

Review: Corel PaintShop Pro X4

BY JOSHUA PHILIPP
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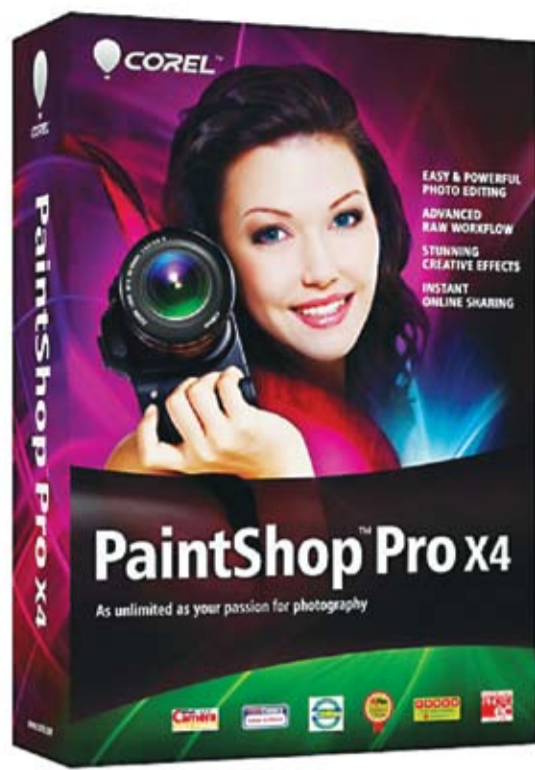
The market of photo editing software is a rough ground to tread, ruled by some of the best and most robust software out there—among them Adobe Photoshop, Apple Aperture, and a long list of applications geared toward casual users.

Knowing this, I was really surprised by what Corel PaintShop Pro X4 has to offer, and I can say with full confidence this could become a real contender in the market of photo editing software. Released Sept. 7, the application is geared toward photo enthusiasts who may not be experts with photo editing software, but would like to have the power of the pros beneath their belts.

Similar to other photo editing applications, the workspace of PaintShop Pro X4 is split into three tabs the user can switch between. The first, "Manage", is where users organise, upload, and keep track of their photos. The "Adjust" tab is for editing the light, shadow, grain, and colour of an image. And the "Edit" tab is for photo manipulation, such as adding text and effects.

The Manage tab isn't too different from what you'd find elsewhere, but it has all the essentials. A carousel of images is shown at the bottom, a list of photo collections is shown to the left, while data on each image is presented on the right. The main area in the centre provides a large preview of the highlighted image. Corel added some new features from the last version of PaintShop Pro, including a full screen preview mode and a star rating system.

The real draw, however, comes from the other two workspaces.



A box shot of Corel PaintShop Pro X4. COREL

PHOTO EDITING

The Adjust tab is like a beginner version of what you'd find in pro-level image editing applications like Lightroom or DxO Optics Pro, while the Edit tab is like a lighter version of Adobe's enthusiast version of Photoshop, Photoshop Essentials.

The Adjust workspace is divided into three sections, with a menu of tools to the left, a small image carousel at the bottom, and a preview of the selected image in a large window just above. The tools are presented as sliding bars, so as an example, users can increase or decrease brightness by sliding the brightness bar forward or

backward.

All the essential tools are here, presented in tabs. Beginners may not want to venture past the first tab, "Smart Photo Fix", that has all the basics for light, shadow, and colour adjustment. But more experienced users can advance further down into the noise removal, sharpening tools, and the more complex options to adjust light, shadow, and colour.

Corel added just a couple new features to this section, including fill lights to brighten shadows and a clarity tool to enhance lines and edges.

Just for clarity, the Adjust section is not as powerful or robust

as what you'd find in a program like Lightroom 3, but it gives all the basic tools and a similar feel for a fraction of the cost.

The new "Selective Focus" feature is shown creating a tilt-shift image in a screenshot of Corel PaintShop Pro X4. (Corel)

The Edit tab builds on this, allowing users to draw, paint, and manipulate their images while working in layers. The workspace is divided into four sections. The different tools are found on a thin bar along the left, while a bar on the right gives tips on how to use each one, including step-by-step instructions on how to create different effects. Similar to the other workspaces, an image carousel is found along the bottom, while the main area is reserved for the selected image.

