



Interactive Flash File Creation In InDesign CS4 and QuarkXPress 8 – A Comparison

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	3
Scores	4
Ease of use	6
Authoring Environments	7
Pre-Loaded Content	7
Appropriate Design Tools	9
External Vector Art	9
Navigation.	10
Page Transitions	10
Menus	10
Windows	11
Drag and Drop	12
Animation	12
Multimedia	13
Data Integration	14
Integration with Print	14
Output Formats and Integration with Adobe Flash.	15

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

InDesign CS4 has Flash capabilities and these are often compared to QuarkXPress 8's Flash support. Despite surface resemblances in their ability to create content for the Flash platform, this report concludes that InDesign CS4 only supports basic Flash communications projects, where QuarkXPress 8 goes well beyond that.

Apparently, Quark believes layout designers should be given the tools to expand their business into the realm of Flash design — e.g. when a print layout customer asks for an interactive online design that closely fits the print layout. Adobe InDesign's Flash related features suggest that Flash designers are really Flash developers and therefore a whole different kind of creative professional — graphic designers either have to learn to be developers (highly unlikely) or have to be content with handing off designs to developers to complete in the Adobe Flash application.

A result of this view is that InDesign offers two “modes” of Flash support. The first delivers capabilities for creating a Flash version (SWF) that looks identical to the print layout and behaves as a virtual version of the printed design, while the second offers XFL export as a means to output a background design to the Flash application in which a Flash developer will add interactive elements.

The first mode of Flash support in InDesign allows layout designers to create e-brochures and e-magazines more or less like Flyp Media. The second mode of Flash support in InDesign divides the effort of creating Flash content between two types of users: layout designers and Flash developers (they can be one and the same person).

Probably for this reason (among others), Adobe has decided to include the Flash programming environment with Creative Suite Design Premium version 4.

Quark's view on the other hand resulted in Flash design being incorporated directly into every copy of QuarkXPress 8 as an integrated part of the program. Quark's approach leads to its Interactive palette being more of a design tool than a development environment. Because Quark wants to enable layout designers to easily add interactive capabilities to existing print layouts or design for Flash without development skills, their SWF support needs to offer a great deal of functionality the Flash application delivers without the complexity of Flash itself.

This report concludes the Flash functionality in QuarkXPress 8 indeed lacks the complexity of the Flash authoring environment, while delivering many of the interactive capabilities of the Flash application (without the AIR and Flex capabilities, which are prominently present in the Flash CS4 development application). This implies layout designers can offer more payable services to their customers without having to learn Flash at all and companies can utilise their graphic design team for specific Flash projects instead of the often more costly Flash development resources. One example of how far QuarkXPress' Interactive features enable layout designers to expand their interactive offerings is <http://www.alandaleuk.com/>.

In this sense, QuarkXPress 8 does a better job than InDesign CS4, but although the report is centered around these two applications, the difference between Adobe and Quark from the point of view of interactive Flash file design and development really lies in the different approach to what each vendor seems to think a layout program should allow its user to do.

As well as professional designers, one user type that we believe will benefit from the more integrated approach to Flash design in QuarkXPress 8 is graphic design students and educational establishments. Clearly those students pursuing a career in Flash development will take the time to learn Adobe Flash but those learning graphic design or multimedia courses covering a range of media will certainly see the benefit in only having to learn one application for both their high-end print design and Flash designs.

Looking upon the two programs' Flash support in this way, we cannot but conclude that Quark goes a further distance at supporting a layout design firm's business by enabling them to offer more to their customers with less effort, training and cost, while Adobe at least expects the same design business to invest in some Flash development training.

As will become clear from the rest of this report, QuarkXPress 8's Flash capabilities are in many cases much easier to learn than the same features in the Flash environment. We also found QuarkXPress 8 capable of complex interactive presentations, animations, and web pages without writing a single line of Flash code.

The same sort of complexity could only be achieved from within Flash itself after having used InDesign as a background design starting point. Alarming was that InDesign CS4 is in some cases not consistent in its Flash support —such as with not supporting FLV content, or interactive elements on an InDesign page not exporting to the XFL format.

