

Client: UK Web Design Association (UKWDA)

Adobe Photoshop – Are there any real alternatives?

Small agencies and freelancers have long struggled to pay for the high end software product suites. The problem is that the best, most effective software for creatives is Adobe Photoshop, which is pricey at up to £600 per licence, and even more for the full Master Creative Suite. If you're new to freelancing with no clients onboard this can be frustrating – even deterring.

The Adobe team have come up with an apparently shrewd solution: Adobe cloud subscription. But is Adobe's new cloud subscription *really* cheaper than Photoshop? This option would make more financial sense for smaller companies hiring temporary help for a few months, because they could avoid spending thousands of pounds on software which would have to sit idle for months afterward. That's why Adobe Creative Cloud is so appealing for small creative agencies and independent freelancers. Rather than shelling out two thousand pounds upfront freelancers or agencies can simply subscribe per user.

When comparing the Creative Cloud subscription to purchasing CS6. Now, since Creative Cloud gets you access to the full Master Collection, we'll base the numbers on that. Let's assume that Adobe releases updates every 18 months, too. With Creative Cloud, you'll spend around £500 over the course of 18 months for full access. That's less than you'll spend buying a new version of Photoshop Extended.

This seems like a viable alternative to buying the Adobe Photoshop software outright. But in a recent CNET poll, and a survey completed by creative professionals by analyst firm Jefferies & Co. suggests that the majority of potential buyers still need some convincing of its merits. Specifically, 41 % said that they had a negative view of the Creative Cloud compared to 32 % who expressed a positive view. Beyond that, 62 % of respondents had a negative view of the price compared to 27 % who felt positive about it.

So are there any other viable alternatives on the market if you're still not wooed by Adobe's latest offer? Yes. So let's review some of the top alternatives (there are many more floating around the web):

1. GIMP

GIMP stands for "GNU image manipulation program", and it is one of the oldest and best known alternatives to Photoshop. Although it doesn't quite have all of the great features that Photoshop has, you'll find most of them somewhere in GIMP. GIMP is also cross platform and supported by a large community. There is an alternative based on GIMP known as 'GIMP Shop'. It's the same as GIMP, except the layout is more similar Photoshop, so anyone making the transition should still feel comfortable with this software.

2. Krita

Krita has been praised for ease of use and in fact won the Akademy Award for Best Application in 2006. Part of the Koffice suite for Linux, Krita is less powerful than both Photoshop and GIMP, but has some unique features.

4. ChocoFlop

ChocoFlop is a design application ideal for Mac and optimised for Mac's architecture. Its operational speed is relatively quick and its architecture is fairly well featured. This program won't always be free though unfortunately, but until a stable version is released (it's currently in beta) they are allowing free use. As long as you don't mind the occasional bug it's worth considering.

5. Cinepaint

Cinepaint is designed primarily for video often used to make animated feature films, but it is also a great image editor capable of high 32 bit colour. Although currently there is no stable version for Windows.

6. Pixia

Pixia was originally designed in Japanese but English versions now exist for this rich editor. Although the original focus was on anime/manga, it is a very capable editor in general. There are tutorials available for it if you find some of the features counter-intuitive. Pixia works for Windows.

7. Picnik

Picnik is a web-based photo editor that has recently taken off due to a partnership with *Flickr*. It has all the basic features plus a few more advanced ones such as layers and other special effects. It is cross platform because you only need a browser.