With a DTP package, you can quickly and easily produce professional-looking leaflets, reports, and even your own magazines. We put seven of the best packages to the test

Long-awaited improvements will please the faithful, but perceived value for money doesn't match other top-enders.
● £TBA , US price $999 for XPress, $1,599 for Passport
● Quark Systems: 01483 454397

QuarkXPress Passport 4.0 (beta)				
Ease of use	★	★	★	★	☆
Features	★	★	★	★	☆
Value for money	★	★	★	☆	☆
Overall	★	★	★	★	★

Hot off the Desktop

Whether it's designing and printing party invitations, a parish newsletter, a business report or creating a commercial Web site, more and more people are getting into desktop publishing (DTP). In this roundup we take a look at seven of the latest packages you can buy, with prices starting at under £30 and going up to over £500.

So what's so special about DTP packages anyway? After all, most word processors will let you add graphics to your documents, use multiple columns and define 'styles' based on various combinations of font and formatting. Many will also create indexes and tables of contents for books, and all of them will let you use templates to set the layout of a document.
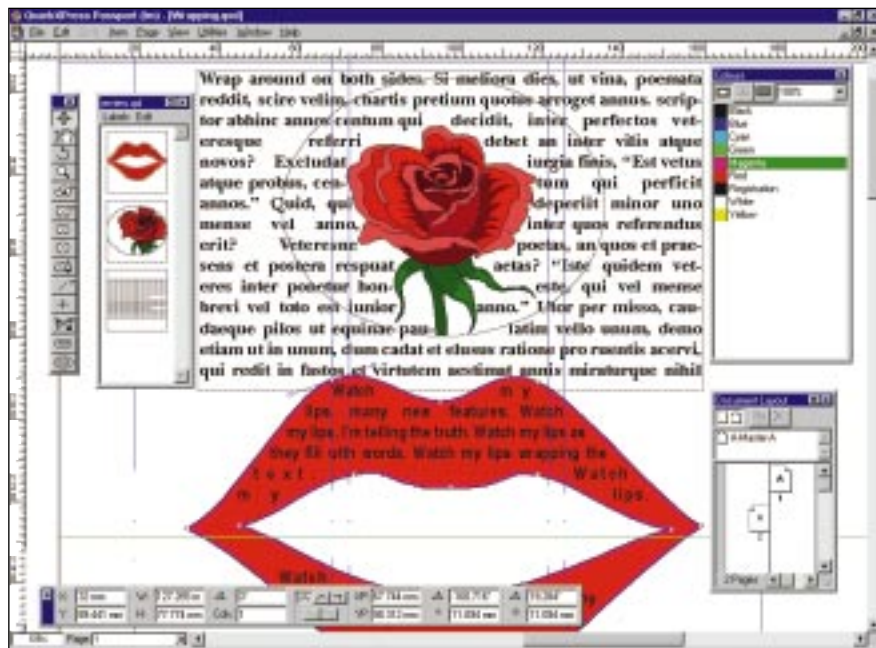
DTP goes much further in terms of page design, with more precise placing of illustration and objects, tighter typographic control over kerning and tracking (see jargon buster towards the end of this feature), colour definition using Pantone and other libraries, and separating output to colour plates.

Central to DTP are the concepts of frames and master pages. The former serve as containers for both text and graphics. The great advantage of using frames for text is that you can import a 'story', ie, a text or word processor file, into the program then place it into a frame. If the text is too long, then other frames can be linked to the first and the text flowed between them. This approach means you can easily 'box-out' a piece of text, or continue a story on a non-adjacent page.

Master pages define not just the base layout and margins, but all sorts of common items and page furniture, and with multiple master pages, you can use different page layouts – essential for magazine work.

