor to a page layout program or simply keep using the most up-to-date versions of your word processor as desktop publishing software? Is free software *good enough*? Why should you upgrade? Why should you stick with what you alredy know and use? State your case in [Old vs. New Desktop Publishing software](http://desktoppub.about.com/u/ua/findsoftware1/When-To-Upgrade-Desktop-Publishing-Software.htm) and see what others say

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How Does Offset Printing Differ From Desktop Printing?

The method of printing — whether offset or desktop printing — dictates how the desktop publishing document must be prepared. That's why answers to questions about what kind of software to use or how to set up a document begin with "how will it be printed?"

**Answer:**

The three primary differences in offset printing and desktop printing (such as inkjet and laser) are the colors of ink and the way the ink is placed on the paper as well as the type of machinery used to accomplish the task.

**Ink Colors**

Both commercial offset printing (also known as offset lithography) and inkjet desktop printing utilize four basic ink colors: CMYK. Dots of cyan (blue), magenta (red), yellow, and black (the K) are placed next to each other in specific patterns that trick the eye into seeing millions of colors. Additionally, offset printing can use premixed inks in a variety of specific colors as well as metallic and florescent inks. These are called spot colors. However, [printing white ink](http://desktoppub.about.com/cs/printing/f/white_ink.htm) is not usually a viable option for offset or desktop printing.

Printing Process

Inkjet printing puts all the different ink colors on the paper in one pass through the printer. In commercial offset printing each color of ink is applied separately. Because the paper must pass through the printing press multiple times, there are special requirements for preparing digital files for [color printing](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/colorprinting/tp/Color_Printing.htm).

### Printer vs. Press

Desktop printing usually uses some type of inkjet or laser printer. The inkjet printer has ink cartridges that places the ink directly on the paper. These are self-contained units connected to a computer through cables. Offset lithography uses a web or sheet press that may consist of multiple units.

[Photographic printing plates](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/printingpress/) are made of the file to be printed. The plates accept the ink which is then transferred to the paper.

### File Preparation for Offset Printing

In choosing [desktop publishing software](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/findsoftware1/tp/Big-List-Of-Desktop-Publishing-Software.htm) one of the key considerations is determining how you will print your material. Some lower end or consumer desktop publishing applications cannot produce the type of files needed for commercial offset printing. Even when using software capable of creating the required files, non-designers may not understand how to properly create files for commercial offset printing.

Although there are many specific considerations for [preparing files for offset printing](http://desktoppub.about.com/cs/prepresstechnique/a/send_files.htm), in terms of ink colors and the printing process two of the main software and file preparation considerations are the use of CMYK graphics and separations.

* [**CMYK vs. RGB**](http://desktoppub.about.com/cs/basic/g/cmyk.htm)  
  Graphics generally use RGB (Red, Green, Blue) or CMYK colors. Graphics on the Web or designed for on-screen display are RGB images. Because offset printing utilitizes CMYK inks, all full-color graphics need to be saved with CMYK colors. This simple conversion is done in your graphics software program.
* [**Separations**](http://desktoppub.about.com/cs/basic/g/separations.htm)  
  Whether printing in CMYK inks or spot colors, for offset printing you must supply a file that can be separated into different files for each ink color. These separations contain only the elements of the document that will print in one color of ink. The printing plates for offset printing are made from these separations

### Types of Software Used in Desktop Publishing

In addition to the sometimes fuzzy division of desktop publishing into professional, home, and business categories, there are other types of software closely associated with desktop publishing. Of the [four types of software for desktop publishing](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/softwarehardware/tp/Software_Desktop_Publishing.htm) , the Page Layout category encompasses the programs also known as desktop publishing software. The others are specialized or auxilliary tools used in desktop publishing. But the lines are blurred. Much of the [best design software](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/softwarehardware/tp/Design_Software.htm) is used for both print and Web and sometimes doubles as both page layout and graphics software or creative printing and business software or other combinatons.

Graphic design and desktop publishing share so many similarities that people often use the terms interchangeably.

