

RANDOM

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I may be crazy, but I'm not stupid.

THOUGHTS

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Do you need an SMTP server?

Maybe you don't, but if you travel a lot you might, or maybe not. If you never travel, you may, or perhaps you don't. That's not much help, is it? Maybe it would be good to talk about what an SMTP server is, what it does, and why having one on your computer might make life easier. Or harder. There isn't an easy one-size-fits-all explanation.

What an SMTP server does

Network gurus please skip the next paragraph, which is not a complete and accurate summary of how an SMTP server works.

SMTP is an initialism for "simple mail transport protocol". When you want to send an e-mail message to your cousin in Canton, your e-mail program tells the SMTP server to send the message. The server then talks to another server and says something like "Helo! I have a message for my user's cousin in Canton!" (Yes, there's just one "l" in "Helo".) If a connection is made, then the SMTP server hands the message over to another server that drops the message into your Canton cousin's mailbox. Simple.

Why you don't need one, or maybe you do

Your ISP offers a perfectly good SMTP server and most people use it. But consider what happens if you have a notebook computer:

- When you take the computer to the office, your e-mail program has to be told to use **smtp.bigoffice.com**.
- At home, you have to change the server's address back to **smtp.yourisp.com**.
- When you travel to a hotel in Arlington, Texas, you have to change the SMTP server to **smtp.cheapaccess.com**.
- And when you finally get to your company's branch office in Tree Limb, Texas, you have to change the SMTP server once again go **smtp.bushwhack.org**.

Wouldn't it be nice to go from home to office to hotel to remote office and never have to change the SMTP server's name? Granted, the changes take only a few seconds as long as you remember the exact name of the servers in question and as long as you don't commit a typo. When all you want to do is send some e-mail and then kick back with a beer, you don't need a long and involved diagnostic session.

In that case, you should consider adding an SMTP server to your computer. Plan to spend a little time working through what may seem like a Byzantine series of settings, though. You'll need an hour or so to get the server set up, test it, and make sure it's running properly, but once you get it working, you're done.

The cost? Nothing. Oh, you can find an SMTP server to pay for if you want to, but one that's available for free does everything you want it to.

PostCast SMTP Server

The PostCast SMTP server is one of several applications by Gate Comm Software of Yugoslavia. The other applications are mainly "bulk-mail" software. You're thinking "spam", right? Yes, bulk mailing applications can be misused by spammers just as airplanes can be misused by crazies. There are valid reasons why you might want a bulk mailing program – keeping in touch with clients is one valid reason.


Most of the applications provided by PostCast are shareware, but the SMTP server is freeware. Why free?

According to the author, Nenad Oric, "Much effort has been invested in its development, and although the program is free, I expect indirect benefits to come from the sale of [other software.]"

Oric is clearly not a fan of spam, but he makes programs that spammers use. Just as a gun might do good in the possession of a police officer and bad in the possession of a criminal, PostCast's software can be used for good or ill.

If you've concluded that an SMTP server might be a good addition to your computer, you can download a copy from <http://www.postcast.com/>.

Most of the settings are easy enough to figure out from just reading the dialog boxes or consulting with the Help file, but one setting wasn't obvious and it is set improperly by default: PostCast doesn't check for an MX (mail exchange) record. I turned this on, provided a domain name in the "helo" handshake, and set the server to accept mail only from my local machine. By giving the server a domain name and forcing it to check for an MX record, I have created a more secure system.

You'll probably be able to set up the PostCast Server by reading through the directions that come with the program. If not, contact me and I can walk you through it. 

Random Thoughts or Dead Trees?

Dead Trees seemed to be a somewhat negative name for this publication. Starting with this issue, the new name is *Random Thoughts*, suggesting – if not deep analytical articles – that at least minimal thought during development of the articles. Please note that I still bear no particular animosity toward trees.

Corel Draw Graphics Suite 12: Pro tool or a toy?

That's a problem that has beleaguered Corel since the beginning. Draw is a remarkably versatile graphics tool for Windows PC users, but most graphics professionals use Mac computers. Corel has a reputation for releasing buggy software, particularly even-numbered versions. And the company, after nearly going bankrupt, was acquired last year by a California venture capital company. Can version 12 be any good?