STAND-OUT FEATURES

There are a few new features in PaintShop Pro X4 that really stand out. The first is the new Selective Focus tool. This basically can create a focal point in an image while blurring out other areas of the photo.

This has a few different uses. Users can add an area of focus for portrait photography. It can also make a Tilt-shift image effect that creates a fun, miniature model look—such as making cars and people look like toys in a miniature city. The tool is effective and easy to use, and can be customised for each shot through the use of a few adjustment bars.

Social media features have been added, allowing users to automatically upload photos to Facebook, Flickr, or to send them through email. This can be accessed through a tab at the bottom of the workspace.

There is also a new tool that can merge images of different exposures to create a High Dynamic Range (HDR) effect. This lets users take images with different parts in focus or with different adjustments and merge the parts they like into one photograph. You could, for example, take a picture exposed to capture the sky, then another to capture the building, then merge

Pro X4 fixes this by allowing users to paint in or out parts of the image, which is how most applications still overcome this issue. It requires some additional work, but still does the job rather fast and effectively.

All around, PaintShop Pro X4 is a more robust and more complete version than its predecessor, with 75 new features and enhancements. This is a good starting point for



The adjustment workspace is seen in a screenshot of Corel PaintShop Pro X4 that lets users edit the light, colour, shadow, and grain of their images. COREL

the two. It often has a vivid, dream-like look.

The feature works well, but isn't quite as powerful as what a user would get from programs such as Photoshop that can automatically remove ghosting or automatically add an HRD effect to a single image. Ghosting is when multiple images are merged and parts of two or more can still be seen in the final image—such as if wind was blowing and the branches of a tree were moving between shots. PaintShop

users wanting to do advanced photo editing, but who are either new to software like this or who aren't ready to fork over \$300 for some of the more advanced applications.

Price:
PaintShop Pro X4 SRP \$75
Rating: ★★★★★

PaintShop Pro X4 Ultimate SRP \$99
Website: www.Corel.com

Adobe Carousel Brings Mobile Photo Sharing to the Cloud

BY CAROLINE DOBSON
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Anyone who has laboured to upload a collection of photos from their phones to their computers, or begged and pleaded friends for pictures knows that transferring photos between devices can be a major hassle.

Adobe hopes to change this with Carousel, a new application released Sept. 7. The software will automatically sync photos between a computer, a phone, and a tablet. It is subscription based, but users can share it with up to five friends, who will also have full access to all its features, and who will automatically share any photos with you that they upload.

The application is both cloud- and local- based, meaning that photos are shared through devices through the Internet, but users still keep the original photos on their computers.

When a user uploads an image,

it appears almost instantaneously on all other devices signed into its collection. In a demonstration of the service there was very little noticeable load time, although the presenter noted that load times will change based on image size, and on how good a user's Internet connection is. Uploading requires no plugging in, no syncing devices, and no tricks or long procedures.

While there is no limit to file sizes, image types are restricted to JPG (which is the default for most devices outside professional DSLR cameras). Once photos are up in the cloud, the subscriber, or any of the five friends they can pass the service to, can download the full images.

Adobe took a minimalist approach to designing Carousel, wanting to eliminate what they dubbed the "pain points". As stated in an early presentation of the software, their key goal was to do anything but develop a "new kind of pain for people". The idea here is simplicity, and Adobe has done a fine job at it.

The application shares nearly the same interface between any device it is used on, with the only difference found in sizing to make it usable between phones and other small devices. The interface itself is just rows of images on a dark background. Each row represents the day the photo collection was uploaded, and scrolling between these can be done with either a finger swipe or by the scroll of a mouse.

There are only a few buttons found on the entire interface. Adobe threw out all star and colour rating buttons, and includes only one, simple button for users to mark which images they like.

Users can also choose to edit their images within Carousel, which brings up three different buttons: Looks, Adjustments, and Crop & Rotate.

The photo editing features are surprisingly thorough for what looks like a light application and shares some similarities to Adobe Lightroom. Users have access to all

the essential tools to adjust colour, correct lighting, and rotate images. The features are also available to users on iPhones or iPads, since all the adjustment tools are based on sliding bars.