There's not really anything terribly wrong with that but it is helpful to know and understand how they differ and how some people use and confuse the terms.

* **graphic design** jobs involve the *creative process* of coming up with the concepts and ideas and arrangements for visually communicating a specific message
* **desktop publishing** is the *mechanical process* that the designer and the non-designer use to turn their ideas for newsletters, brochures, ads, posters, greeting cards, and other projects into digital files for desktop or commercial printing

While desktop publishing does require a certain amount of creativity, it is moreproduction-oriented than design-oriented.

Desktop Publishing Software Is A Common Denominator

Graphic designers use desktop publishing software and techniques to create the print materials they envision. The computer and desktop publishing software also aids in the creative process by allowing the designer to easily try out various page layouts, fonts, colors, and other elements.

Non-designers also use desktop publishing software and techniques to create print projects for business or pleasure. The amount of creative design that goes into these projects varies greatly. The computer and desktop publishing software, along with professionally-designed templates, allow consumers to construct and print the same type of projects as graphic designers although the overall product may not be as well-thought out, carefully crafted, or polished as the work of a professional designer.

* **Graphic design** is the process and art of combining text and graphics andcommunicating an effective message in the design of logos, graphics, brochures, newsletters, posters, signs, and any other type of visual communication.

**Desktop publishing** is the process of using the computer and specific types of software to combine text and graphics to produce documents such as newsletters, brochures, books, etc

### Graphic Design = "Good" and Desktop Publishing = "Evil" Myth

Graphic design and desktop publishing are often used interchangeably but, in part because it is an activity also used by non-designers, desktop publishing is often considered a lesser activity than graphic design. In truth, the two are separate but intertwined disciplines.

Not everyone who does desktop publishing does graphic design, but most graphic designers are involved in desktop publishing - the production side of design. The term desktop publisher can refer to a designer or a non-designer but it often carries negative connotations of an amateur.

Some graphic designers are quite vocal about their distaste for desktop publishing, which is somewhat amusing since much of what they do does involve desktop publishing. What they are really upset about is not desktop publishing itself - it's an invaluable part of the entire graphic design process - but rather the misuse (real or perceived) of desktop publishing software by non-designers.

What's the difference between a commercial printer and a desktop printer?

It's man vs. machine when comparing a commercial printer with a desktop printer.

**Answer: Printer as machine**  
[Desktop printer](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/glossary/g/Desktop-Printer.htm) refers to the actual piece of hardware including dot matrix printers, laser printers, and inkjet printers used in homes and businesses. These desktop printers are usually small enough to fit on a desk or table. Businesses may also use larger floor-model printers. Again, these are equipment used to print documents on paper or transparencies or other materials.

With a desktop printer, a digital file is sent to a printer connected to a computer (or its network) and the printed page is available in a short while.

**Printer as person**  
The commercial printer is actually a business and its owner and/or employees who are printing professionals. A print shop may have printers (machines) for digital printing but they also usually have web or sheet presses for offset lithography and other commercial printing processes.

A commercial printer is a printing company that prints a file using one of a variety of methods, often involving a printing press. The printing method to be used affects how the digital file must be prepared. Commercial printers usually require very specific file preparation or prepress tasks.

**Knowing which is which by context**  
When you encounter instructions in desktop publishing articles and tutorials to "talk to your printer" we're not telling you to whisper to your inkjet or engage your laser printer in meaningful conversation - although a few sharp words might make you feel better when the printer jams or you run out of ink in the middle of a print job. You can safely assume that "talk to your printer" means consulting with your commerical print service about your print job.

nstructions to "send your document to your printer" could refer to the man (or woman) or the machine. It should be evident from the context of the page whether it means hitting the print button in your software or taking a digital file to your print shop for commercial printing. Other terms used for a commercial printer are print shop, offset printer, quick printer (places such as Kinko's) or [service bureau](http://desktoppub.about.com/cs/basic/g/servicebureau.htm) -- technically different but a printer and a service bureau may sometimes provide similiar services. The term "service provider" may be used to mean either your service bureau or print shop.