Yes! After just a few minutes with Corel Draw 12, I was at least as excited about what I was seeing as when, in about 1983, I saw the original Corel Draw in New York City.

Let's consider the 3 primary concerns:

- **"Draw is not a tool for professionals."** You won't find a Draw 12 for the Mac, so most graphics professionals won't be using it.
- **"Corel's even-number releases are buggy."** True, with two exceptions. Version 8 was solid from the start and 12 is astonishingly good.
- **"A venture capital company has bought Corel."** Yes and the company seems to know Corel's strengths.

Easy from the first step

The installation process noticed a previous version and offered to include workspaces from Draw 11. I chose to include my primary RGB workspace and my primary CMYK workspace.

Unlike graphics applications from Adobe and Macromedia, Corel Draw has always concentrated on keeping the desktop clean. Corel's toolbox is "sparse" (a term used in the 1980s that applies today.) Instead of many open toolbars, dockers, and palettes, Draw keeps most of the clutter in the background. The toolbar appears to have only 15 tools, but if you include the multi-purpose icons that hold several tools, it contains more than 60. They're just in comfy compartments, that's all.

One of the most fascinating new features is called Dynamic Guides. In previous versions, I could turn on Snap to Objects so that when I dragged one object close to another, the one I was dragging would snap to the outline of the stationary object. Usually what snapped, though, wasn't what I wanted, so I rarely used it. *Dynamic Guides* is a feature I will rarely turn off.

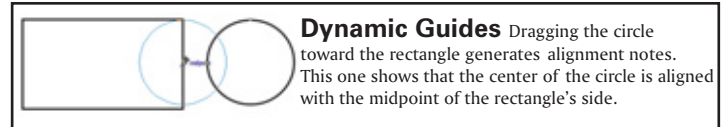
If you use Corel Draw for tasks that require careful alignment, this feature alone could be worth the price of the upgrade.

A related feature makes it possible to slide any letter up or down, left or right, and to rotate the letter. This is a feature you won't use often, but Draw 12 eliminates the need to convert text to curves, break them apart, and then join the parts of any letters with open spaces before rotating a letter. This is a technique that is used occasionally in trademarks. Occasionally, please! And even then it's probably over-used.

We're off to office!

Draw now offers output options "to Office" (both WordPerfect Office and Microsoft Office) that could be the key to prosperity for Corel. Despite the applications' robust set of features, it's foolhardy to think that Corel can wrest the profes-

sional graphics market away from Apple and Adobe. Not all graphics professionals use Adobe applications on Apple computers, but most do. Corel may now see its future as leading through office workers: People who must put together PowerPoint presentations and the like.



Perhaps the real key to success for Draw 12 lies with Microsoft PowerPoint. PowerPoint is the most used application for presentations. If you haven't seen at least one PowerPoint presentation in the past month, you're probably either retired or visiting from another galaxy. PowerPoint's built-in graphics capabilities are weak. Creating graphics in Draw exporting to PowerPoint is a developer's dream come true.

If you're going to part with \$180 for the upgrade, you might want some reasons for doing so. Here are some:

- **Dynamic Guides:** This is the hottest new feature. You'll learn how to use dynamic guides in about a minute.
- **Virtual segment delete:** Let's say you've imported a complex vector object and you want to delete a line segment. In the past, you'd have to ungroup, find nodes, break the nodes, then finally delete the line segment. The virtual segment delete tool lets you select a line segment and delete it.
- **Improved snapping.** Coupled with dynamic guides, improvements to snapping make aligning objects a snap. (Sorry.)
- **Export for office**
- **Shape recognition:** Turn it on, draw a more-or-less square object Draw turns it into a square! It's the same for circles and several other shapes.
- **Postscript Import:** Draw is one of the few applications that can reliably import and interpret a PostScript file (eps, ps, or pdf) in a way that it can be modified and used.
- **Typefaces:** Draw 12 has both some new faces and more OpenType faces that support multiple languages.
- **All the other stuff that's in the box:** Corel Photo-Paint 12, Corel Capture 12, Corel Trace 12, Corel R.A.V.E. 3, and Bitstream Font Navigator 5.

For more information about Corel Draw Graphics Suite 12, see Corel's website at www.corel.com. 



CORNER on the market by A.J. Stinnett.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow observed, "We judge ourselves by what we feel capable of doing, while others judge us by what we have already done."