SCORES

We gave each application a score out of 10 for 15 elements of functionality covered in the report. These scores are subjective, but do reflect how we felt InDesign and QuarkXPress dealt with supporting Flash features.

Functionality	InDesign CS4 Flash support	QuarkXPress 8 Flash support
Authoring environments	6	9
Preloaded content	5	6
Design tools	10	10
External vector art	8	8
Page transitions	8	9
Menus	2	7
Floating windows, skins	2	8
Drag & drop elements	2	8

Functionality	InDesign CS4 Flash support	QuarkXPress 8 Flash support
Animation	0	6
Multimedia	3	8
Data integration	0	7
Integration with print	5	8
Output formats	6	5
Integration with Flash appl.	7	2
Total out of 150:	64	101

EASE OF USE

Quark has been offering Flash export from QuarkXPress since October 1996 (although only built into the application since QuarkXPress 8 released in August 2008.). The company has always claimed their Flash output can be created without knowing anything about Flash programming.

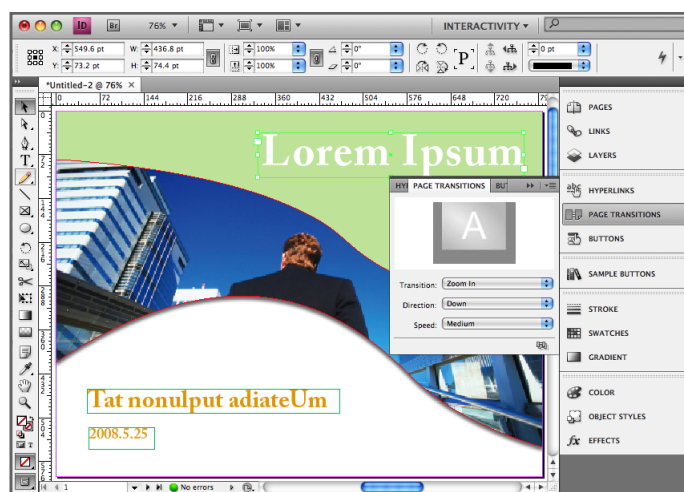
This has been true up to a point – authors still have to know what each option in the Flash output dialogues will lead to in order to obtain the results they want. Nevertheless, the QuarkXPress Flash capabilities have been much easier to master than Adobe's Flash authoring environment.

With InDesign CS4, Adobe is for the first time offering InDesign users some basic Flash capabilities they can create without knowing Flash itself. However, the InDesign Flash capabilities stop where the Flash authoring environment is better suited to create Flash documents, according to Adobe.

Given the very basic nature of InDesign's Flash support, Adobe seems to assume InDesign users will make the switch to using the Flash application relatively early in the process. Quark on the other hand seems to believe layout designers like to design Flash content outside the Flash authoring environment for as long as they can — or completely.

In view of the complexities of Flash and its move towards a full-scale programming environment, there is a lot to be said for Quark's take on this. Of course this is going to depend largely on the type of interactive project a user is taking on. QuarkXPress 8 is well suited to product tours like for example a standalone microsite to launch a new mobile phone, or some level of banner advertising, design portfolio Web sites etc. The Adobe Flash application may be more appropriate for more complex development projects, for example an interactive game or e-commerce site.

Although Flash CS4 does come with a predefined library of effects, in reality its learning curve remains quite steep. Unless a layout designer is involved with a lot of Flash content, learning how to



InDesign CS4

use Flash may be too cumbersome for most and in many cases just doesn't match with the mind set of many a designer.

AUTHORING ENVIRONMENTS

InDesign's approach to Flash authoring is different from that of QuarkXPress 8's from the start. QuarkXPress 8 has a dedicated layout space for interactive design; InDesign has not. In QuarkXPress 8 the Interactive palette only shows when the user has chosen their layout to be interactive, Flash-based.

Consequently, QuarkXPress 8 automatically switches to pixel units, allows for the setting of basic output variables like frame width and background colour, and allows print layouts to be converted to interactive and vice versa.