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Of all the types of software, **page layout software** is the key component of a desktop publishing system. The primary purpose of page layout software is to make it easy to combine text and graphics to create [layouts](http://desktoppub.about.com/cs/basic/g/pagelayout.htm) for brochures, ads, newsletters, greeting cards, books, and similiar publications.

Differences between high-end page layout software and many low-end or *consumer*products include the level of typographical control and graphics capabilities, as well as the ability to generate digital files suitable for commercial printing processes, including PostScript and [PDF](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/electronicpublishing/g/pdf.htm).

Although used in desktop publishing, Photoshop, Illustrator, and similiar software are classified as [graphics software](http://desktoppub.about.com/cs/basic/g/swgraphics.htm) not page layout software. However, many designers do page layout in [Adobe Illustrator](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/illustrator/p/Adobe-Illustrator.htm) and other drawing programs.

The best known professional page layout software programs are: [Adobe InDesign](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/indesign/p/Adobe-InDesign.htm), Adobe PageMaker, [Adobe FrameMaker](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/adobe/p/framemaker.-D0f.htm), QuarkXPress, and Corel Ventura. Mid-level page layout programs include [Microsoft Publisher](http://desktoppub.about.com/cs/software/p/mspublisher.htm) and Serif PagePlus. Consumer desktop publishing software such as [The Print Shop](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/findsoftware1/p/Broderbund-Desktop-Publishing-Software.htm), Print Artist, and Printmaster are generally not used to develop documents for commerical printing.

**Page layout** is the process of placing and arranging and rearranging text ([text composition](http://desktoppub.about.com/cs/basic/g/textcomposition.htm)) and graphics on the page to produce documents such as newsletters, brochures, books, etc.

**Page layout** also refers to the actual document page and its composition. The primary software programs for desktop publishing are called page layout applications or [page layout software](http://desktoppub.about.com/cs/basic/g/swpagelayout.htm). For[Web design](http://desktoppub.about.com/cs/basic/g/webdesign.htm), designers use software specifically for creating Web pages or use page layout software that can covert layouts to the proper format for online use

[Desktop publishing](http://desktoppub.about.com/cs/basic/g/desktoppublish.htm) is page layout. Designers do page layout by arranging text and images on the page to create an attractive and effective page layout.

**Also Known As:**page design | page composition | document design | desktop publishing | layout

**Examples:**Before designers had desktop publishing software, page layout was often done by pasting blocks of typed or typeset text and images cut from special [*clip art*](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/glossary/g/clipart.htm)books onto sheets of paper.

[Adobe PageMaker](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/pagemaker/fr/PageMaker.htm) was the first desktop publishing or page layout program that made it easy to arrange and rearrange text and graphics on screen — no more scissors or messy glue

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In short, **desktop publishing** is the process of using the computer and specific types of software to combine text and [artwork](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/glossary/g/Artwork.htm) to produce documents properly formatted for print, Web, or mobile devices such as newsletters, [brochures](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/glossary/g/Brochure.htm), books, [business cards](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/glossary/g/Business-Card.htm), Web pages, greeting cards, letterhead, packaging, signage, etc.

The desktop publishing process is employed by both graphic designers and non-designers to create visual communications for commercial[digital printing](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/glossary/g/Digital-Printing.htm) , printing on a [printing press](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/glossary/g/Printing-Press.htm), or for [desktop printing](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/glossary/g/Desktop-Printer.htm) at home or in the office. Although desktop publishing can encompass everything from the initial design to printing and delivery of the finished product, the core parts of desktop publishing are  the [page layout](http://desktoppub.about.com/cs/basic/g/pagelayout.htm) and [text composition](http://desktoppub.about.com/cs/basic/g/textcomposition.htm) and the [prepress](http://desktoppub.about.com/cs/basic/g/prepress.htm) or digital file preparation tasks

The primary software for desktop publishing is [page layout software](http://desktoppub.about.com/cs/basic/g/swpagelayout.htm). [Graphics software](http://desktoppub.about.com/cs/basic/g/swgraphics.htm), including [drawing software](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/glossary/g/Drawing-Software.htm) and a [photo editor](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/glossary/g/Photo-Editor.htm), word processing software or office suites, and Web design software are also major tools of the graphic designer or[desktop publisher](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/glossary/g/Desktop-Publisher.htm).

