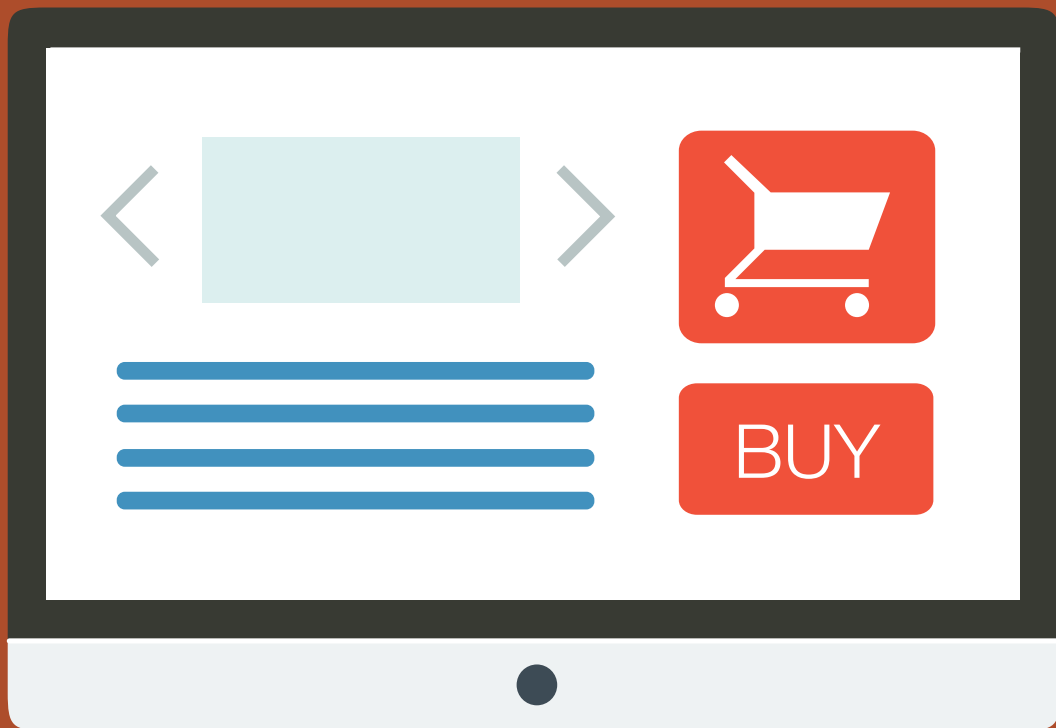


Top 6 Tips for Purchasing CAD Software

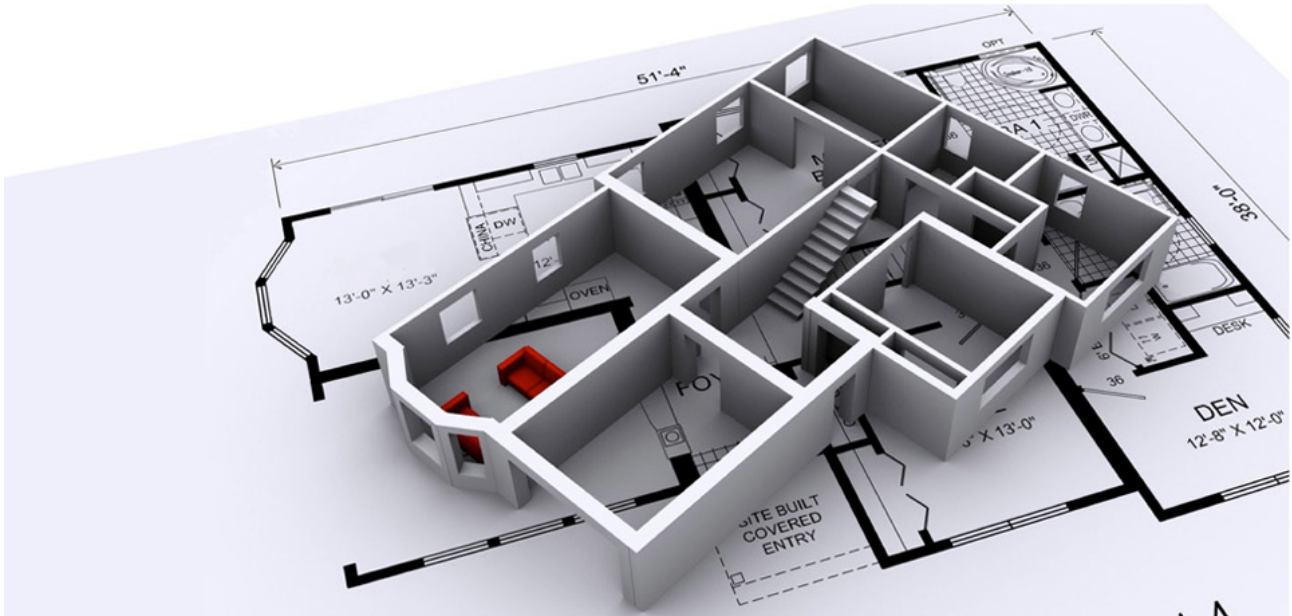


A Microspot Guide
Written by Aaron Lamb

Top 6 Tips for purchasing CAD Software

1) Do I need 2D, 3D or Both?

When you start looking for CAD software think to yourself 'what do I aim to do with this product?' If you're looking for illustration or floor planning then it's more than likely that you won't have any need for 3D work and could save a lot of money sticking to a 2D software.



If on the other hand you need to create for example a model of an interior or a product then you of course will need 3D. If you decide that you need 3D then make sure that you look at the products in detail as the majority of 3D softwares will offer 2D capabilities but not usually the other way round.

2) Who uses this software?

What better feedback on a product is there than that of existing customers? If a site doesn't show a lot of customer reviews, case studies or testimonials then chances are that the company itself may not be that hands on with the customers themselves.