InDesign CS4 on the other hand uses the same design environment for print and Flash, which makes it easier to get started than QuarkXPress 8 but users run more of a risk creating "Frankenstein InDesign documents" —especially if they lose track of the different layers they are probably going to use for separating print content from Flash content like buttons, menus, etc.

InDesign CS4 also has no dedicated Flash palette. Instead, Flash controls are shown side-by-side in the existing Interactive PDF palette. This is an unfortunate choice, as about half of the PDF features are not available for Flash output. Most users will only find this out when trying to export to SWF.

Users can manually switch to pixels, but changing InDesign's background colour involves more than just setting the paper colour —which only affects screen preview. Setting a background colour for a Flash version of a document will require users to add a new layer and create a coloured frame on that layer.

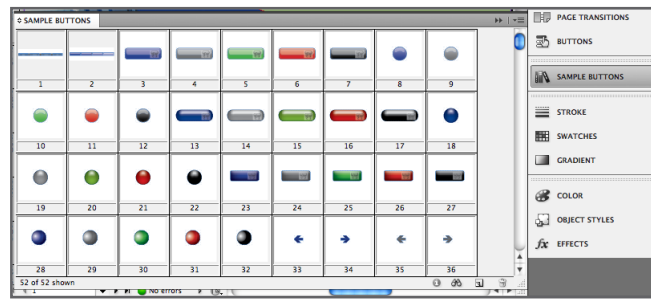
This is the most appropriate way in InDesign to get a coloured background in Flash output. In QuarkXPress 8, you can simply select the whole layout to have a background colour that gets output in Flash as well. However, you cannot set a different background colour for different pages without reverting to the same "trick" in QuarkXPress as you must in InDesign.

Conclusion: InDesign's Flash output handling is a step in the right direction, but it's somewhat clumsily implemented. QuarkXPress 8 has an edge in how it supports layout designers who want to add Flash design capabilities to their portfolio but will continue to create print designs as opposed to specialising in Flash projects.

Scores: InDesign: 6/10 QuarkXPress: 9/10

PRE-LOADED CONTENT

Both applications come with pre-loaded content. InDesign CS 4 includes ready to go buttons that can be customized, which makes it very easy for users to get started. The buttons "pool" is an InDesign Library. To create multiple buttons with a consistent look and feel, the best way to go forward is to create an Item Style. This will not keep the button's action in sync, but it does keep buttons' looks in sync.



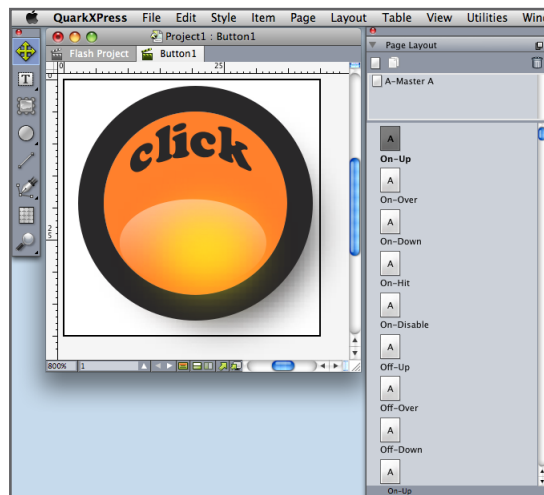
InDesign CS4

QuarkXPress 8 does not come with pre-loaded buttons, which makes it harder for users to start. However, buttons in QuarkXPress 8 are created as composition zones, so they automatically have synchronization for both appearance and content.

In InDesign, buttons are limited with respect to what users can deploy them for:

- They don't have actions included and there are approx. 40 variations on about 5 themes
- Possible actions one can attach to these buttons mainly consist of GO TO actions, Play Movie, Play Sound, etc.

In essence, InDesign's included Flash content reflects its emphasis on the user being an e-magazine producer. This explains why most actions are concentrated on moving through a document from page to page and on playing movie and sound clips.