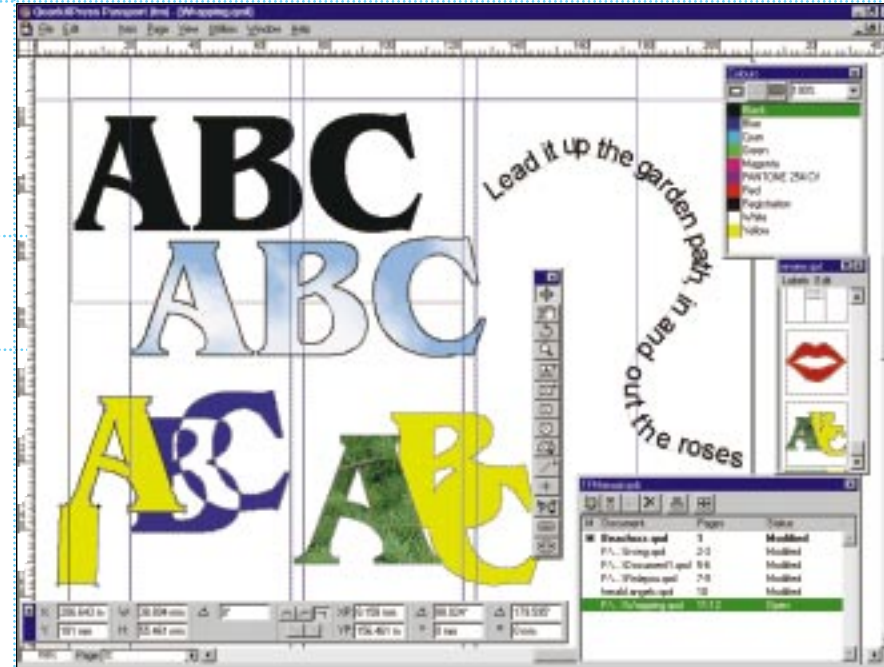## QuarkXPress Passport 4.0 (beta)

Since its release on the Mac in 1987, Quark has led the field in professional publishing and now claims 90 percent of the magazine DTP market. Its killer features include multiple master pages, high precision in typography, and support for Xtensions. These allow third-party developers to add extra features to the core program, for general-purpose and specialised 'vertical' markets.

The PC version didn't materialise until 1992, and since then has seen little change. Consequently, in the light of the upgrades from PageMaker and Ventura, XPress was starting to look seriously under-featured. Version 4.0, due out in Mac and PC flavours before the end of the year, seeks to redress that.

Version 4.0 will be released in both single-language versions, and as Quark XPress Passport, which has 11 interface, help and proofing languages. The latter requires a hardware security key, or 'dongle', plugged into the back of the PC. In the beta version, it looks much the same as version 3.3, with a simple, uncluttered interface, and a slightly larger toolbox, but there is actually a lot that's new.

XPress has traditionally used 'boxes' – rectangles, ellipses or polygons that contain text, pictures or just colour. This version sees Bézier boxes – free-form shapes that can be edited as in a drawing package. You can also combine or subtract boxes to create new shapes. Improved text tools let you type along a curve, or wrap a block of text around both sides of a graphic. There's better support for long documents, with tools to synchronise separate documents into a 'Book', taking styles and colours from a designated master chapter. There's also built-in indexing and a 'Lists' feature that can build tables of contents or illustrations. Colour support has been extended to HiFi (six-colour) separations.

Despite the new features, Quark has kept the interface simple: some would say too simple as there is still no top button bar and the right-mouse menu is poorly exploited. As ever (at least with the beta version we looked at) there is little in the way of extras: XPress is the only application here that doesn't ship with any fonts.

Adobe PageMaker 6.5

Aldus PageMaker was a pioneer of desktop publishing, but lost pole position to Quark. After several years trailing behind, PageMaker started to catch up. Version 5.0 brought a Control Palette similar to Quark's Measurement Palette, as well as free text rotation, and support for third-party add-ons, or 'Additions'. By version 6.0, following Adobe's take-over of Aldus, we saw HTML (Hypertext Markup Language) support, better drawing tools and, at last, multiple master pages.

The point-five update is deceptively modest, as there's a lot that's new. The antiquated interface has been smartened up, with the various palettes for colour, style, and master pages, being stacked into one tabbed box. The Control Palette sees some welcome cosmetic changes, and the right mouse button at last produces a context menu. As with Quark, there still isn't the standard Windows toolbar for saving, printing and so on.

