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Adobe Creative Suite 4 Web Premium - Mac

Is it worth the upgrade?

by Stuart Miles published on 23 September 2008

Adobe has launched a new version of its Creative Suite software, version 4, but does the Web Premium package offer enough to the webmasters of this world to upgrade? We get coding to find out.

Web Premium comes with 11 applications to give you a complete concept to web offering. The Premium edition gives you greater image support over the Web Standard version, as well as providing Photoshop CS4 Extended.

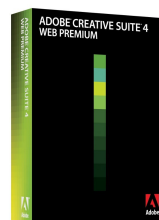
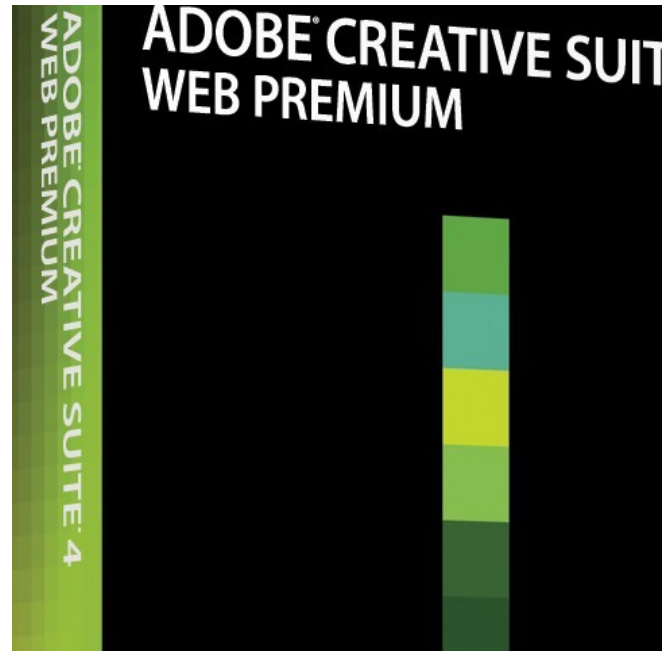
In the box you get Adobe Dreamweaver CS4, Adobe Fireworks CS4, Adobe Soundbooth, Adobe Contribute, Adobe Photoshop CS4 Extended, Adobe Illustrator CS4, Adobe Acrobat 9 Pro, Adobe Flash CS4 Professional, Adobe Bridge CS4, Adobe Device Central CS4, Adobe Media Player and Adobe Version Cue CS4.

Of course, as there is a great deal of overlap between the Web Premium and Design Premium packages, you'll find that some of what you read here will be the same as the other package also reviewed, but with some differences in the details.

So what's new?

While there are literally hundreds, if not thousands, of new tweaks, fixes and features, here are the ones that most caught our eye.

Across the entire platform everything has had a graphical overhaul in the interface. Like other applications announced recently by Adobe, all the applications in Creative Suite 4 have got a new look. That new look is all about simplifying workflows, so you get one window with a tab-based design rather than multiple windows lurking about your desktop and everything is contained, so it's easier to find.



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Likewise Adobe has, in some of the packages, created multiple views or even highlights so you can see what's new via an easy drop down menu that then instantly changes the look and feel of the application (to some degree) based on what you choose.

Overall the interface is much cleaner, and although we still aren't sure about the single window interface have, found it easy to use. It's like when we moved from having tens of Firefox windows to just the one with tabs: all the applications attain their goal of making the workflow simpler.

Other features come to multiple applications within the suite, such as the Kuler colour web app, that is now available as a panel inside Fireworks, Photoshop, and Illustrator. As long as you've got internet access you can see what colours work with other colours based on data from the Kuler community. It's a really helpful little tool and no doubt will pave the way for other third party apps as web plug-ins or widgets in the future.

Adobe Dreamweaver CS4

Moving on to the web side of things

Dreamweaver gets yet more updates mainly improvements to the workflow. Realising the way webmasters work you know get a related files bar that allows you to see what documents are linked to the document you are working on. Handy if you are programming in PHP with multiple include files.

Working in a similar way to the Firebug plug-in on Firefox you can now also access CSS tags and edit them on the fly in something Adobe is calling the Code Navigator. You see the changes without having to save the file. It's a nice feature but one that Firebug users will be used to. But the selling point here is that you don't have to come out of Dreamweaver to see your changes working.

There are now more code hints for Ajax and

At a glance

What is it?

Creative package aimed at webmasters

Good

New interface, comprehensive offering

Bad

Aside from workflow improvements, not much new here, no video authoring software

Verdict

If you're a light user of CS3, then the move to CS4 isn't probably a necessity, however this will get any design job done as long as you've got the creativity

Price £1195

Our score

8/10

Your score

?/10

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JavaScript so you don't have to spend valuable minutes typing the same code out time and time again, while the built-in syntax error detection promises, and delivers, errors as you go to speed up your de-bugging time.

One of the biggest time savers is for those who work with images. Smart Objects allow you to link an image, similar to InDesign, that can be updated without having to refresh the Dreamweaver page if the source file changes. What's even more helpful is that Smart Objects are clever enough to understand that you may have the same asset (like a logo) throughout the site in a variety of sizes. Dreamweaver will change all keeping any proportions you've assigned to them. Like most things in CS4, it's not groundbreaking, but it will save you an extra key press.

