



Design by collaboration

For your next project, get everyone on the same page with these groupware products

Design groupware

Design projects are often group activities. Typically, you'll have writers, designers and perhaps illustrators, photographers or web programmers on the same team. And let's not forget the client (or your supervisor) who will need to get involved with feedback, corrections and approvals along the way.

Getting the team – big or small – to work together efficiently can be a challenge, especially if you're in different offices or cities. However, the following groupware products can help solve these issues and get everyone on the same page, literally.

Group design and layout with QuarkXPress

QuarkXPress 7 has two key features designed to handle workgroup projects among different users of the program, wherever they are...

1. Synchronization and content sharing

This feature allows you to share content and automatically synchronize it across multiple print and/or web files in a project.

Quark allows you to have multiple print or web layouts (jobs) in one Project file and share content objects amongst any of them. What's more, you can synchronize almost any item – such as text (with or without text formatting information), pictures, lines or other shapes, colour swatches – in a Quark file across all layouts in the Project.

After you create an object, you can choose to "share" it by adding it to a Shared Content

Library using Quark's Shared Content palette. You can then drag it out of this library to create other instances of it anywhere else in the project. When an item (or just its content, like a picture) is synchronized in this way, Quark keeps a master copy of it in the Shared Content Library. When any part of that item is changed, the content library version is updated automatically and then copied to all other instances of it in the project.

2. Composition zones

A Composition Zone is a Quark layout or a user-defined area of a layout that can be shared with other

Quark users so they can all work on different parts of a project at the same time. They can also be automatically synchronized with the Shared Content Library, as detailed above. Use the Composition Zones tool to create one in your layout then export it as a separate file. Another Quark user can then work with that file, returning it to you when finished. When you receive it, your layout is updated automatically with the new material in the zone.

Combine this with Quark's XML-based Job Jackets, which keep any user designing within the required prepress specs as they work on a layout or Composition Zone. Now you have a powerful way to share large jobs across any number of XPress users in your office or beyond. Remember that to use these features all participants will need a recent copy of QuarkXPress.

Quick feedback and approvals with Acrobat

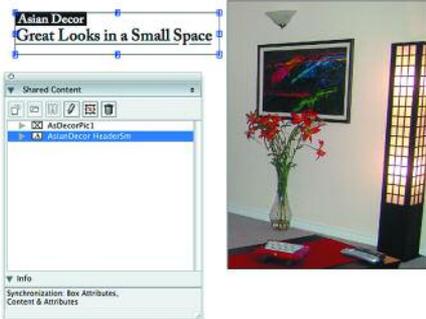
Using Acrobat Professional, you can take a PDF file and enable the commenting feature (Comments Menu... Enable for Commenting in Adobe Reader), which allows anyone with a free Adobe Reader (formerly called Acrobat Reader) to add their comments to the PDF using the Reader's Commenting toolbar. In this way, you can send a quick PDF of your work to almost anyone for their comments/feedback/approvals. Since everything – fonts, graphics – is included in the PDF, it will look the same on any system (Windows, Mac or UNIX), regardless of the software.

However, colours vary on different monitors so this is not a reliable method for colour proofing. When you get comments back you can incorporate the changes in the original layout file.

Acrobat takes it further, easily automating the process of sending PDFs to a list of email recipients. When they respond, all of their comments are automatically added to your original copy of the PDF, organized by the different reviewers. Open the file in Acrobat Professional and you can see everyone's comments separately or all together. You can respond to each reviewer as needed and send non-responders a reminder note – all in Acrobat. It's an incredible time-saver when you work with a number of collaborators and client reps.

Extensive web-based collaboration

ConceptShare is an example of an online service available to designers (starting at about \$20 per month) that takes an approach similar to Acrobat



A graphic item is designated as shared content in a Quark file

Professional but adds a powerful Flash-based viewing and commenting system. You can create as many “workspaces” as you want and to each you can add PDFs or JPGs of your work as well as the users permitted to enter the workspace across the web.

An excellent set of commenting tools allows the user to easily post notes, suggestions and approvals. When you, as the “owner” of the workspace, visit, you can see everyone’s comments, clearly organized by reviewer, date and time. If you and any reviewers are visiting the workspace at the same time, you have a real-time chat feature that allows everyone to talk about the work and see each other’s markups. This Sudbury, Ont.-based service is one of the slickest I’ve seen and the price is certainly right. (Larger studios can have their own branded approval site with ConceptShare for about \$100 a month.)

Full-featured project management with Bf.Documents GFX

Of interest to publications and studios working on large or long-term projects, Bf.Documents GFX is a Windows-server-based project management system for design, CAD and engineering work. It goes far beyond the approaches mentioned

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[www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/
bfcollaboration.com/documents/gfx](http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/bfcollaboration.com/documents/gfx)
www.conceptshare.com
www.quark.com/products/xpress

above, adding shared calendars and scheduling, resource management, version and document control and much more. With it you can post your work in various formats – such as PDF, JPG, PSD – and allow users you designate to “sign out” any of these files to view, comment on or approve. As the manager of each project folder, you can see all comments from various reviewers.

This is a larger system with a higher cost (\$2,500 to \$3,700 for a site license) and you’ll need a Windows server to run it but if your needs are fairly complex and strict versioning control is a must, it may be just what you’re looking for.

 **Bob Atkinson** is a prepress consultant with clients across Canada and the U.S. and a columnist for *Graphic Monthly Canada*. He can be reached at bobatk@gmail.com