

THE ELECTRIC PRESS

With version 9, QuarkXPress is finally emerging from InDesign's shadow. It's a beacon of hope for small publishers and designers wanting to create digital editions – and it's full of gadgets to power up layouts in all media.

Words Keith Martin



Desktop publishing software

QuarkXPress 9



Price £934 (£779 ex VAT) + Upgrade: £334 (£279 ex VAT) + Student/teacher £99 (£82.50 ex VAT)

Contact Quark + quark.com

Needs Mac OS X 10.5.8 + Intel processor + 1GB Ram

Pros Rich design- and production-focused tools + Easy-to-use digital publishing features

Cons App Studio release delayed

Verdict Rounded multi-platform solution that may bring Quark back to the fore.

QuarkXPress has been a key name in desktop publishing since the 1980s, and for years was the default choice for the world's leading periodicals. It retains a huge professional user base among publishing houses, but through much of the last decade it's been overshadowed by Adobe InDesign. In 2008, version 8 brought a new interface and a revived approach, and now QuarkXPress 9 is set to bring a suite of digital publishing tools into the mix.

We examined those tools in detail six weeks ago (see MacUser, 4 March 2011, p64), when they were released with preliminary support for QuarkXPress 8.5. As previously announced,

the final version of the iPad publishing solution is still due to emerge in the next 90 days as a free update. In the meantime, there's plenty more to see in QuarkXPress 9, which has new features across the board.

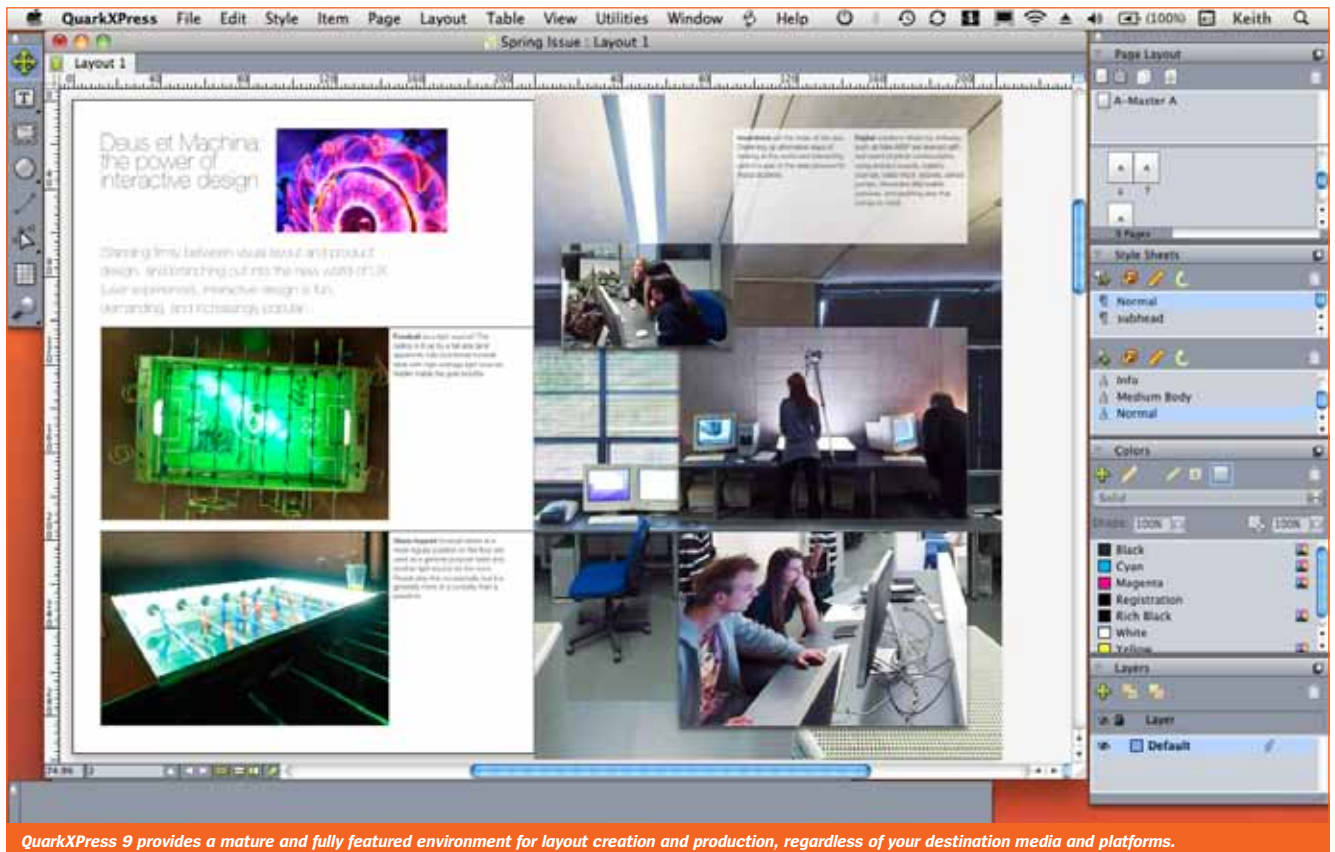
We were given the software ahead of its launch later this month so that we could test the new features in depth and assess what they'll bring to designers and publishers working for both traditional and new platforms. In keeping with