PageMaker takes a slightly different approach to XPress – three shape tools provide rectangles, ellipses and polygons (but no Béziers), while three frame tools
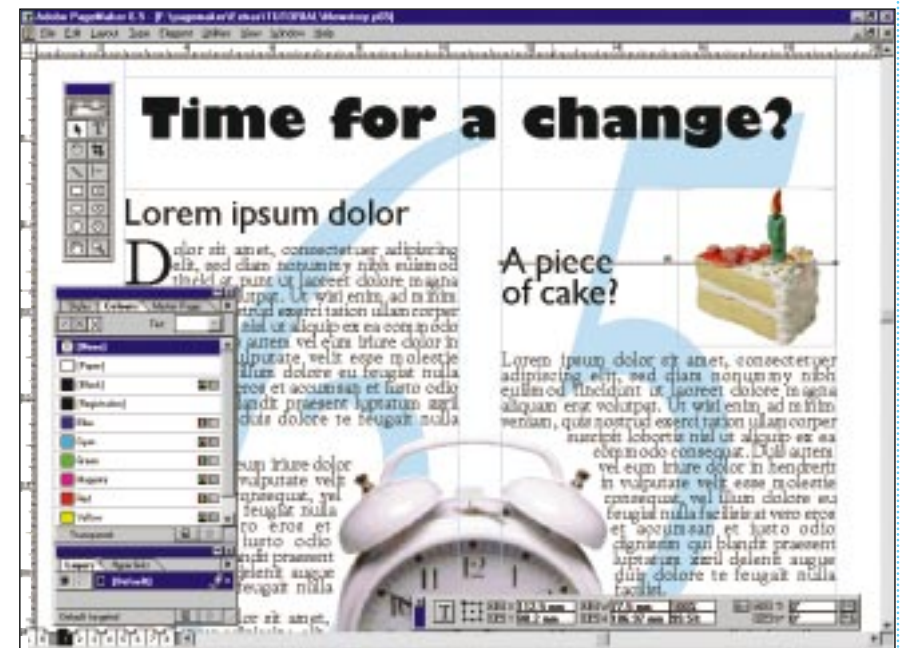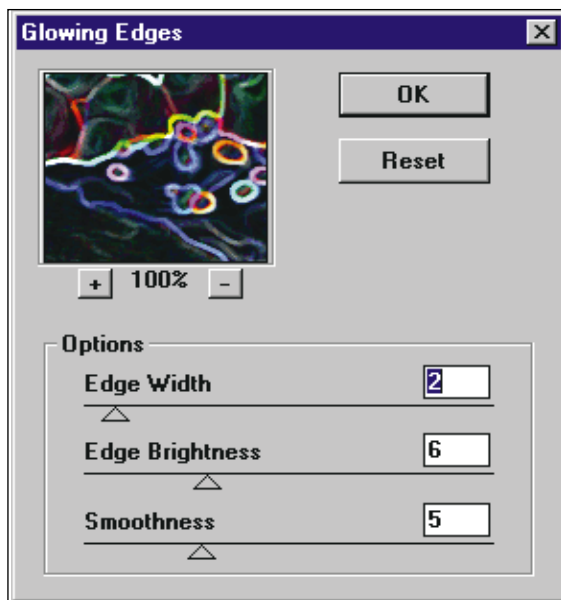
provide correspondingly-shaped containers for text or graphics – the former flows to fit the frame while the latter are cropped by it. You can also place 'free-range' text and a built-in story editor is available for editing longer passages.

This version brings auto-reformatting. For example, if you create a publication, then decide to change the page size or margins, PageMaker will resize graphics and re-flow text to suit. Another new feature is 'layering'. Not to be confused with stacking objects on top of each other, this lets you assign text and graphics to a named layer, and hide or show the entire layer. So you could have a 'Comments' layer that doesn't appear on the final print, or layers containing the same text in different languages –17 spelling dictionaries come as standard.

There are more 'Plug-Ins' – the successor to 'Additions' – which let you apply photo-enhancing filters in-place, such as Glowing Edges (see picture above). There's Web support, with a links palette, and HTML import and export, and you can also create Adobe Acrobat electronic documents. Finally, there's a good bundle of extras, including 220 Adobe fonts, a cut-down version of PhotoShop, and an inspiring set of multimedia tours and tutorials.

After a spell in the doldrums, PageMaker looks set to challenge Quark in the professional stakes.
- £468.82 (inc VAT) average street price
- Adobe: 0181 606 4000

PageMaker 6.5					
Ease of use	★	★	★	★	☆
Features	★	★	★	★	★
Value for money	★	★	★	★	☆
Overall	★	★	★	★	☆

Corel Ventura 7

Never a corporation to do things by halves, Corel has packed the Ventura box very full. There are 1,000 fonts, 30,000 clip-art images, a 3D logo generator, copies of WordPerfect and PhotoPaint to take care of your word and image processing requirements, together with other utilities for database publishing, CD-ROM creation and much more.

In contrast to the restrained interfaces of Adobe and Quark, Ventura bristles with buttons. Six sets appear by default, with a further five on standby, but they can all be hidden. It's actually less complex than it appears, as the arrangement is logical. The top bar contains the standard Windows save, open and clipboard controls, undo/redo, a miniature colour palette, spelling and search tools, buttons to import text and pictures and buttons to output to paper or electronic format. Further bars include the page layout and drawing tools, a full colour palette, line and fill options, as well as navigation and viewing controls. It's all completely customisable, and you can save an entire interface, with different sets of buttons to hand for producing books, for example, or handbills.