**Desktop Publishing in Depth**

It was primarily the introduction of both the Apple LaserWriter, a [PostScript desktop printer](http://desktoppub.about.com/cs/printing/a/postscriptprint.htm), and PageMaker for the Mac that kicked off the desktop publishing revolution. Aldus Corporation founder Paul Brainerd, is generally credited for coining the phrase, "desktop publishing." Read more of [When Was Desktop Publishing Invented?](http://desktoppub.about.com/cs/beginners/f/when_dtp.htm)

Before the invention of desktop publishing software the tasks involved in desktop publishing were done manually, by a variety of people and involved graphic design, typesetting, and [prepress](http://desktoppub.about.com/cs/basic/g/prepress.htm) tasks which sometimes leads to confusion about what desktop publishing is and how it is done. Read more of [What is Desktop Publishing?](http://desktoppub.about.com/cs/beginners/f/what_dtp.htm)

[Freelance](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/glossary/g/Freelance.htm) and [in-house](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/glossary/g/In-House.htm) graphic designers, [small business owners](http://desktoppub.about.com/od/freelancedesign/g/soho.htm), secretaries, teachers, students, and individual consumers do desktop publishing. When desktop publishing software first debuted, desktop publishing was almost the exclusive realm of graphic designers. However, with the advent of more desktop publishing software and easier-to-use, consumer-oriented software desktop publishing became accessible to a wider range of people, including non-designers and others without graphic design experience. Read more of [Who Does Desktop Publishing?](http://desktoppub.about.com/cs/beginners/f/who_dtp.htm)

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The trick to selecting a desktop publishing package is finding the one that best suits your needs. If, for example, you want to publish a simple, four-page newsletter for your company, you don't need a program designed for creating process-color separations or generating long, multiple-section documents. Usually, programs with these high-end, professional publishing features are expensive and difficult to learn and use.

Conversely, if your application calls for a DTP powerhouse that can handle prepress color or compile long works, an economically minded program designed for busy small business managers won't satisfy you. Such programs are long on convenience and short on the precision and features needed for professional results. Again, you should know what you require before you buy. Otherwise, you might end up with a package incapable of publishing the types of documents you need. Or--perhaps worse still--you could find yourself with a program too complicated to learn on an already too-busy schedule.

The 10 DTP packages in this review are a diverse lot. They range in price from $50 for Spinnaker's Easy Working Desktop Publisher to $900 for QuarkXPress.

I've placed them in the order I think would be most useful to COMPUTE readers. However, these assessments are based on my overall opinion of each program and not necessarily according to the tasks they excel at. Read each listing and determine which comes closest to your page layout needs.

1. PagePlus

Of all the packages listed here, PagePlus is the best bargain. It provides 80 percent of the functionality of some high-end programs for less than a tenth of the cost. This is the only low-cost product that supports both spot and process color separations, and PagePlus has several other useful features that make it a desirable alternative to investing in an expensive, hard-to-learn professional product.

Features include: a powerful table editor; text frames that can easily link and jump text from one frame to another (which is great for newsletters); and a ChangeBar that lets you assign line weights, colors, and many other attributes with a few mouse clicks. You can move rulers into your editing area to easily measure and resize objects.

The $60 price tag is incredible, but for another $39 you get the PagePlus BumperPack, which includes more than 100 True-Type fonts and several hundred clip art images. PagePlus comes with several useful manuals that cover the basics of desktop publishing, including some excellent design tips.