Mark Graham, MacDraft user since 1995

Independent Kitchen Designer

www.compositkitchens.wowcity.com

"I design kitchens for my customers and import them from Italy. When we are not able to use a Composit kitchen, I will design the kitchen myself and have it made right here in New Zealand, MacDraft gives me this flexibility."

If there *are* these things on the other hand then you can see how people in your industry are fairing with the product. At the end of the day these reviews are from people much like yourself and will often provide an unbiased opinion on the software rather than throwing industry jargon at you trying to make you buy.

3) Will my clients need to use the same software as me?

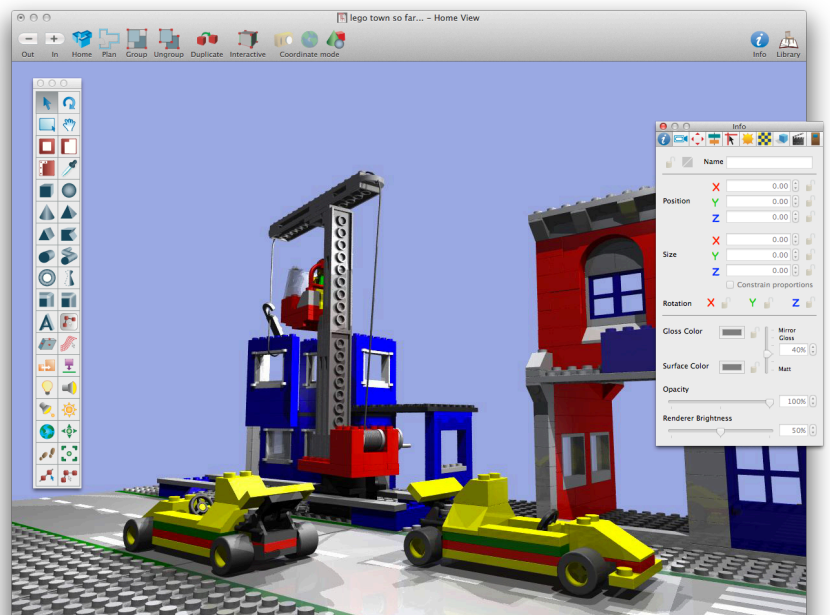
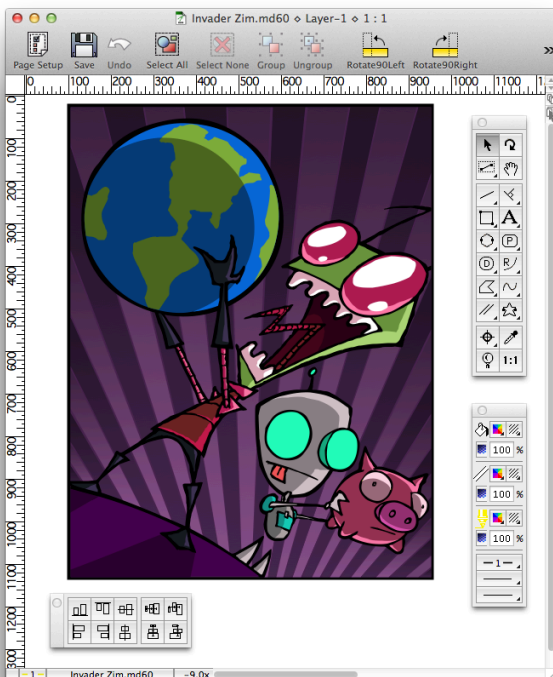
File compatibility between programs is a big deal within the CAD industry. Developers understand that it is a very competitive market and therefore one person may have to create files on one software that can be interpreted on their clients different software. A good practice is to look into what file support the software you're looking at has.