The most useful toolbar is the property bar, which changes its contents – rather like the corresponding palettes in PageMaker and Quark – to suit the context. So if you're editing text, you'll have font formatting, tables, page numbers and an 'on-the-fly' spell-checker and thesaurus to hand. If you're editing a graphic, you'll have size, position and rotation controls.
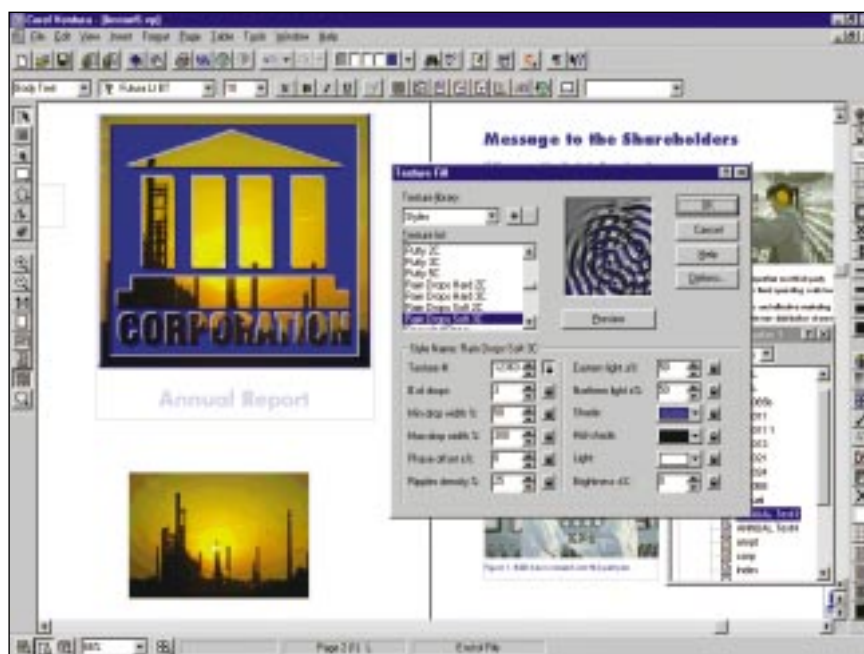
Ventura is unrivalled when it comes to drawing tools, with palettes full of pre-set shapes such as hearts, arrows and speech balloons, as well as Bézier drawing pens. There is also a stupendous range of fill effects, with multicoloured shading, bitmapped patterns and an infinitely configurable array of fractal-generated textures.
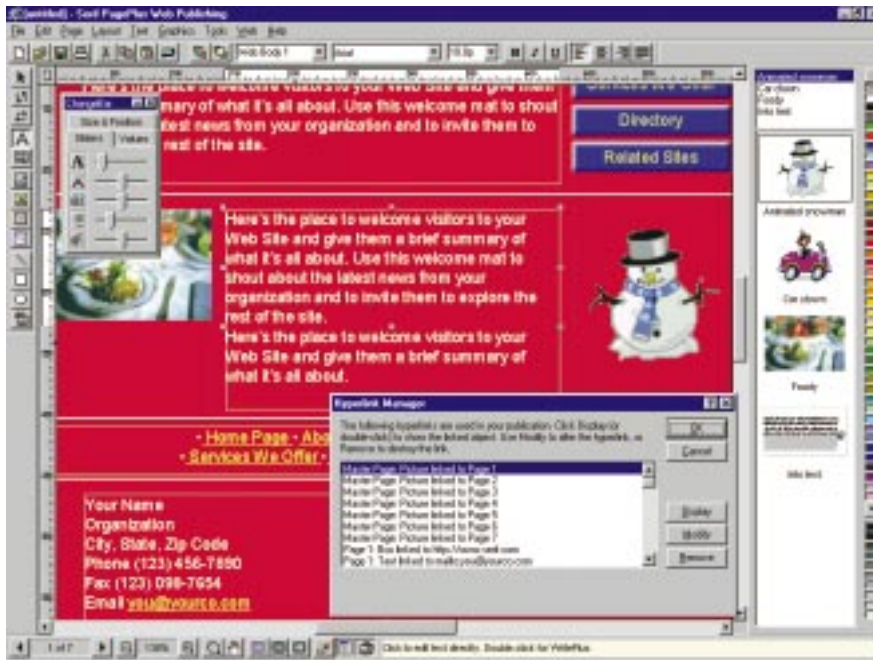
This version of Ventura at last brings you the ability to work with more than one document, dragging and dropping items between them. It also includes multiple master pages, as seen in XPress and PageMaker. You can have 'conditional' tags for text – which work rather like PageMaker's layers, enabling multiple versions in the same document. There's extensive Web support, with output to standard HTML (Hypertext Mark-up Language) or Corel's Java-enabled Barista format. You can also create electronic documents using Corel Envoy, which is a rival format to Adobe Acrobat.