2. Microsoft Publisher

Microsoft Publisher provides the most help to the novice. It has an online tutorial that introduces you to the program and most of its features. The program's PageWizards, a set of interactive macros, automatically create many types of documents--brochures, newsletters, flyers, business cards. Pop-up cue cards, or dialogs, appear at stages throughout the layout process providing hints and information about program features. And the documentation contains a wealth of information about page layout and typesetting.

The PageWizards feature is unique to Microsoft Publisher. Nobody else has anything like it. When you open the program, PageWizards is one of the startup options. Then, based on your answers to several questions about tone, size, number of columns, and so on, PageWizards creates your document. All you do is replace existing sample text and graphics with your own.

Microsoft Publisher still doesn't support color separations--a serious limitation. But it does ship with WordArt, a feature that lets you create a wealth of special effects with TrueType fonts. You also can use WordArt with Microsoft Word and several other Microsoft products.

3. PageMaker

Of the top four professional packages, PageMaker is the most powerful, versatile, and easiest to use. It handles long documents, short documents, and color all reasonably well. This is the program for those who publish all types of documents.

PageMaker's process color separations are powerful and straightforward. And if you're unfamiliar with prepress separations, the documentation includes a full-color booklet explaining the process and how to get the best results.

Another exciting feature is Panose font matching. When you open a document in PageMaker that contains fonts not on your system, Panose searches for the nearest match and alerts you that it's about to make a substitution. If you don't like Panose's choice, you can choose any other font installed in Windows. And you can save Panose substitutions for future use, allowing PageMaker to always substitute the same fonts. This is especially useful if you use fonts from several vendors, which often have different names. Service bureaus will find it handy for matching the myriad fonts their customers use.

You can't go wrong with this program.

4. Express Publisher

As long as your documents don't need to be color separated or contain a lot of pages, Express Publisher is a strong program. Express Publisher's ability to rotate text at any angle and easily jump text from one frame to another makes it especially suited for one-color newsletters and newspaper display ads. Also helpful in these kinds of documents is the program's free text feature, which lets you stretch and manipulate text as you would in a draw program. The program also comes with TextAppeal--a type special effects program similar to Adobe TypeAlign or Bitstream MakeUp.

Express Publisher has several drawbacks. It doesn't let you create either spot or process color separations, so your output is limited to black and white. Also, the program supports only 48 letter-size pages, and there's no way to compile short document files into longer works.

The real problem with this package is that it has been around for awhile and needs upgrading. The features that made it stand out last year--text and graphics rotation, and text frame linking--are supported by many of this year's products.

5. Easy Working Desktop Publisher

This program packs many useful features into a low-priced, easy-to-use program. It works similarly to a word processor. A button bar and ribbon across the top of the editing area makes setting tabs and margins a snap, and you also can use it to change fonts and format text.

Instead of a lot of complicated options, the toolbox consists of two easy-to-use tools: a text tool and a pointer. One manipulates text and the other works with graphics and frames.

But the real story is in the program's extensive list of advanced options, especially those designed for working with long documents. You can't compile multiple document files into one long work, as in Ventura, Frame-Maker, and PageMaker, but you can insert chapter breaks (similar to Word for Windows section breaks). Chapter breaks let you format blocks of pages as separate sections, making long documents easier to manage. With the chapter break features, you can create separate headers and footers for each chapter, restart page numbering, and even renumber footnotes.

A couple of other long-document features worth mentioning are the automatic table of contents and index generators. This is exceptional functionality for a product in this price range.

This is an entry-level program designed for novice desktop publishers--which means it should contain features to help you lay out your documents. Easy Working Desktop Publisher falls short here. The templates consist of sectioned off pages, or shells. Other packages reviewed here ship with templates that contain sample text and graphics, so you can see what your document will look like before you choose a template.