QuarkXPress 8

QuarkXPress 8 has the dedicated Interactive Layout Button Sub type. This is harder to learn than InDesign's predefined button magic, but once users have learned this, they have four different types of buttons to choose from, including multistate buttons such as on/off. The button design space to work with is dedicated, and the resulting buttons can be synchronized layout-wide. These buttons can trigger the full extensive range of interactive functionality offered by QuarkXPress 8, allowing for a wide range of creative applications other than just basic navigation. For example triggering

animations, submitting user feedback, capturing information from the state of the Flash presentation etc.

All of this does require that users learn and grasp the QuarkXPress Composition Zones concept. This will help users to get the most out of the Buttons functionality in QuarkXPress 8, but once they do, these are much more powerful than InDesign's.

Conclusion: InDesign offers an easy entry in basic button functionality, with a strong focus on document navigation. For anything more complex, users must load their document in the Flash environment and take it from there. QuarkXPress 8 skips the easy predefined stage altogether, and gives users a much more powerful button design environment. However, the learning curve to get more out of buttons than in InDesign is quite steep —although not as steep as learning to use the Flash application.

Scores: InDesign: 5/10 QuarkXPress: 6/10

APPROPRIATE DESIGN TOOLS

Both applications let you use all of the same design tools you use for print.

Scores: InDesign: 10/10 QuarkXPress: 10/10

EXTERNAL VECTOR ART

InDesign CS4 accepts Illustrator files and imports them as PDF files. This allows users to resize placed Illustrator files after they have been placed in InDesign without quality loss. Certainly when a vector item is dragged from an Illustrator page to an InDesign page, there is no quality loss at all.

A negative in InDesign is that it flattens transparent objects on export. Because of InDesign's limited interactivity, this won't hurt much. However, in QuarkXPress 8, transparency is never flattened, which is crucial with animations, as this enables an object to move behind a partially transparent object while retaining its smooth appearance.

QuarkXPress 8 directly imports or places Illustrator files by drag and drop, but immediately rasterizes them. This does make it impossible to resize the file without some quality loss, except for editing the original in Illustrator itself. Bizarre as this may sound, this actually doesn't work out as bad as it seems.

InDesign does have a slightly better *preview* of Illustrator files but at the cost of very poor performance, especially when enlarging the canvas.

However, when it comes to Flash output, it turns out QuarkXPress is probably rendering a more realistic preview of what the actual Flash file will look once it has been exported.

Conclusion: InDesign previews Illustrator files more beautifully than QuarkXPress 8 does, but at the cost of performance and without noticeable difference when exported to the target Flash file.

Scores: InDesign: 8/10 QuarkXPress: 8/10

NAVIGATION

Both InDesign CS4 and QuarkXPress 8 offer navigation capabilities in multiple ways. Again, InDesign relies on further Flash authoring in the Flash application itself for more complex navigation needs, while QuarkXPress 8 delivers more in its own working environment.

PAGE TRANSITIONS

Both applications automatically add Next and Previous page keyboard actions (the arrow keys). QuarkXPress 8 has fully customisable keyboard shortcuts and can auto-advance pages at timed intervals. It can also set a default page transition as a layout preference.

InDesign CS4 uses a dedicated palette tab for transitions. This seems to make it easier to learn than QuarkXPress 8, where all functionality is grouped together in the Interactive palette. But QuarkXPress only works differently, grouping page transitions, buttons, etc., all in their own dedicated menu sets.

Both applications have several page transitions to chose from, but only InDesign has the page curl transition that is often used on e-brochure or e-magazines. QuarkXPress has many other transitions, some of which can be set to activate automatically when the user hovers the mouse over a specific area on-screen.