QuarkXPress' heritage,

we found a familiar product equipped with a varied selection of new tricks, all created with real-world design and production needs in mind.

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QuarkXPress 9 provides a mature and fully featured environment for layout creation and production, regardless of your destination media and platforms.

Digital publishing

Let's first recap on the big, attention-getting feature: the new digital publishing abilities on which Quark is betting. In the one design-rich layout environment, you can now create and deliver work in a great many different ways. Besides the print and PDF support, interactive Flash creation and web output that it's had for a while, QuarkXPress now includes some rather useful tools for creating ePub output for standard eBook readers; Blio output for the K-NFB-developed rich-media eBook reader software (currently still Windows-only, but reportedly coming

to iOS); and, soon, fully integrated iPad digital magazine production and output, dropping the need for the conversion service currently required to produce apps with the preliminary version that we saw.

Note that, awkwardly, this remains available only for QuarkXPress 8.5, which you can get at no extra cost if you're a QuarkXPress 9 owner; things will fall properly into place with a free update that Quark promises will be available within 90 days after version 9 ships.

The Blio functionality is built in a similar manner to the iPad design process:

picture boxes in your layouts are tagged as being a Blio interactive type, specifically a slideshow, video, or embedded or externally referenced HTML. More sophistication is possible, including reflow view for content-focused reading, text-to-speech audio and an interactive Blio table of contents. When finished, export the file as a Blio eBook file and you're done. Or at least you're ready to test it on a Blio reader (only on a PC so far) and upload to the K-NFB online bookstore.

Regular eBook ePub-format export is also relatively simple, though the jump from a visual layout to ePub's relatively design-free structure can be jarring if you're new to it. The Reflow Tagging palette is used to build up lists of content elements, both text and image, in the desired order; then the new Reflow View mode is used to fine-tune the content formatting and apply eBook-specific tags (styles by any other name) to give the content meaningful structure.