6. QuarkXPress

Of all the DTP packages, QuarkXPress has the most powerful color features. However, it lacks long-document features, making QuarkXPress not quite as versatile as PageMaker. While PageMaker, Ventura, and PagePlus all support process-color separations, QuarkXPress provides more options for assuring successful color reproduction at the print shop. Two important options are traps and spreads, which let you compensate for press registration irregularities. To trap and spread with PageMaker, you have to use a separate utility, such as Aldus TrapWise. The problem with this approach is that you must have your separations trapped at the service bureau, which means you can't control the entire process.

QuarkXPress provides extensive control of graphics and fonts. The Picture Usage option, for example, displays a list of all pictures in your document. Clicking on the Show Me button in the Picture Usage dialog box takes you to the page and location of the graphic image. QuarkXPress doesn't, however, provide a way to copy all the pictures in your document to a new drive or directory. Instead, you must use File Manager and then re-establish the links after opening your document. This makes preparing documents for remote printing troublesome.

Like PageMaker, this complex program is remarkably easy to use. In fact, the two programs are so much alike that you can forget which one you're working in. Both use a layout-table metaphor--you can grab and move objects on and off your pages easily, similar to conventional paste-up.

7. Ventura Publisher

Ventura Publisher is the program of choice for many professional book and catalog publishers. It provides a wealth of features for stringing several document files together in one long work. It also provides process-color separations and other features usually associated with short-document publishing, but the program is big and awkward to use, it's just easier to use something else.

Ventura's list of long-document options is extensive. Not only can you compile several chapters into a longer work, renumber the pages, and then create tables of contents, indices, and other lists; but you also can automatically renumber the figure and table numbers in captions. All the other programs (except FrameMaker, if you understand its variable language well enough) make you go back into each chapter and renumber captions manually.

The program's variables options lets you quickly update portions of your documents, such as parts numbers or product names, globally with a few keystrokes. And, since Ventura's table editor treats table text the same as other text, you also can use variables to keep your data current in long grids and other word charts.

8. PFS: Publisher

Similar to a word processor, PFS: Publisher sports a button bar for formatting text and working with frames, and it has some long-document features uncommon to DTP packages in this price range. Although the program comes with 50 templates, they're simply empty shells devoid of text and graphics. This really doesn't give novice users a good idea what they will look like when fleshed out with text and graphics. A handy cataloging feature, which lets you view templates before you open them, saves time.

PFS: Publisher has easy-to-use index and table of contents generators. A table editor lets you create word and number charts. The irregular text wrap feature, which contours text around irregular-shaped graphics, works similarly to the same feature in PageMaker or QuarkXPress. Both the table editor and text wrap feature are simple and powerful. A QuickButtons feature lets you assign commands to a floating tool palette, so that often-used options are a mouse click away.

9. FrameMaker

This program is a long-document workhorse. But it's also big, awkward, and hard to use. Its lack of conformity to standard Windows conventions also makes it difficult to learn.

An impressive feature is FrameMaker's ability to publish online documents. In combination with an optional Frame Technology product, FrameReader, you can publish documents that are similar to Windows Help files. Your online documents can have hypertext links between bitmaps and text, or between text in one section and text in another. These links allow you to jump from topic to topic by clicking on highlighted text or a bitmap. This is a great way to create online manuals for employees, or even hypertext training sessions. Online publishing isn't big yet, but it's likely to be more popular in the near future.

While FrameMaker lacks process-color support, its spot color options are extensive. However, version 4.0 (which should be available by the time you read this) has been completely reworked. It has done away with some of the awkward terminology and non-Windows Common User Interface (CUI) conventions. Expect Version 4.0 to be a much stronger DTP market contender.

10. Publish It!

Although Publish It! is easy to use, it's plagued by limitations. It doesn't support several standard DTP features, including color separations and crop marks, which are essential if you plan to get documents reproduced at a print shop. Publish It! is geared toward reproduction on laser printers, which have definite quality, quantity, and page size limitations.

This program isn't really suited for most business publishing. In some cases, you'd be better off with a word processor, especially for long documents. You should consider it only if you have no DTP skills and need quick-and-easy, unsophisticated layouts. Otherwise, almost any of the other products listed here would serve you better.

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