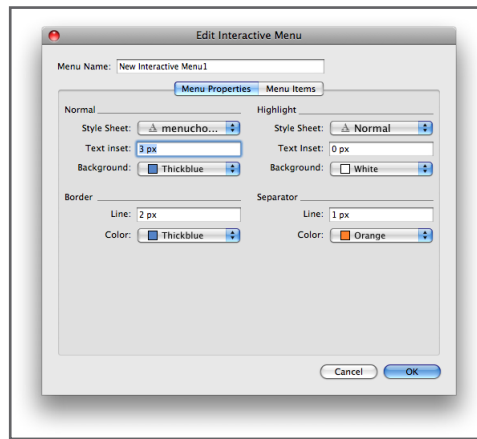
Conclusion: InDesign and QuarkXPress differ in this area mainly as a matter of taste. Personally, I would like to see the page curl transition effect added to QuarkXPress's transitions set. But it's not really essential as both applications can advance pages semi-automatically —and QuarkXPress fully automatic. The latter makes QuarkXPress somewhat more powerful than InDesign, where the user must switch to Flash in order to get the same functionality.

Scores: InDesign: 8/10 QuarkXPress: 9/10

MENUS

InDesign CS4 can't build true menus —users must design around them or fake them. QuarkXPress 8 can build sophisticated pop-up menus, which act much the same as those of an Operating System or an Adobe AIR/Flex application.

To build menus in QuarkXPress 8, users need to first familiarize themselves with the way these work —building menus is by no means a simple task, not even in QuarkXPress 8. Adobe assumes InDesign users will not build presentations with interfaces without first learning the Flash application.



QuarkXPress 8

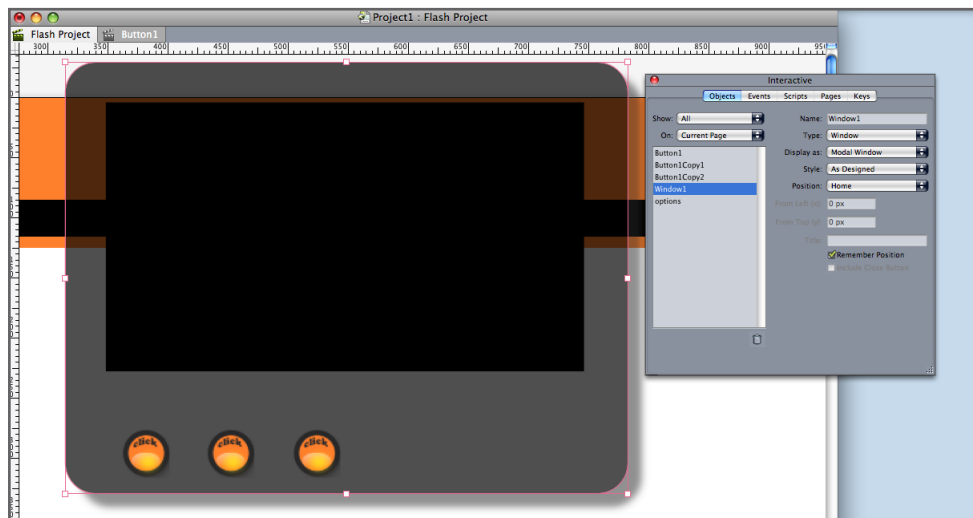
Conclusion: Setting up a menu system in InDesign is virtually impossible, except for making button groups and layers act like menus —which adds to the complexity of the document. In QuarkXPress 8, menus for complex presentations where the user can be sent to a page or object depending on a selection they make, is possible. It is easier to learn than learning to use Flash.

Scores: InDesign: 2/10 QuarkXPress: 7/10

WINDOWS

QuarkXPress 8's Interactive palette has an object called a window. This encapsulates everything above it as its own window that can be moved around, shown, be hidden etc. Windows are very useful for showing video, getting user input and for other interactive widgets.

InDesign CS4 only has one stage of communication, which is the page. This may not come as a surprise, given that Adobe focuses heavily on Flash capabilities as a means to create e-brochures and e-magazines —although even in those cases a pop-up window for videos would be useful. As



QuarkXPress 8

with most other Flash capabilities not included in InDesign, users will have to switch to the Flash application to get the same “action-able” power.

One illustration of the windows functionality in QuarkXPress 8 is the video skin. The Flash application enables users to create such skins, but if a user is not a Flash programmer, Adobe advises to take an existing skin file and change it.