Adobe has also licensed the Web Kit web engine (used in Apple's Safari) and this allows you to see the page source in "pseudo" browsers so you can see the code and how it will interact with the user all locally. You can then freeze/pause the code to change it again useful if you are trying to see what's happening in a sequence.

The main new features aren't groundbreaking, but they will make life easier, and if you're still at a stage in your programming skills that you use an editor rather than hard coding, this still remains one of the best out there.

Adobe Fireworks CS4

While there are improvements to Fireworks, it's probably the least exciting of the suite. That's not to say it's not a good application, I personally use Fireworks for basic image management here at Pocket-lint, however having two image applications has clearly proved problematic. Rather than ditch the application, Adobe is trying hard to reposition it as a prototyping tool rather than an image tool.

Like the other applications in CS4, Fireworks gets

the interface overhaul and workflows simplified. Like Photoshop there is the Kuler community tool, while you're now able to export to PDF (exciting).

Adobe Soundbooth CS4

With podcasts still as popular as ever, Adobe has bundled Soundbooth into the Web Premium package allowing podcasters to get more professional with their output. The new application adds multiple track support that can be used to mix any number of mono or stereo clips as well as royalty-free Soundbooth Scores and sound effects.

The software promises and delivers in automatically detecting and fixing your average audio flaws in audio recordings such as hisses, hums, rumbling, crackling and pops.

Adobe Device Central

While you get Device Central in all the different variants it's more likely that its going to be of more use to the Web Premium users than, say, the Designers, as it allows you to design mobile applications and then test them as if they were on a mobile phone.

This time around there is greater integration with Dreamweaver, Flash and Fireworks and playing on the new online strengths of the suite, Adobe has said they will be offering new devices that are Flash ready as they are announced/become available.

It's not just about mobile phones though and you'll also find the PSP, Wii and other gadgets included in the listings. While it won't be for everyone, those who are developing for multiple platforms will find this application incredibly useful.

Adobe Bridge CS4

While photographers have Adobe's Lightroom, the rest of us have Bridge. Now back under the control of the Photoshop team, plenty of new stuff has been added.

Breadcrumbs, RAW file support, workspace

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switcher, tabs for quickly going to things like metadata, output, keywords, preview and essentials are all new and improved. Again none of it is groundbreaking, all of it, however, makes life easier.

Adobe Photoshop CS4 Extended

Adobe seems to have worked hard tweaking the software in virtually every way to not only give you new features, but also make better use of the features the software has but you weren't aware of.

Realising that large images slow the system to a halt, Photoshop now gives that job to the computer's processor rather than the software memory. The move means things now happen a lot faster, and while your computer will still struggle if you've got loads of massive images open at the same time, it's a vast improvement on performance from before.

Other improvements, probably related to this switch of resources, are that you can preview brushes directly on the canvas with the Dodge tool allowing you to touch up the mid-tones or shadows, without blanket covering everything in a carpet bombing approach. Elsewhere adjustment levels have been made easier to use - basically opening them to the masses and likewise Curves get an easier to use interface with the ability to pinpoint areas in the image.

Then there is the Auto blend layers feature that allows you to create an image with a far greater depth of field from multiple images without having to mess around with multiple images for hours. Press the button and the software does the rest.

Overall the application is just as comprehensive as before and while there isn't that much new in terms of standout features what is there has been made easier to use.

Adobe Illustrator CS4

When it comes to drawing, it's hard to fault

Illustrator and this version adds little to the mix. What it does do though is give you a new feature that we've personally wanted for some time.

Illustrator CS4 adds multiple artboards to the application that allow you to have multiple files within the same file to save you having multiple single files. It's a small addition, but one that is likely to make a big difference to your workflow.

Elsewhere there is an improved gradient tool so it's live rather than creating it blind as is in CS3 - again a lot easier and you can also now adjust opacity of the gradient, something that is a lot easier than having to mess around with layers and the such like.

VERDICT

Like the Design Premium package from Adobe, the best way to sum up the Adobe Creative Suite 4 Web Premium package is comprehensive. It will give you control of every facet of your web production from concept, to print, to screen with the added bonus of image management thrown in as well.

From a CS3 to CS4 upgrade point of view while there isn't a massive number of new features that will set you twitching with excitement, the new interface and thousands of enhancements on the workflow front should mean this is worth getting if you are using the current versions day-in day-out.

For Dreamweaver, the crown jewel in this package, it is more of a catch-up initiative rather than leading from the front and if you're already programming this will allow you to ditch the numerous third-party apps that have appeared while Adobe caught up.

The inclusion of Soundbooth is a welcomed one, however we are surprised that as IPTV continues to take off there still isn't any video authoring software here - even in a basic offering.

At a briefing we had with Adobe some time ago, a spokesman for the company started talking about

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measuring the distance the mouse travels around the page to improve the workflow and it's clear that has been the main objective.

If you're a light user of CS3, then the move to CS4 isn't probably a necessity, however it is still an improvement for the better.