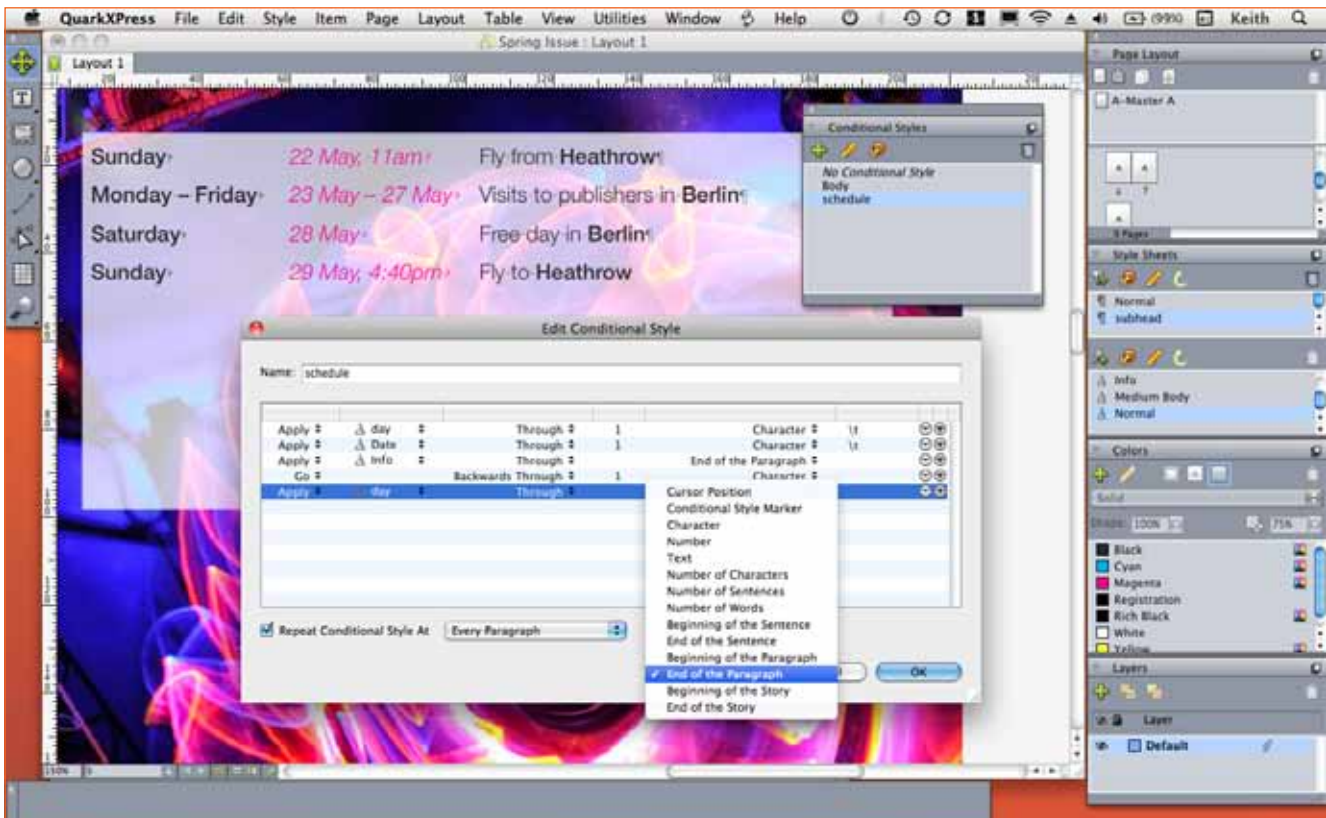
It's a little strange to use such a visual layout application to structure content in this relatively layout-free way, but these tools are actually surprisingly easy to use – and, equally importantly, this turns out to be a fast, efficient ePub production workflow. The results work smoothly in the iOS iBooks app and on the Sony Reader, the Nook and most other eReaders. No Kindle output is available, but converting to that from ePub via third-party utilities is a standard procedure.

Big style

QuarkXPress has always been known as an efficient production tool, and the style sheet features, always a strong area, have been



▲ The App Studio additions won't be available in their final form until the summer, although there's an interim solution that enables iPad publishing from QuarkXPress 8.5.



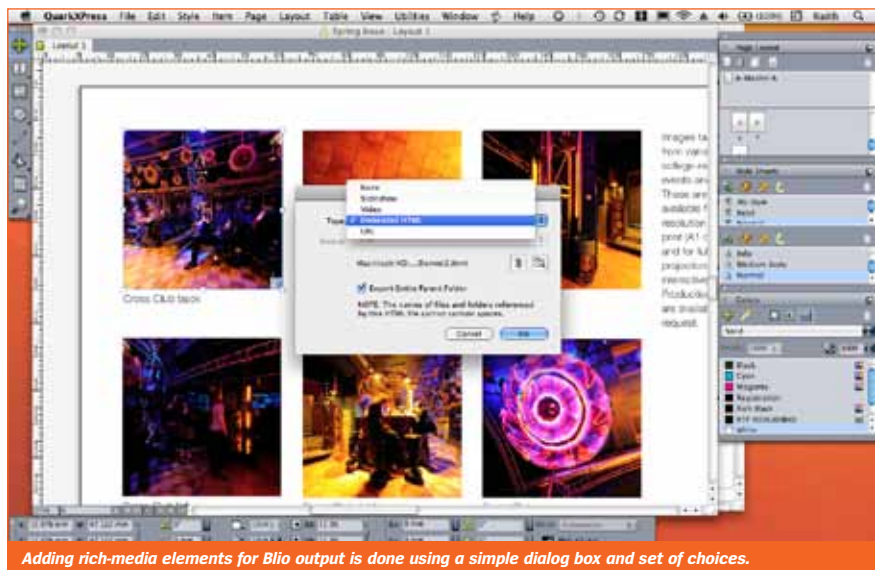
Setting up Conditional Styles is relatively simple, as long as you can predict some structural aspects of your text.