Corel's Ventura 7 is huge and complex, but does offer the most creative power to the intrepid.
- £450 (inc VAT) average street price
- Corel: 0800 973189

Corel Ventura 7					
Ease of use	★	★	★	☆	☆
Features	★	★	★	★	★
Value for money	★	★	★	★	☆
Overall	★	★	★	★	☆

plifies the process of transferring the finished pages from a PC to the Web site. **It's easy and it's fun – but beneath the surface there's a lot for the wannabe power user.**

● £99.95 (inc VAT)
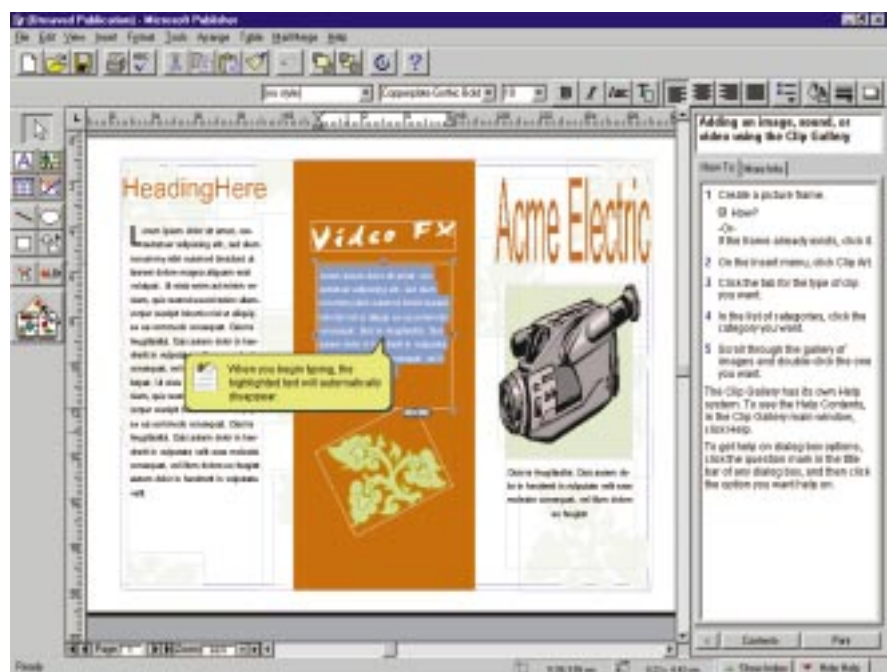   (£69.95 for a limited period)
● Serif: 0800 3767070

Serif PagePlus 5.0 Professional					
Ease of use	★	★	★	★	★
Features	★	★	★	★	☆
Value for money	★	★	★	★	★
Overall	★	★	★	★	★

Microsoft Publisher 97

Keeping it simple has been Microsoft's DTP philosophy since version one, and Publisher 97 carries the tradition into the world of Web publishing. The interface sees little change from the last version – you have a host of Page Wizards ready to guide you through creating everything from newsletters, through stationery, to Web sites. If you get bored, distractions include Origami birds and paper aeroplanes. Once you've run the Wizard, there's plenty of assistance from a help panel at the side of the screen, which can be turned off as you progress. You get 150 quality fonts and 5,000 clip-art images, but to access these you must copy 30Mb of catalogue files to your hard disk. As you also need the CD inserted, this seems rather inefficient.

Working with Publisher is simple – a small toolbar provides access to text and picture frames, WordArt text effects, lines, ellipses and rectangles, plus a palette of 'smart' shapes including

Serif PagePlus 5.0 Professional

Serif has also always concentrated on offering a lot, and version 5.0 continues the tradition, with 400 fonts and 17,000 clip-art items. To get started, there's over 100Mb of on-line tours and Page Wizards – automated templates where you fill in your own details in place of the 'dummy' text. PagePlus is much more than a starter application, though, with professional features such as colour separations, Pantone support, and precision typographic control.