For this report we tried this and found it to be very easy to change the skin file, but to be quite hard to load the altered skin in a browser without generating error messages. The debugging phase took half a day, and even then we ended up with one skin working and another one stubbornly refusing to debug properly. In order to grasp what we were doing wrong, we would have to invest in learning Adobe Flash.

The question then is if designers prefer to do this type of work in a page layout environment, where “programming” a video skin takes half as long and does not require one to learn a single line of code. In fact, creating the video player skin with QuarkXPress 8 resulted in the video playing immediately and without any errors at all. One could argue this is due to the exported SWF file “only” being a Flash 7 file, but the end-result nevertheless played properly, and did not generate frustrating errors in any of the browsers we used for testing (Safari, Firefox).

Conclusion: Due to the focus of Adobe on creating e-brochures and e-magazines as the most important usage for Flash in InDesign, there are no windows capabilities in the application. The way windows have been implemented in the QuarkXPress Interactive palette lets inexperienced designers quickly create working video player skins and more. In Adobe’s world, Flash is needed for creating the same type of functionality, but even using an example file as a starting point in Flash turns out to be a less smooth experience.

Scores: InDesign: 2/10 QuarkXPress: 8/10

DRAG AND DROP

Items on a QuarkXPress 8 layout can be made draggable. Expressions can be made to react to where the object is dragged and dropped, and draggable items even keep their transparency. These capabilities are especially interesting to layout designers who must create interactive presentations. With QuarkXPress 8 they can do so without a side trip to Flash, and from within the Interactive palette — although this doesn’t mean it can be done without a trip to the manual or help files.

There is no equivalent for this functionality in InDesign CS4. InDesign layout designers cannot even lay the foundations for this sort of functionality in InDesign, other than creating the pages and transitions. They must switch to Flash and may find some interactive design elements have lost their interactive characteristics altogether.

Conclusion: QuarkXPress offers more interactive Flash functionality without the user having to take a trip to Flash itself. All of the functionality can be managed using the Interactive palette.

Scores: InDesign: 2/10 QuarkXPress: 8/10

ANIMATION

QuarkXPress 8 has slide objects that slide both horizontally and vertically, and it can animate objects along paths. It also has a dedicated “Image Sequence” layout subtype for creating frame by frame (motion stop) animations.

There are no animation capabilities in InDesign CS4, because the focus of Adobe with InDesign’s Flash capabilities are on e-brochures and e-magazines and also because animations go beyond the basic Flash design functionality Adobe wants to deliver inside InDesign. Consequently, users who want to create animations, have to learn Flash and use the Flash environment.

The good news is that animation design by itself is actually amongst the most simple things users can do with Flash. In fact, QuarkXPress 8’s animation support is (logically) far more basic than what Flash has to offer, and because of the lack of a steep learning curve here, there’s no distinct advantage to using QuarkXPress 8, other than “it can be done” without having Flash on the hard disk.

Conclusion: Animations are easier or at least as easy to create in Flash as they are in QuarkXPress 8. InDesign Flash supports no animation capabilities but relies on the Flash environment where animations are quite easy to set up.

Scores: InDesign: 0/10 QuarkXPress: 6/10

MULTIMEDIA

Movies

InDesign appears to be able to place QuickTime movies but can only export them to PDF, not to any of its supported Flash formats. Also the actions to control the movie are only meant for PDF output. Users only find this out when they place a QuickTime movie and then try to export it to Flash.

There are no work-arounds for this. Even if XFL is used as an intermediary format before opening the file in Flash, the movie is replaced with a bitmap of the poster frame.

We also found InDesign CS4 to randomly crash when placing large movie files, but this is something it has in common with QuarkXPress 8. InDesign has more limitations in this area; for example, it can’t place a FLV movie in any form —not even for export to PDF.

In QuarkXPress 8 users can place QuickTime and Flash video (although not by drag and drop), embed the QuickTime content at export time, and also resolve video from a URL at run-time. Complex controls for Flash video can be built without leaving QuarkXPress 8. However, before

starting to work with movies, it pays off to visit the online manual and read it through. Most of the crashes movies generate when working with QuarkXPress come from not knowing how to place the movie in the document.