There are also editing presets that let users automatically add some of the more popular edits to their photos—such as black and white, the aged look, or more vibrant or dream-like options. All edits are also nondestructive, meaning they do not alter the original image. Users can undo any edits instantly.

Sharing is also one of the main features of Carousel, allowing users to instantly upload images to Facebook or Twitter.

As mentioned earlier, the software is subscription-based (one of the few drawbacks, in my opinion). Early adopters will get it for \$5.99 a month, or \$59.99 a year, but those who come in later will need to pay \$9.99 a month, or \$99.99 a year.

To make the subscription model a bit more attractive, users can upload



The main screen is shown in Adobe Carousel. The cloud-based application allows users to sync images between their computers, iPhones, or iPads, and to share images with friends automatically. COURTESY OF ADOBE

an unlimited number of photos, and Adobe offers a complimentary 30-day trial to anyone interested in giving it a shot—which is enough time to last for any vacation, and the slow return to society stage that

inevitably follows.

Currently, Carousel is only available for the Mac, iPhone, and iPad, but Adobe will open this up to Windows and Android platforms in 2012.

Seattle's Website Named Best of the Web



The Seattle.gov website which has earned the honour of Best of Web (BOW) for its official Web portal for a third time. SCREENSHOT FROM SEATTLE.GOV

BY AYSHA HAQ
EPOCH TIMES STAFF

Seattle—Seattle earned the honour, Best of Web (BOW) for its

official Web portal, Seattle.gov for an unprecedented third time.

The BOW contest, now in its 16th year, was created by the Centre for Digital Government to recognise "innovation,

functionality, and efficiency of official Web portals of United States cities, counties, and states".

"A core value of my administration is open and effective government," said Seattle's Mayor Mike McGinn, in a press release announcing the award. "And we are supporting that value in many ways, including town halls, public performance measurements for city departments, providing online data, and providing user friendly services to all our users on our city website."

Data.Seattle.Gov was also named a winner in the Government-to-citizen category.

"The goal of every government website is to provide online services and information to constituents," stated Cathilea Robinett, executive director of the Centre for Digital Government on their website. "However, this year's winners have taken the power of the Web to the next level—combining clear communication, design aesthetic, and easy navigation."

The centre itself is a "national research and advisory institute on information technology policies and best practices in state and local government", according to its website.

The BOW award for a state website went to Arkansas and for county website it went to Stearns County in Minnesota.

'Full-Duplex' Technology Could Double Bandwidth

BY JOSHUA PHILIPP
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A new breakthrough could help avert the nearing bandwidth crisis, allowing all users to continue streaming video and music without fear of their Web providers tacking on extra charges for going over bandwidth limits.

New "full-duplex" technology, developed by researchers at Rice University, does this by more efficiently communicating with wireless cell towers. Devices need to exchange data with cell towers, which is usually done through two frequencies. Full-duplex, however, can do this using just one frequency and works with wireless devices including cell phones and tablets.

Bandwidth is running out, and although it hasn't made much buzz yet, companies are scrambling for solutions. In Canada, AT&T DSL has already set a 250GB monthly cap and charge \$10 for each additional 50GB. To cope with this, Netflix had to cut its video sizes for Canadian users, meaning they get lower quality picture and video, even with HD.

A report warning of the impending bandwidth drought, released in April by Public Knowledge, states: "The era of plentiful, low-cost bandwidth is approaching an end. The supply of bits, the raw material of our information economy, is rapidly dwindling."

The report blames bandwidth interest from wireless companies. According to Sabharwal, full-duplex can be used on existing devices, but will require some new hardware—namely a new type of antenna they developed that they dubbed "multiple-input multiple-output" (MIMO).

Basically, the technology works by using an extra antenna and a few programming tweaks to send data. MIMO uses "several antennas to improve overall performance". "We took advantage of the multiple antennas for our full-duplex scheme, which is the main reason why all wireless carriers are very comfortable with our technology," Sabharwal said. Full-duplex may be a ways off still, however. According to Sabharwal, the technology should start hitting markets "in just a few years" when wireless carriers upgrade to 4.5G or 5G networks.

"We showed that our approach could support higher throughput and