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**Mark H. Walker**

*Microsoft Office Visio 2007: Inside Out*

**Bonnie Biafore**

*Visio 2007 Bible*

**David J. Parker**

*Visualizing Information with Microsoft Office Visio 2007:  
Smart Diagrams for Business Users*

**Microsoft Vizio 2007 Professional Edition**

**Microsoft Vizio 2007 Standard Edition**

**Book Review**

—Reviewed by

AMITAVA DUTTA-ROY, LIFE FELLOW, IEEE

**Index Terms**—Illustrations, Microsoft Vizio 2007, software guidebooks.

**G**ood illustrations, wherever appropriate, always enhance the readability of textual matter and the communicability of overhead presentations. Creating illustrations was once difficult for those not specially trained in that art. Now, any author can create eye-catching illustrations by using drawing programs developed for personal computers. Books that guide users through such programs make that task even easier. This review describes my experience with one such software program—Microsoft Office Visio 2007—and three books that explain the operations of the program. Visio offers an assemblage of extremely rich tools for drawing, though much training and practice are required to take full advantage of all those features. This review is primarily addressed to readers who may be new to drawing programs and would like to give their articles or presentations a professional look that can make a lasting impression.

Which should the readers consider first—the computer program or the guide books? I recommend

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that a prospective purchaser of Visio browse through the books first and make sure to purchase the right edition of the software. The difference in price between the two flavors of Visio 2007 is not trivial. The standard version probably will meet the requirements of most readers. Those likely to employ Visio for the development of application programs would be better off with the professional edition.

*Microsoft Office Visio 2007: Inside Out*, by Walker, and *Visio 2007 Bible*, by Biafore, are written for users who may need help from the beginning. Both of them are good for guiding the user through the maze of Visio's intricacies. Biafore is more to the point, whereas Walker provides more background explanation. Both cover standard and professional versions of Visio 2007. I recommend both of these guidebooks. Since they complement each other, you might do well by browsing through both.

*Visualizing Information with Microsoft Office Visio 2007: Smart Diagrams for Business Users*, by Parker, is decidedly not for beginners. It is geared toward professionals and corporate software developers who may want to create drawings to embed in their websites or other interactive creations. It thoroughly explains the programming needed to do that. Although I am not a software developer, I found some of Parker's explanations of the Visio features very useful to my work.

Now to the software. I find Visio 2007 to be user-friendly and manageable, even for those who may need to use it only occasionally. I reviewed an earlier edition of Visio in 2000 for *IEEE Spectrum*. The program has helped me create complex illustrations for my subsequent work for *Spectrum*, *IEEE Communications Magazine*, and tutorials. Since 2000, the software has undergone various reincarnations: Visio 2007 is the latest version. It is compatible with recent editions of other Microsoft tools such as Word and Excel. Moreover, Visio 2007 is backward compatible with many of the older Microsoft products. Illustrations created with the software can be inserted into a PowerPoint or Word document (2007 edition and some of the earlier Word releases). Do you wish to edit an illustration made with Visio and already inserted into a PowerPoint or Word document? Just double click on the illustration, and the original Visio drawing returns to the computer screen, ready for editing, eliminating the time that would be wasted in locating the right file. Depending on the complexity of the task at hand, a user can start by choosing the most appropriate section of the software—for instance, electrical, mechanical, marketing, and organizational—and then mix and match templates offered in other sections as the drawing slowly grows on the screen.

Visio is all about shapes: shapes that can be dragged from ready templates and dropped on the workspace (i.e., your computer's monitor), as well as shapes that can be customized by combining various shapes from the templates, imported from other files, and saved for future use. The Visio shapes bin starts with basic forms such as a circle, ellipse, rectangle, and arrows. The workspace itself has a linear grid—either in millimeters or inches—to be selected by the user. The view options include the grid, two rulers (in  $x$ - and  $y$ -directions), the best connection points for a particular shape, and guide points that allow the user to connect shapes at a click of the mouse. The widths and colors of simple lines or shape outlines are easily chosen, and the shapes themselves may be filled with any color and to any degree of transparency and to any gradient.

The built-in shapes in Visio templates are grouped in eight principal categories: (1) business, (2) engineering, (3) flowchart, (4) general (here, we get the very basic shapes), (5) maps and floor plans, (6) network, (7) schedule, and (8) software and databases. Beyond the basic shapes of the general category, other templates contain hundreds of complex shapes. Each category opens a door to

subcategories. For example, the business category offers template shapes useful for many common business applications, including flowcharts and graphs. The template for charts and graphs contains 40 different shapes to plot bar graphs, 3-D bar graphs, pie charts, and so on. Visio also offers different shapes for drawing timelines. Inside the timelines, the milestone markers also have different shapes. When a milestone is dragged along the timeline, the date at the position of the milestone is automatically calculated and posted on the drawing. The maps and floor plans category offers a rich coterie of shapes for visualizing road maps with signs depicting landmarks and transportation shapes. The floor plans cater to residential or office buildings. The furniture icons may be shifted and placed anywhere.

One feature of Visio 2007 that most of us would welcome is known as "brainstorming." It is a computer equivalent of visualization of a free flow of ideas, and it helps to organize thoughts of an individual or group of people assembled for a brainstorming session on a specific task. One starts with a main theme and then moves on to one or more layers of subtopics. I found it is easy to move the subtopics around, change them, attach other shapes next to the headings, attach annotations, and add colors to lines and texts.

At any stage of a drawing process, lines, shapes, and alphanumeric characters on the workplace can be grouped as a composite. The composite shape and the final drawing may be moved around on the workspace, resized if necessary, added to other composites and saved in its native .vsd or in more popular .jpg or .gif formats. In the Visio professional edition, drawings can also be saved in formats compatible with AutoCAD work.

Software programs are so complex these days that they are often afflicted by unintentional bugs in programming. Over time, they are corrected through updates after users report the problems to the developers. Visio 2007 is no exception to this general evolutionary process of software development. For example, I wanted to attach a subscript and a superscript to a parameter (a Greek letter) that I needed in one drawing. However, I discovered that it was impossible to perform the desired operation. It was only through trial and error that I achieved this feat by copying the symbol and the super and subscript from a Microsoft Word document and pasting them on Visio workspace—a clumsy process indeed.

Casagrande uses television shows such as *The Office*, *The Colbert Report*, *General Hospital*, and *Seinfeld* to either illustrate a point or provide an entertaining distraction. And her examples are taken from such a wide range of sources that they effectively represent most possible human experiences—books, blogs, and even popular websites such as Happy Furry Puppy Story Time [p. 191]. These and other references to pop culture and the everyday draw Casagrande and her book out of the airy reaches to the mortal realm.

But Casagrande's book is also a good choice for professional communicators. I say this for three reasons. First, *Mortal Syntax* is comprehensive: Casagrande's in-depth discussion of linguistic and grammatical concerns will help professionals understand why a usage is correct (or isn't correct). And the 101 entries cover a wide range of usage

questions, from adverbs to lingo. Second, *Mortal Syntax* is authoritative: Since Casagrande bases her usage decisions on 14 respected sources, the professional can depend on her answer being correct. Third, *Mortal Syntax* is easy to use: The book is split into sections by word type, and the title of each entry is a short example of the usage. There's even a little text box at the beginning of each entry that says whether the usage is acceptable.

Both lay readers and professionals will learn from this humorous book. As for me, I've enjoyed reading it, and I feel that I've learned a good bit. Hopefully, and most important, I'll now be able to wittily aggravate some irritable grammar snobs that can't understand that what it is is one cannot bow to tyranny, and none are so tyrannous as the grammar snobs I cannot put up with.