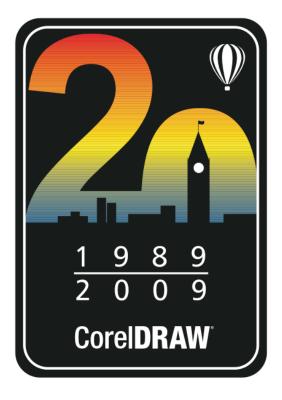*In light of the twentieth anniversary of CorelDRAW®, John Falsetto, the product manager for CorelDRAW® Graphics Suite, recently sat down with Tony Severenuk, a user experience designer, to reflect on the suite's history. Tony is well-known within the CorelDRAW user community and has been with Corel for the past fifteen years.*

How did you wind up in your current role as a user experience designer?

I actually started in Tech Support, around the time of CorelDRAW version 4. So I was a phone agent for a while, became a manager in Tech Services, and then moved on to program management in Engineering. And that role evolved into user experience design.

Can you elaborate on what your current role entails?

Well, I visit with customers to see how they're using the software. Those visits help us figure out what users find easy or difficult, and what they may have yet to discover. It's a mutual learning experience. I also attend trade shows and interact with the user community through newsgroups, beta groups, and advisory councils. All the information gleaned from those interactions is then used internally at Corel, by working with Product Management, Engineering, Quality Assurance, and Sales to help shape future versions of the software.

What can you tell us about the first version of CorelDRAW, which was released way back in January, 1989?

CorelDRAW was actually inspired by user requirements from a product called Corel Headline, which was developed specifically for Ventura Publisher. It helped people create type effects for desktop publishing layouts. So for example, a community newsletter or a newspaper that wanted something dressier than a straight Helvetica headline could use Corel Headline to add type effects with a bit more flair or style. So that's where it started.

Over the years, the number of disks in the suite has increased. Do you remember which version had the most?

Yes, it was version 6, which included 68 3.5" high-density diskettes. It cost $250 more than the standard suite and was only available by special order through customer service. Today, it's all on a single dual-layer DVD.

When did the product become a suite?

Version 3. That's when Corel PHOTO-PAINT® was first included, along with Corel Chart and Corel Show.

With millions of customers around the world, you must have come across some unique uses of the software. Off the top of your head, what's the most interesting?

Well, most people regard the suite specifically as a layout and illustration package for advertising. But the one that struck me was learning that people in a memorial service business are designing tombstones with the software.

So, they're designing it in CorelDRAW?

Yes. They have a bunch of specialized macros to automate the workflow. And to see such a permanent, personal thing being created is quite special and eye-opening in terms of use of the product.

With the way that the software and publishing industries have evolved, how would you say that use of the product has changed over the years?

Well, the output has certainly simplified for many of our users. Sign cutters or sign makers, for example, no longer have to go through and weed and strip vinyl to apply it to their signs. Now, they have digital printers that basically print directly on the vinyl itself, so that automates much of their back end workflow. They used to have to cut out little pieces of vinyl to assemble their signs. Now, they can print it out in full color where previously they were limited to a couple of stock colors for each piece of vinyl.

And in a similar way, many print shops now have short run presses, which are basically like large, 4-color photocopiers but they can accommodate thousands of copies. So now, rather than having to spend time setting up the press and the ink, and then running off the press proof to ensure the copy is right, they can just go through these blistering fast machines. It saves an enormous amount of time and effort.

With such a worldwide user base, do you notice common themes when you're visiting with customers?

With X4, the suite is available in 18 languages and most people like the fact that everything within the product tends to stay live and dynamic. It's easy to work with and alter and add effects to something. They don't have to recreate from scratch. And, regardless of the industry it's used in, most people are doing layout work with the product. Whether that's an engraving service, or a sign maker, or promotional box and packaging material.

Do users tend to differ from region to region, in terms of what they're producing with the software or the industry in which it's used?

Yes. It actually does change quite a bit just between how it's used in North America, Europe, Eastern Europe, and Asia Pacific. In North America, you see a lot of people who use it for engraving, screen printing, wayfinding, and signage. It's used that way in Europe, too, but it tends to be more for advertising and layout work — with the most common layouts being less than 12 pages. So, people making

magazine ads, or telephone or yellow book ads, or newsletters and such. And then, with Japan, instead of industrial use, it's used more by people making personal things, like greeting cards and other trinkets.

