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Thoughts about Final Cut Pro eX

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by Bob Sarles on Sunday, June 26, 2011 at 12:41pm

I make my living as a film and television editor. When I work on the editing staff of a number of television series, most often I am working on an offline AVID non-linear editing system. However, my two home editing systems are both running the previously current version (FCP7.02) of Final Cut Pro, a fantastically powerful tool created by Apple in 1999 (I've been on it since 2000) that allows me to create and finish films for broadcast, DVD or internet distribution on my own home system. I've produced feature films, television specials and documentaries, music videos, films produced for museum exhibition and programs distributed worldwide on DVD on my home Final Cut Pro editing systems. The workflow has worked perfectly for me for eleven years utilizing this system. I currently have no less than three major projects in mid post production on my FCP systems.

In its earliest days, when Final Cut Pro was a brand new software, I promoted the system whenever I had a chance: on Apple's website, in the press and on TV. I really believed that this was a revolutionary way to work, and I attempted to convince folks in my industry that this was a viable, professional and cost effective alternative to the very costly AVID, which had a checkered history in supporting its customer base. I had more faith in Apple as a company I wanted to work with in the future.

That all changed this past week.

Last week Apple released a replacement editing program called Final Cut Pro X. It is not an upgrade. It is an entirely new program with little in common with the tool that many professional editors like myself have been using to earn our livelihood for the past decade.

Apple's programmers improved a couple of things that make no difference to me including changing to a brand new and completely different user interface - very iMovie like. A decade of motion memory on a way of working down the drain if I wish to embrace this new tool. Worse of all: 1) the new system cannot edit multi-cam, 2) eleven years of projects archived won't run on the new system, 3) I cannot export the audio files I need for an efficient workflow with my sound designer who works in ProTools, 4) they have killed the program's ability to export a simple Edit Decision List, [Apple determined this very important tool is arcane and not worth supporting when in fact we use EDLs to track music usage, archival footage usage, they are used when you must move to some kind of linear online editing and delivering accurate EDLs remains a part of most networks' deliverables from producers], and, 5) there is no way to log and capture from master source tapes, nor batch capture media from tapes that are not on line. Most of this industry is still tape based, especially for archival based documentary work, which is my bread and butter for self produced projects.

Apple has discontinued selling the classic version of FCP, and will no longer be doing upgrades on it, thereby orphaning the program. I will be keeping my current hardware and software configuration as long as it is feasible. I figure I can stay with my current set up for the next five years. Then I'll switch to something else. Maybe an AVID, maybe something that doesn't exist yet.

Apple abandoning the legacy FCP platform is a stab in the back to this long time supporter of FCP as a viable alternative to AVID. It is clear to me that Apple knew well in advance what the response to this new product would be from professionals and they just don't care. There is more profit in the consumer and prosumer market, potentially millions of customers vs. the tens of thousands of folks who need the features that Apple crippled with this release. They are basically killing off the program we used, appropriating the name of the product for marketing and product recognition. It's a big "get lost" to those who use this product in a pro/broadcast setting.

What Apple should have done was release the new product and be clear who it is being marketed to. I know lots of folks who will dig this for home movies, corporate work and events videos. Apple should have kept an R&D dept. together to continue to update the legacy FCP to take advantage of faster computers and faster storage and render capabilities that become available as the technology advances, rather than orphaning this important tool.

I feel betrayed by Apple and I am not happy about it. Shame on Apple.



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Sneak peak at FCPX. It sucks.

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