‘Conditional Styles go quite a long way beyond Nested Styles and you can fully automate highly complex formatting jobs’

given a serious boost. Paragraph, Character and Grid Styles are joined by Bullet, Numbering and Outline Styles, Callout Styles and Conditional Styles. Each of these three new features uses the style sheet concept; storing and applying sets of formatting instructions for efficient styling and control of content and design.

Bullet, Numbering and Outline Styles make designing list-based content easier, including customising the appearance of the bullets and numbering systems used for different list levels, and the list structure appearance itself. Set this up, apply it, then fine-tune the styles as required.

Conditional Styles allows style sheets to be applied to content using a semi-intelligent logic. As with InDesign’s Nested Styles, you can set it up so that one style will apply to a number of words, then a different one, and so on. What makes this more powerful than the Adobe equivalent is the ability to look for a condition (such as a return or column break character) and then move backwards or forwards from that point before applying a specific style – not to mention the ability to repeat a set of Conditional Style statements whenever a given text string, character, new paragraph or specific ‘conditional style marker’ is found. This goes quite a long



Adding rich-media elements for Blio output is done using a simple dialog box and set of choices.

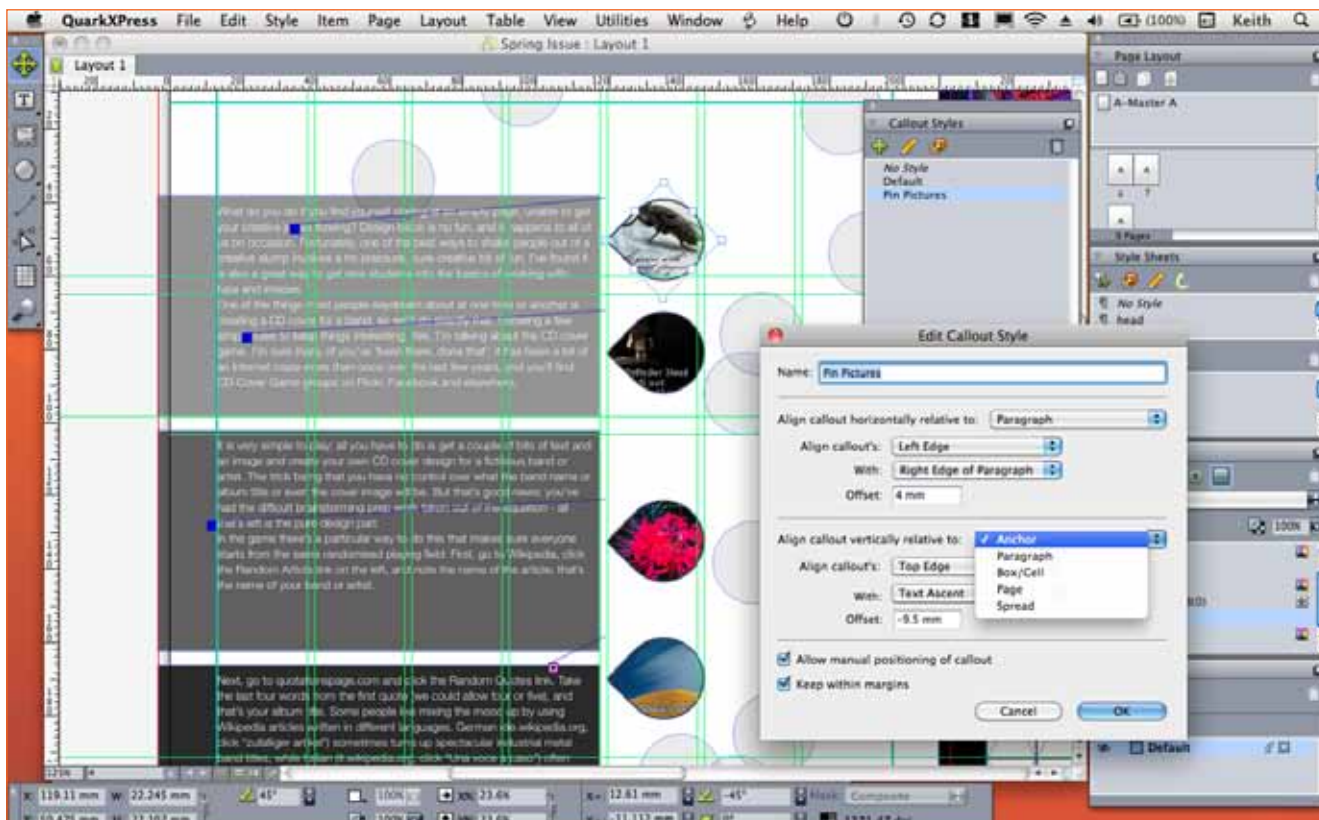
way beyond Nested Styles and you can fully automate highly complex formatting job. In theory, at least; you’ll need to figure out the step-by-step logic required for your particular formatting needs, so be ready to practise.