This version has a number of improvements to the interface resulting in less screen clutter and more room to view your work. As ever, there is a built-in text editor, complete with spelling and grammar checker, and LogoPlus, a drawing-cum-text-tweaking tool. The newcomer is TablePlus, a table editor that combines advanced formatting options, such as slanted text, with an impressive range of spreadsheet capabilities. Despite the advanced colour and page layout support, producers of longer documents haven't been so well catered for in the past. This version redresses that by offering Wizards to automate the creation of indexes and tables of contents.

You're still limited to one document at a time, which makes it awkward to copy items between publications, but the new Portfolio, a storage area for text and graphics, has alleviated this. You can drag items to and from publications, and the content of the Portfolio is automatically saved between sessions. Unlike Quark's similar 'Library' feature, though, you can only have one Portfolio file.

There are new Wizards for in-place photo optimising, creating calendars and mail-merging publications, but the main thrust of new development is in Web publishing. There are page Wizards for personal, community and business use. There are tools to attach links to graphics or text, or for more ambitious users a 'hot-spot' tool that lets you attach different links to different parts of the same graphic. You can create scrolling text banners, and decorate your pages with 99 animated GIF pictures, before outputting to HTML format or previewing in your Web browser. Finally, a copy of Microsoft's Web Publishing Wizard sim-

DTP on the Internet

Among the products reviewed here, the biggest single trend is toward design for the World Wide Web, with only Quark and GSP declining to play among the current versions, though Xtensions exist for the former.

Simple Web publishing is a lot less complicated than paper publishing – you'll be using fewer fonts, only two basic graphic formats, and won't have to worry about separations or the finer points of typography. Basically, all you need is the ability to add links to a document – hot spots that will jump to another page or site when clicked, and the ability to save in the Web HTML format. PageMaker, MS Publisher and PagePlus all do this, and Ventura goes further with its Java-enabled Barista format, enabling multiple columns, more complex graphics and a greater choice of fonts.

However, despite Ventura's self-billing as 'One document – Multiple Destinations' all the products here are first and foremost designed for producing printed output. Although it may be convenient, say, to use the same package for your company's sales literature and Web site, if Internet publishing is your primary activity, then there is little point in investing in colour separations, high typographic precision or fancy drawing tools. If you want to publish first and foremost on the Web, then applications such as Microsoft FrontPage or Adobe PageMill go much further with support for frames, electronic forms, multimedia and site management.

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arrows, starbursts and speech bubbles. A special tool summons further Wizards to produce coupons, calendars, adverts and logos, and there's a further 'Design Gallery' of ready-made page items ranging from headlines to Web buttons. There's basic Bézier drawing in the limited and elderly Draw applet. New in this version is a mail-merge feature for personalising correspondence, but the bulk of development has been in Web design.

As with PagePlus, you can link text, images or parts of images and as well as exporting to HTML you can preview the pages in your browser. There's plenty of help, including a potential problem-spotter. If you want to transfer the pages to the Web using the Microsoft Web Publishing Wizard, you'll have to download it first, as it isn't included on the CD.

For the power user, Publisher isn't as well equipped as PagePlus or Pressworks. It doesn't create process colour separations, and spot colours are limited to two. However, those wanting to go further than the supplied Wizards can get a crash course in the principles of page layout from the printed manual. **Marginally the easiest of all, but it doesn't match PagePlus or Pressworks in features.**

● £99.99 (inc VAT)
● Microsoft: 0345 002000

Microsoft Publisher 97					
Ease of use	★	★	★	★	★
Features	★	★	★	☆	☆
Value for money	★	★	★	☆	☆
Overall	★	★	★	★	☆