Furthermore, InDesign CS4 gives the impression the movie is embedded (or linked to) in the document, but QuarkXPress on the other hand gives little to no visual clues as to whether the embed or link has been successful, although there is a Multimedia tab in the “Usage” dialogue. This does not provide visual clues, but at least its list accurately reflects the linked sound and video objects in the document.

When adding a QuickTime movie to InDesign, the user can finish the document in Flash and embed the actual movie there, by replacing the poster frame. However, building a set of movie controls in Flash is quite hard, even when an existing “skin” is taken as the point of departure.

In contrast, building movie controls in QuarkXPress 8 is actually quite simple. The hardest part here is designing the controls themselves. The resulting document can be re-used as if it were a skin file — capable of loading different movies by just loading new movies in the same (template) document. The skin/video player can even be reused by saving the object in a QuarkXPress library.

QuarkXPress 8 supports embedding audio and separate volume controls for foreground and background audio. InDesign does not.

Conclusion: With regards to movie support, QuarkXPress 8 is a clear winner. It even wins over Flash in terms of ease-of-use.

Scores: InDesign: 3/10 QuarkXPress: 8/10

DATA INTEGRATION

QuarkXPress 8 can get information from external URLs and post data to external URLs using standard calls, and integrate this data into the layout at run time. QuarkXPress 8 can also be set up to do calculations like time, cursor position, and operating system, and modify content accordingly.

QuarkXPress can create editable text fields which can be reformatted, use fonts, manipulate, retrieve and send data from URLs and much more. InDesign CS4 has no equivalent and relies on Flash and the Flash developer to code equivalent functionality.

Conclusion: QuarkXPress allows for dynamic form-based Flash files. InDesign doesn't, but relies on users designing in Flash for this type of complex content. However, in this area it must be said that QuarkXPress becomes almost as difficult to learn as the Flash environment.

INTEGRATION WITH PRINT

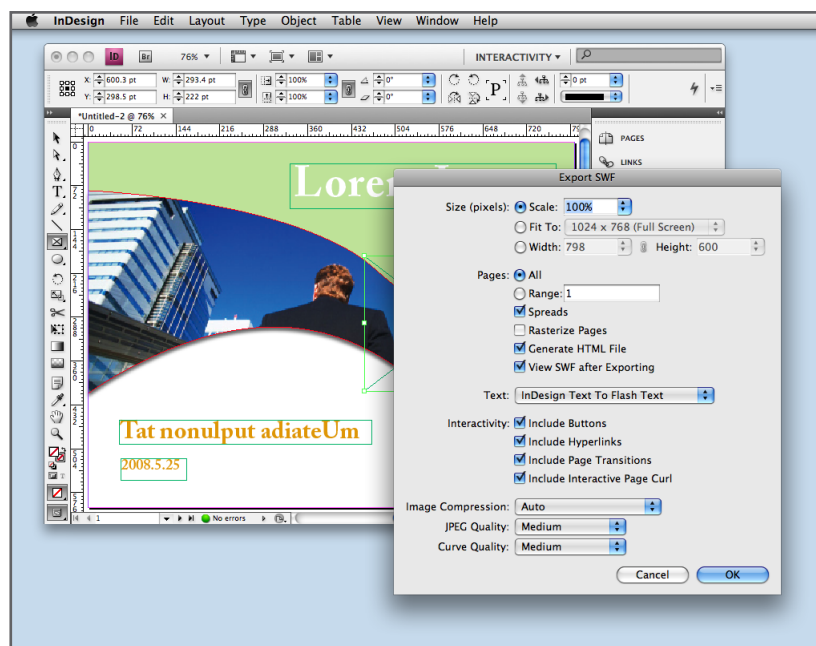
Conversion from Print

QuarkXPress 8 can convert from print to interactive layouts. InDesign CS4 can directly export a print layout to a Flash equivalent and add page transitions. Neither offers specific guidance on things like colour space, although Live Preflight in InDesign and Job Jackets in QuarkXPress 8 can help.