For example in the electronic and mechanical industries people are likely to share DWG files, in publishing and illustrative industries PDF files and so on. Make sure you know what files your clients, factories or even friends may use and make sure your preferred program can handle that.

4) Can I try the product before I commit?

A big mistake people make when buying a product is that they didn't first test it. The vast majority of products will offer a demo version that will either be a limited version of itself or the full product that expires after a week or two.



Make it compulsory that before you commit to a purchase you trial the product so that you know what it can do. Some companies offer a money back guarantee with their product if you can't get to grips with it but this is rarer nowadays as softwares are run on serial numbers which means the distributor will find it difficult to stop you using it once you have it on your machine.

5) How do I find the best deal?

The best deal isn't always the cheapest deal. A lot of CAD companies know how diverse their clients are and therefore offer a range of products or add ons to suit particular industries. The point here is that if you buy the cheapest version of the software you may find that its missing particular content that you will now have to purchase as an add on or plug ins. These package deals will of course be a little more expensive but at the end of the day you will have a CAD package tailored exactly to what you need.

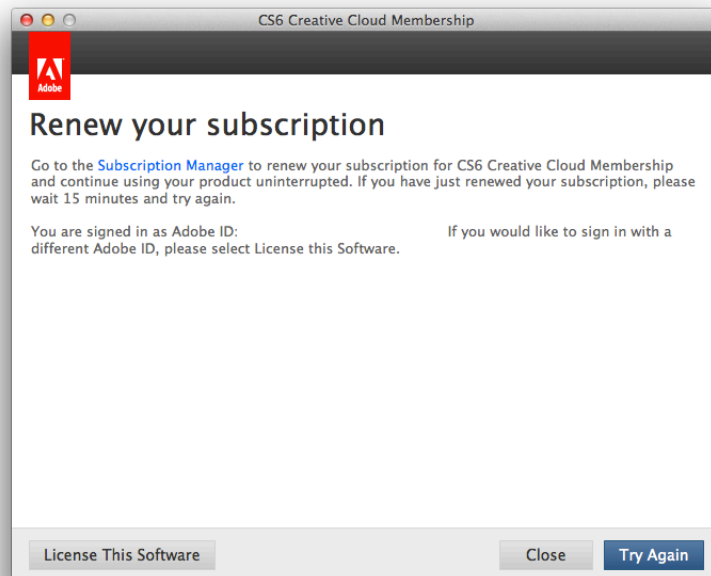
Design Tools

2D Drawing Tools	?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3D Modeling Tools	?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hatching	?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		
Textures		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Transparency Options		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lighting Effects		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Photorealistic Rendering	?	✓	✓	✓							
Wall Tool	?	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
House Wizard	?	✓				✓		✓			

Find a section on their site which shows a matrix of what tools or add-ons you get in different versions/packages of softwares. You can also create your own list of what you want that application to have and compare it.

6) Should I pay a subscription?

Over the last couple of years there seems to be a trend of CAD software providers switching to subscription based software. This means that you pay a monthly fee to use their product rather than a hefty one off fee.



A few good points to note about subscription software is that you can cancel it at any time meaning that you may spend £30 using a product for a month and realise you don't need it rather than having paid £1000. Also product updates and upgrades are generally included in the monthly subscription so you won't be continuously paying an upgrade fee when a new version is released.

There are negatives though, you may be tied into a contract which makes you pay more over a year than you would outright, like a phone contract or car insurance would. Also your subscription may run out before a major project forcing you to go through the troubles of renewing.