GSP Pressworks 2.5

You get two versions of Pressworks in the same box – the 32-bit version 2.5 requires Windows 95, and version 2 is the earlier Windows 3.1 edition. Bundled with Pressworks are 35 own-brand fonts, a tiny (105-piece) clip-art library, a selection of utilities including font management, clip-art and photo-CD browsers, as well as demo versions of various other products from GSP . Unlike the Microsoft or Serif products, there are no Web publishing features.
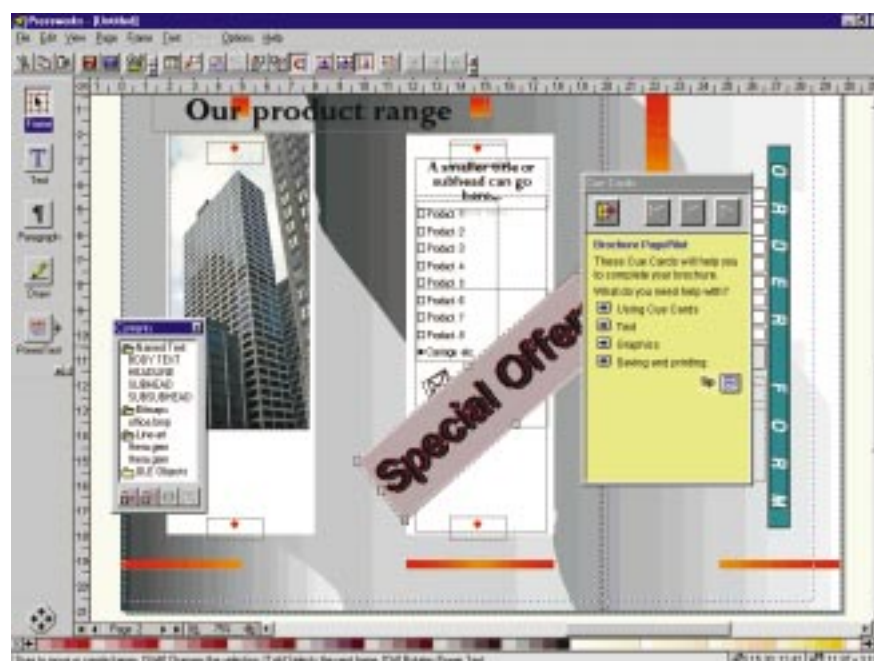
Just to ring the changes, the automated templates known as Wizards else-where are called 'Page Pilots' here. There are plenty available, covering business cards to books, and there's more of a UK feel: Zip codes are out, but Postcodes and VAT numbers are in. As with the Microsoft and Serif products, there's plenty of coaching – this time in the form of 'Cue Cards' – and other help screens that appear the first time you use a feature. All can be turned off as you get more confident.

The simple button bar down the side of the screen switches between modes – creating frames, editing text, drawing, adding clip-art or inserting other objects. With each mode, the top toolbar changes to suit, so you get a word-processing style formatting ribbon for dealing with text; shapes and Bézier tools for drawing; border, size and text-wrap controls for frames.

A rather good feature for organising your publications is the contents box. This shows a list of all the named stories (such as text files you've imported, or text that has been created and named in the program) as well as imported graphics. It will give you information about each item, such as the size of a graphic, and you can also use it as a holding area for items that have been imported into the publication but that you have yet to place on a page. Although there's no purpose-made text editor, you can use a spelling checker and thesaurus straight on the page.

One drawback is that although you can have left and right master pages, you can't edit these to make global changes to a publication – only pages added after the edit reflect the changes.

Easy and inexpensive, the contents of the PagePilots have more relevance to UK users.
● £39.95 (inc VAT)
● GSP: 01480 462944

GSP Pressworks 2.5					
Ease of use	★	★	★	★	☆
Features	★	★	★	☆	☆
Value for money	★	★	★	★	☆
Overall	★	★	★	★	☆

Mini Office Publisher

A sense of déjà vu awaits here as, despite the Europress badge, this is actually a previous incarnation of PagePlus enjoying a new lease of life. Despite the bargain price, you get 200 fonts, 2,000 pieces of clip-art (with browser) and numerous templates for home and business use. Although there are no Wizards or Pilots there are extensive sets of templates – all you have to do is replace the existing text and graphics with your own. There's plenty of help, too, with 'click here' hints attached to each template, a floating help panel, and an option to use a reduced set of tools and menu items. There's little in the way of printed manuals, but plenty of electronic documentation in Acrobat format – the reader is included.

The interface is simple, if somewhat eccentric. There's a standard set of tools for creating text frames, editing text, drawing simple shapes, then a Change Bar which, as the name suggests, alters its contents to suit the job in hand. If you are editing text, for example, this will initially give controls for the size and style (bold, italic, and so on) of text. When you click on the button at the top right, a further dozen buttons will appear – click one of these and the controls in the Change Bar will change in turn, to offer fonts, colours, alignment, spacing and so on. It's ingenious, especially in the way it saves precious screen space, but it does make it rather tedious to apply lots of formatting changes to a piece of text.

Although you don't get the logo or table creation tools seen in PagePlus 5.0, you do get the story editor, WritePlus. This version only has the spelling, not the grammar checker, but it does have that other publishing essential – a word counter which you can use on individual stories. Moving up a level, the Story Manager keeps tabs on all the separate texts in your publication.