CorelDRAW Graphics Suite has a history of being an industry trailblazer. Can you think of any features developed over the years that have been especially revolutionary?

The one that immediately comes to mind is the concept of live effects, which we've had since CorelDRAW version 1. This lets users immediately see the changes of any effects they apply and eliminated having to remember settings when experimenting with different effects. It just updates live onscreen.

Then in version 1.2, we also added CorelTRACE®. This allowed users to take bitmap objects and convert them into vector objects, which could then be edited. A very useful tool for working on logos or signs.

And in version 5, for Corel PHOTO-PAINT, we introduced the ability to have multiple objects on photos. So users didn't have to keep flattening everything they added to a photo. They could have those live elements that were stacked on top, which made editing much easier.

Those are known as layers today, right?

Yes. And in later versions — like 6, 7, and 8 — we concentrated on those live, interactive tools, which essentially gave users immediate visual feedback when editing their artwork. So, for example, we have the Interactive Fill, Interactive Blend, Interactive Transparency, and Interactive Drop Shadow tools. So users can change the appearance of an object with effects that re-render all by themselves. Users don't have to open a dialog box and try to remember which settings they've used.

After polishing off those features, we started working on making the software more of a global player. As an example, we wanted it to work seamlessly in Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Russian, Greek, Turkish, Swedish. So for versions 9 through 12 or so, we worked on supporting all those different character sets.

So now the result of all that work is a product that's successful around the world.

Yes. We sell the suite in 18 different languages natively. Plus, the English product is sold in many other countries as well. It's everywhere — truly a global product.

Any other particular features or developments come to mind?

Well, in version 10, we added the Mesh fill tool. That's an exciting one. It helps users create shading, but differently from how gradients, fountain fills, or blends would do it. It gives a more natural appearance and is very popular in the illustration space. Shading is such an important aspect of a design, especially for illustrations of people or landscapes.

For version 12, we worked extensively on the precision of drawing. So we had things like snapping and the dynamic guides, which help people achieve more symmetry and alignment in their designs.

In X3, we overhauled CorelTRACE and it became Corel® PowerTRACE™. We concentrated on how smooth the trace results were and reducing the number of colors in the trace result. Users can choose

color spaces, for example, if they want spot colors instead of RGB. And this is a real time-saver because spot colors are important for vinyl work or for screen printing.

With X4, I really enjoy the fact that the suite and all of its content is shipped on a single DVD. People can install the DVD on their hard drive and easily search for content, templates, and fonts. Those used to be on separate CDs. And to support the advent of digital cameras and single-lens reflex cameras, we've added the ability to open RAW files natively.

Another feature that we've had for years is live text. Users can see their changes onscreen as they work through the effects dockers. They can immediately see exactly how their text is going to flow and interact with their design.

Do you have any favorite time-savers or tips for people? Something they might not have discovered within the suite?

Off the top of my head, there's two for CorelDRAW and two for Corel PHOTO-PAINT. With CorelDRAW, people should check out the Virtual Segment Delete and the Smart Fill tool. With Corel PHOTO-PAINT, they should open the Brush Settings docker, and look for Orbits on the bottom of the docker. And if people are using PowerTRACE and not clicking on the Color tab, they should try that. It's a big time-saver.

Are there any little-known facts about CorelDRAW Graphics Suite that people might not realize?

The ministry of education in Russia has licensed it for 65,000 schools. So thousands upon thousands of students are using it there.

In terms of product development, how would you say the process has changed over the years? Particularly at Corel, but also generally within the industry.

Software development, in the beginning, was primarily driven by engineers. Nowadays, there's a middle player that works with Engineering, with Product Management, and with users to interpret what people are looking for. It's not necessarily making line by line items of what they want to see, but focused more on the end goal. Trying to make life easier for users, not just by listening to their issues, but by looking at every angle of their workflow to find out if there are things that they, and we, haven't yet considered. So it's really evolved from being engineering-driven to being customer-driven and my role is to interpret the user's needs and then design for that.