



# FileMaker Pro 7

Version seven should have been the best FileMaker ever. Instead, its powerful new features are lost among various annoyances

The latest release of FileMaker's flagship product has a host of new features that gives it the power of an enterprise-class database; in combination with the ability to create great-looking front-ends to actually get at that data, FileMaker Pro 7 should have been a wonder to behold. Unfortunately, it has cock-up written all over it.

In the world of databases, FileMaker has several unique selling points that has endeared it to anyone who's needed more power than AppleWorks but hasn't wanted or been able to afford the vast capabilities of an Oracle system, say. Firstly, it was very easy to use: just about anyone could create a database with FileMaker Pro with only minimal playing around to get the hang of it. Secondly, while few high-end systems have a user-friendly way of getting at their data – relying on programmers to write applications that can interrogate them – FileMaker Pro had almost DTP-quality tools for creating attractive layouts for displaying, searching and summarising data. Thirdly, automating it has been relatively simple thanks to a point-and-click approach to development called scripting. And lastly, it has been a reliable cross-platform database, running equally well on Macs and Windows and doubling as a Web server for those without a copy or who are using a different system and need to enter or extract data.

FileMaker Pro 7 manages to do away with at least some of these selling points. In another classic example of Apple (FileMaker is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Apple) *taking away* features in a new release, FileMaker Pro 7 no longer supports OS 9, and more importantly, no longer includes the custom Web-serving component (only the basic Instant Web Publishing feature). If you want that, an extra purchase of the forthcoming £1,940 FileMaker Server 7 Advanced is necessary.

The once-powerful layout tools remain more or less the same, but use a new cross-platform display system that still has more than

a few kinks that need to be worked out, including font clashes on layouts that worked fine in earlier versions, and distortion of placed graphics: a patch is forthcoming, apparently.

The ease-of-use has all but disappeared as the horrific trend towards consolidating various separate functions has taken root at FileMaker. Once simple menu options are now incomprehensible and a single 'Define Database' contains just about every useful development feature in the system. Anyone looking to get the hang of FileMaker is well advised to ignore the electronic tutorials and wade through the rich wealth of paper manuals provided.

## On the positive side...

If you can overlook these failings, those new FileMaker Pro 7 features promised on the box – multiple tables in a single file; multiple windows for a single file; a proper relational model that doesn't require scores of workarounds to get useful relationships; a decent security model; and a container field that can import and export any object, including files – are very welcome. The 'multiple tables in a single file' feature would have been more useful for existing FileMaker Pro users if FileMaker had made it possible to import existing single-table files into one multiple-table file. There's no such option and FileMaker's advice is to stick with individual files or re-create everything from scratch in a new file. Thanks FileMaker.

If you're new to databases and need something more powerful than an Excel spreadsheet, FileMaker Pro 7 is a very powerful and capable tool. If you're a FileMaker user already, being an early adopter of version 7 is not a good idea, unless you're planning on starting everything from scratch, aren't worried about having to redesign some layouts or you have projects that will be impossible without the new features; otherwise, wait until FileMaker smoothes the bugs out and comes up with a decent migration tool. It's just not worth the upgrade trauma at the moment.

## FileMaker Pro 7 in focus...

**1** You can now get a graphical representation of the relationships between your databases and tables, and use it to edit your setup



**2** In this version, relationships can be properly two-way and based on ranges of values, rather than just matching values



**3** A proper security system means you can define access rights for each user for just about every feature of your database



## FileMaker Pro 7

URL: [www.filemaker.co.uk](http://www.filemaker.co.uk)  
SRP: £257.32

What's good: Proper database tables, vastly improved relationships, better security

What's bad: Poor migration path, buggy, far more complicated than earlier versions

Overall 50%