Typographical control and professional features are impressive, with 0.01mm accuracy, colour separation and automatic trapping, and in spite of the

DTP jargon buster

Bézier curve Shape that can be drawn and edited by dragging nodes (the points the line passes through) and handles (the direction in which it curves).

Kerning, tracking, leading **Kerning** is adjusting the space between a pair of letters, eg AV, to make them fit together better.
Tracking is adjusting the overall letter spacing of a block of text, to change the density (known as 'colour') of text or make it fit the space available.
Leading (rhymes with wedding, not weeding) is the spacing between lines – strips of lead were used in traditional printing.

Knockouts and trapping If you're printing a light colour against a dark background, say pink on black, then the background needs a corresponding circular hole punched in it, otherwise the black will show through, turning the pink a murky maroon. This is known as 'knocking out', but it gets more complicated as a slight overlap must be left to compensate for small misalignments between printing each plate. The lighter object is 'spread' (if surrounded) or 'choked' (if it surrounds) in a process known as 'trapping'.

Pantone One of several industry colour standards, whereby numbered swatches in designers' sample books show inks exactly as they will appear in print.

Point Unit for measuring type, approximately one 72nd of an inch. Other units include Picas, Ciceros, and Didots.

Separations Colour can be printed in two ways. Solid blocks and coloured text use 'spot' colour – one printing plate for each colour used. Photographs and multicoloured graphics use 'process' colour, where the image is composed of tiny overlapping dots, with successive plates contributing the cyan, yellow, magenta and black (CMYK) inks. 'Hi-Fi' or 'Hexachrome' printing uses six process plates.

DTP software compared

Product	XPress Passport 4.0 (beta)	PageMaker 6.5	Ventura 7	PagePlus 5.0 Professional	Publisher 97	Pressworks 2.5	Mini Office Publisher
Contact	Quark 01483 454397	Adobe 0181 606 4000	Corel 0800 973189	Serif 0800 3767070	Microsoft 0345 002000	GSP 01480 462944	Europress 01625 859333
Price (inc VAT)	TBA	£468.82 (street)	£450 (street)	£99.95	£99.99	£39.95	£29.99
Windows version	95	95	95	95	95	95 and 3.1	3.1
Minimum/ recommended RAM	12Mb	8/24Mb	8/16Mb	8Mb	6/8Mb	4/8Mb	4Mb
Min/full disk space	22Mb	26/67Mb	70/269Mb	22/151Mb	10/116Mb	5/25Mb	5/40Mb
Master pages	Multiple	Multiple	Multiple	Single	Single	Single	Single
Multiple documents	●	●	●	❍	❍	❍	❍
Table creator	❍	●	●	●	●	❍	❍
Indexing/TOC	●	●	●	●	❍	❍	❍
Colour separations	●	●	●	●	Spot only	●	●
Web output	❍	●	●	●	●	❍	❍
Add-on support	●	●	●	❍	❍	❍	❍
Fonts included	0	220	1,000	400	150	35	200
Clip-art included	0	0	TBA	17,500	5,000	104	2,200

❍ No ● Yes

knock-down price and the 'last year's model' tag, this is an impressively equipped product.
The cheapest around – it's not state of the art, but is available to Windows 3.1 users, too.
● £29.99 (inc VAT)
● Europress: 01625 859333

Mini Office Publisher					
Ease of use	★	★	★	★	☆
Features	★	★	★	☆	☆
Value for money	★	★	★	★	★
Overall	★	★	★	★	☆

bundles of fonts and language options, Quark eschews the former and charges 60 percent more for the international (dongle-protected) version. Professional publishers not already locked into Quark are not going to find this attractive.

That leaves PageMaker, which has made a substantial comeback over the past two years and Adobe also seems to show a greater regard for its customers. We therefore have no reservations about giving it our Best Buy award.

On the budget front, Microsoft, as ever, offers the most painless introduction to DTP, but for just a little more effort, both GSP and Serif outclass it in terms of features. Of these, PagePlus, especially with its new table, indexing and contents features, offers the most for both the beginner and the more ambitious user, and walks away with our recommended sticker. Tim Nott

At the professional level Ventura Publisher certainly offers the most in terms of features and creative possibilities, but its complexity scores against it for day-to-day work. QuarkXPress, on the other hand, bristles with new features while retaining its simple interface.
However, Quark is looking decreasingly competitive – certainly at the US prices. Whereas Corel and Adobe both include