Our one issue with this is that individual lines of Conditional Style settings can’t be reordered in the list, so reworking the logic can require duplication and deletion instead. Once made, however, just applying the style will do the work, and editing the style later reformats everything cleanly.

The Callout Box feature is another useful workflow enhancement. If a design requires boxes to sit next to specific text content within longer text flow – a common design function in book publishing in particular

– it can be a bit of a nightmare keeping everything aligned with the right text and on the appropriate page. Now, a Callout anchor is inserted into the text flow and objects or groups are then associated with that Callout. The alignment and behaviour of Callout items can be controlled with a wide range of options, and once everything is set up, these can be saved as Callout Styles for quick reuse.

If you’ve ever had to edit text that’s over an image, reversed out of strong colours or tinted to fade into the background – or even just needed to edit a lot of text in a complex layout – you’ll appreciate the new Story Editor. The idea of incorporating a plain text editor into a layout program dates back



The new Callouts feature allows items to be associated with particular text elements, paragraphs or stories, and follow those through flowing layouts with no more effort.



The Story Editor view shows text in a simple word processing-like window, black on white and at a legible body text size regardless of the formatting in your layout.

at least as far as Adobe PageMaker, where it appeared more than two decades ago, but is a very welcome arrival in QuarkXPress. The text is shown in a word processor-like display completely separate from whatever styling and layout structure it has on the page, and editing text in the Story Editor doesn't remove existing visual layout formatting.

Tooled up

Linked text boxes, where a story flows from one box to another, are a fundamental requirement of efficient layout and production. However, in every DTP application, these links have been a bit fiddly to manage, especially when your

page design is in flux and changes are being made. Breaking up text flows can be a hassle and rebuilding linked boxes even more so. This is what the modishly named new Linkster tool is intended to tackle.

