by Brad Schmidt

AFFINITY DESIGNER

Having worked at Friesens since the beginning of the desktop publishing era, I have seen many changes develop. An area that has always fascinated me is the variety of software packages that I have had the opportunity to work with. PageMaker 4 was my first exposure to desktop publishing software. Then came the drawing program turf wars between Aldus Freehand and Adobe Illustrator. I still enjoy a discussion on the rise and fall of titans in the industry as I think back to the sheer dominance of QuarkXPress version 4 and how Adobe was able to wrestle away the bulk of the market share with a new player in this space in the form of InDesign.

Today, having the luxury of looking back through history, I do not think it was the feature set of InDesign that brought about the migration away from QuarkXPress. Rather, it was the licensing and pricing model of the Creative Suite that was the driving factor. The perfect combination of Photoshop, Illustrator, and InDesign at an irresistible price point proved to be too much to maintain the dominance of QuarkXPress.

Since Adobe has moved to the subscription model, I now see Adobe in much the same light as Quark when InDesign first came to market. To shake up the market today, a new program would need to compete in the combined photo, illustration, and page layout space at an exceptional price point. I believe a new player has emerged with a great suite of tools that uses a purchase pricing model rather than the subscription model that has become so pervasive today. The Affinity Suite, which includes Affinity Designer, Affinity Photo, and Affinity Publisher, is uniquely positioned to change the desktop publishing landscape.

Serif released Affinity Designer in October of 2014. Here are features of Affinity Designer that I think are necessary to be considered as a contender in the illustration space.

For illustration, the basic tool set begins with drawing and shape tools. As with other programs, Designer includes a pencil tool for freehand drawing. Along with the pencil tool, Designer includes a selection of basic shapes to get started. Rectangles, ovals, boxes with rounded corners, along with more complicated shapes like starbursts, pies, polygons, and even donuts. These shapes can all be combined in unique ways using the various Geometry tools. These tools allow for shapes to be combined to make more complicated shapes. Use the Subtract tool to minus one shape from another, or to cut holes in or slice off portions of an object to create a new shape.
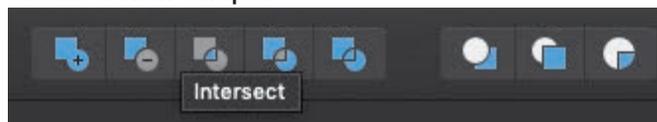
Geometry tools to Add and Subtract shapes

With a little experimentation while drawing shapes, it was easy to see that the drawing experience had been well thought out. Holding the command key immediately set the orientation of the object to centred. Holding the shift constrained the proportions. This makes it simple to create a rectangle, or constrain for a square. Using the control key, the shape was rotated 45 degrees. Using these keys in combination, the object can be centred, constrained, and rotated seamlessly, all while drawing the object.

Precise measurements are also an important element when creating objects. It is great to freehand objects, but often precision is needed to make sure objects are the same size. I found the Transform panel to be useful for this. X and Y coordinates can be entered for exact locations. The width and height can also be specified, along with rotation and skew values. I was pleasantly surprised that the fields accepted basic math such as /2 to divide the width in half, or using the plus, minus, and multiply operators as an effective way to control the shape of the object.