InDesign will lose its interactive controls at export time when transparent objects overlap any interactive element, such as a button or hyperlink. If an object with transparency overlaps an interactive element, the interactivity may be lost during export.

Round-Trip / Integration with print

QuarkXPress 8 print layouts and interactive layouts can be synchronized, share style sheets, etc. In



InDesign CS4

InDesign, buttons etc. must be kept and maintained on separate layers which must be switched on or off according to the export needs of the moment. In this area, of print/interactive integration, QuarkXPress is easier to manage because the print and interactive “layers” are always visible and users can readily exchange objects and elements among them.

In InDesign, sharing design objects between layers involves a few extra steps, but more importantly, the whole design process can become more messy to manage. If XFL enters the game, the synchronisation across documents becomes an additional problem to juggle. Adobe's Bridge then really becomes an essential management tool.

Integration with HTML

InDesign creates a blank HTML page to hold the SWF file. QuarkXPress 8 can embed an entire interactive layout in a web layout. This means users can design the surrounding HTML page in detail while still working on the SWF part of the project, sharing style sheets, colours, etc.

Conclusion: Adobe delivers multiple separate applications that are well integrated to accomplish the same results as QuarkXPress is capable of on its own. However, as QuarkXPress is project based, and therefore holds together all layout types in one file, it is easier to maintain design synchronisation and for managing different output types.

Scores: InDesign: 5/10 QuarkXPress: 8/10

OUTPUT FORMATS AND INTEGRATION WITH ADOBE FLASH

QuarkXPress 8 has a Preview option which lets you look at a whole document or just a page using the Flash Player and a temporary output file. InDesign users always have to go through a full export operation.

InDesign has more check boxes on its SWF output dialogue, but they essentially serve to discern between PDF and Flash export options. However, InDesign can export to Flash via XFL, and thus enable users to finish a basic Flash design in the Flash authoring environment.

Interactive elements such as hyperlinks, page transitions, and button actions are not included in the XFL file. While an InDesign document is based on pages and spreads, an XFL file is based on movie clips in a timeline. When users export an InDesign document to XFL format, each page or spread becomes a separate clip. Each page or spread is mapped to a new keyframe. Users must take it from there.

QuarkXPress on the other hand can only export to an SWF file, but can create standalone "projectors" which can run independent of the browser (e.g. kiosk mode), and of course all interactive elements designed in the Interactive layout will be saved in the resulting file.

Conclusion: In Adobe's mind, InDesign is there to create the layout design and Flash integration is only there to ensure the background layout design has been created before a user goes to the Flash application and adds interactive elements in there or hands off the file to a developer that uses Adobe Flash. In Quark's concept, QuarkXPress can (and must) be able to support most commonly applied interactive elements before exporting the file to a fully working Flash Player file.

There's no better or worse approach in this case —it's just a different approach to the same problem.

Scores for output formats: InDesign: 6/10 QuarkXPress: 5/10

Scores for integration with Flash application: InDesign: 7/10 QuarkXPress: 2/10

GLOBAL CONCLUSION

InDesign CS₄ has very limited Flash file creation capabilities, while QuarkXPress 8 clearly has many more. An added benefit of working with QuarkXPress in the Flash creation area is its simple and easy-to-use approach to most Flash design elements. Working on a Flash project in QuarkXPress 8 is a lot easier than it is in the Flash application—even now that it has some pre-defined effects in a well-filled Library.

The InDesign user is referred to the Flash application very soon in the design process, making InDesign Flash functionality suitable only for flip-through magazines and little else. That by itself wouldn't be that bad—it's a difference between Adobe and Quark in marketing and positioning a product—if InDesign wouldn't be confusing in some areas, and at times downright misleading when it comes to its Flash feature set.

The comparison between the two products in the Flash functionality domain shows that QuarkXPress enables layout designers to go further in offering multi-media design without having to learn Flash, while InDesign adds Flash capabilities really as an afterthought and not as an extra way for its designers to offer services beyond print publication layouts.