CS6: who gives a buck?

By Vanita 'Bezi Phiri   5 Apr 2012

I recently downloaded Photoshop CS6 Beta to get a taste of what the fuss is about. A new interface, improved layer panels, lighting effects and introduction of style sheets for text was keeping the Adobe site busy with users trying to download this free software.

The idea, of course, is for Adobe to see how we react to the application and its changes before the official release later in the year. Though the real cost has not been publicised, the question on my mind is whether the upgrade is worth the possibly big hole it will leave in my wallet.

Moneymaking schemes or appreciable improvements

For me, software upgrades often have the effect of moneymaking schemes instead of appreciable improvements. Unless the news is much akin to finding water in an oasis, such as the introduction of multiple pages in an application that did not initially offer them, or the ability to create interactive PDFs in a vector application, I intentionally skip certain upgrades.

At the same time, I do not want to become one of those Stone Age creatives who are still using Macromedia Freehand, via a postscript printer, via Adobe Distiller, merely to create a PDF.

But being a freelancer, I cannot afford to keep up with technology. Not even the gazillion software updates due for download on my iMac. I am not afraid of change - especially free change. I just do not always have the time and internet bandwidth it takes to do all due updates.

Released too frequently

Software updates are released rather too frequently. Waking up to a bouncing icon on my computer that will not go away until I update the operating system maybe for my own good - especially in protecting my computer against new bugs and improving its overall performance.

But I can't always afford to take a holiday while my machine is being updated and rebooting.

Of course, the repercussions of not updating operating system software are dire. I have to keep my computer safe and efficient. But will Photoshop CS6 really turn my life around? After all, I'd like to believe that turning a blind eye to CS4 and its minimal offerings and, instead, jumping from CS3 to CS5 saved me a lot of money.

Applications are tools

Some would disagree and argue that the panning and zooming features of Photoshop CS4 or rotating spreads introduced in InDesign CS4 saved an entire civilisation. But at the end of the day, I reckon applications are tools, and what we use them for really depends on individual needs and personal experience.

For some people, every upgrade means saving time and optimising their skills. Those who work with hundreds of layers will enjoy the ability to search for layers by names and attributes in Photoshop CS6.

As for me, I'm happy with my CS5 - until I see notable improvements worth my bucks.

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