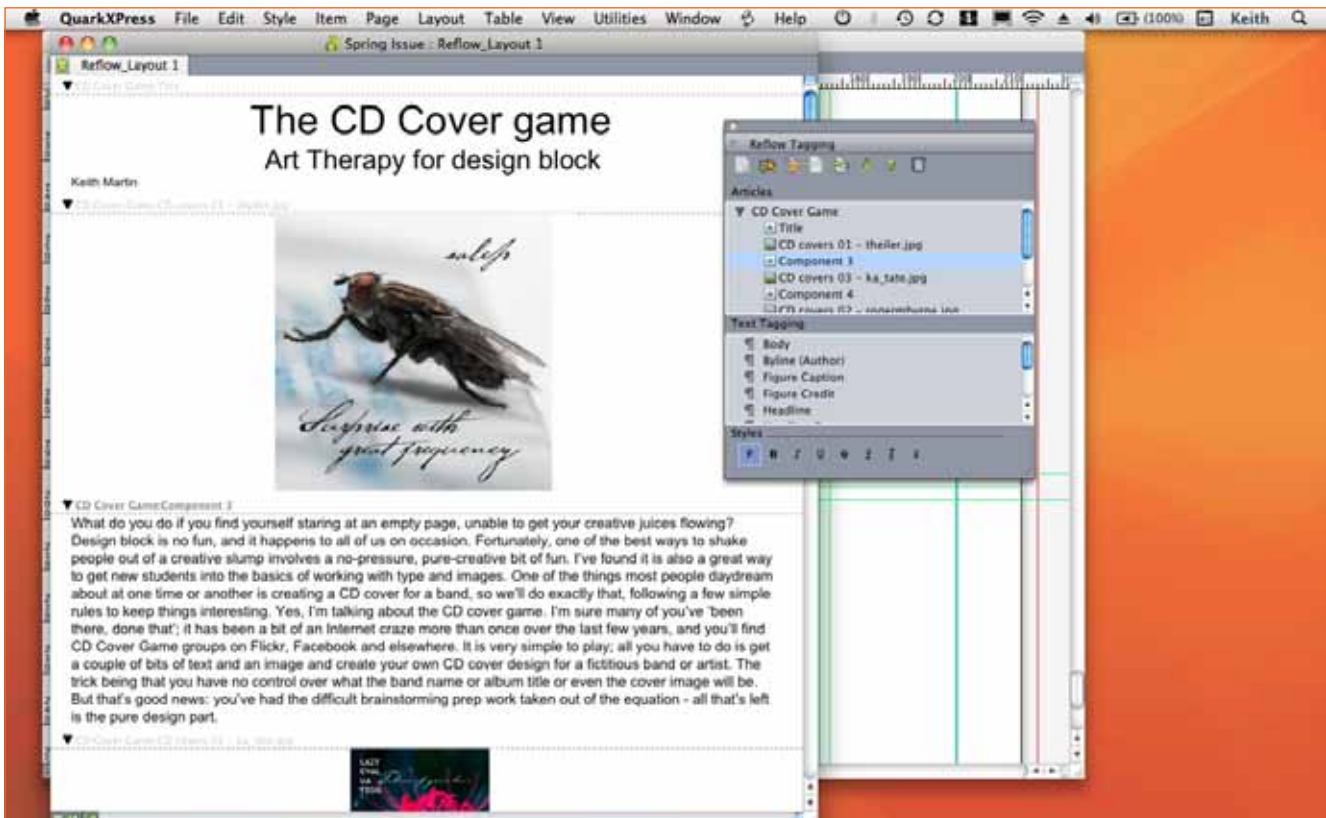
Select a box in a linked chain and choose Linkster. The dialog box offers a variety of different ways to handle the flowing content: unlinking and keeping the text as-is in the various boxes, removing the selected box from the flow but preserving the other links, flowing only up to the current box and breaking there, or breaking at the current box and flowing onwards. Reversing the process is also supported, linking text boxes that already have content in order

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to create a single flow from the disparate elements, with the flow order determined by the stacking order. This is a workflow feature rather than something visual and glitzy – but make no mistake, it's seriously useful.

The new ShapeMaker tool is a bit of a curiosity. It creates objects in a variety of different shapes, from waves and polygons to spirals, with a number of different controls for fine-tuning the output. The results are regular boxes and paths, ready for holding graphics or for flowing text into or onto, and you can save custom parameters as presets. The curious thing about this tool is that it exists at all; beyond star-shaped flashes, it's fairly unusual to want to produce graphics of this nature within a layout application, where they can't be developed fully as they might in Illustrator. Still, while the interface needs refinement, this is potentially useful and could be invaluable in some circumstances.

ImageGrid is a more obviously handy new feature, although one that's equally focused on a specific kind of task. If you've ever needed to set up an array of images, you'll know how tedious that can be. With this new tool, you define the box size and gap or say how many to create across and down, whether to add picture information,



Moving from visual layout to eBook production can be a jolt, but the new Reflow Tagging tools help build well-structured documents for ePub export.

the box shape, and how to scale images. Then pick a folder and go: your page will be filled with a grid of images, just as the name promises. A refinement we hope to see in a future update is more sophisticated handling of the added text, from what data is extracted and applied through to using predefined style sheets. However, what it offers now is undeniably useful and a clear time-saver. Again, it's catching up with a feature previously seen in InDesign and going several steps further.

For an even more structured approach to layouts, the Table tool is worth trying. It isn't new to QuarkXPress 9, but has been enhanced to allow cells to be either text or picture containers. As before, maintaining a live link between a table and an Excel file is an undeniably useful trick, with updates to the data document automatically tracked into the layout.

The Cloner is another godsend if you ever need to replicate anything across multiple pages or to different documents. You can select objects and clone them to the same place on a specific range of pages, or clone whole pages from one document to another. Style sheets can be included, so creating elements in one layout and then adding them to a number of different documents when they're done becomes a practical reality.


Other features, such as the support for native Illustrator files and direct access to Photoshop PSD layers, item styles and the live proofing view modes aren't new, but they help round out QuarkXPress into a highly productive tool.

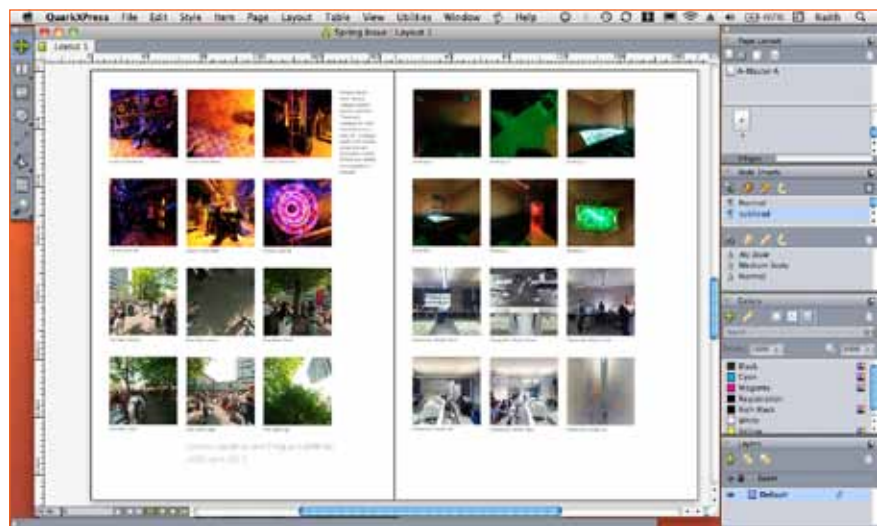
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Frankly, we're impressed. As well as the mature tools and useful new abilities for creating all kinds of layouts, QuarkXPress 9 offers cutting-edge digital design and production features that put new publishing platforms within anyone's reach, and without resorting to multiple applications, expensive workflow systems or hand-coding.

We look forward to seeing how Adobe rises to the challenge. InDesign has had a good run, and remains £200 cheaper, but its digital publishing add-ons are firmly and unapologetically reserved for top-flight publishing houses; Adobe has simply not chosen to address the needs of the

industry's long tail of smaller publishers, studios and designers. To those of us who've been watching the DTP market for the past decade, it looks like a role reversal that could bring a corresponding reversal of fortune.

For anyone interested in publishing to digital platforms rather than only in print, Quark's package now seems to be the most affordable and designer-friendly solution. It's frustrating that we have to wait a little longer for a proper implementation of the iPad app creation features, but from the end of July a fully integrated version of App Studio will be available for QuarkXPress 9. As we said when we first tried it: this is the new publishing. Exciting times are ahead. 



Use the excellent new ImageGrid feature if you want to create gridded-up image arrays across multiple pages. Choose your settings, pick a folder of images and QuarkXPress does the rest for you.