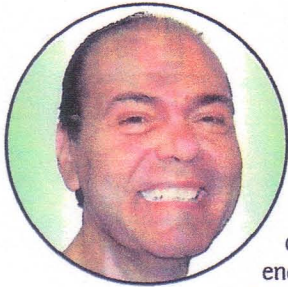


ELECTRONIC PRODUCT NEWS

The Designer's Guide to Products on the Web

7



Ease of Use

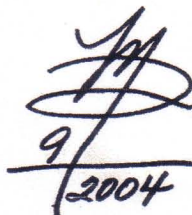
If you had a nickel for every time you encountered the phrase "easy to use" in a consumer-product description, your reading time could be semi profitable. On the flip side of the coin, should your experiences be similar to mine, if you had a nickel for every time this description proved true, you might find your pockets almost empty.

Occasionally, a product comes along that not only flattens the learning curve, but also crosses the boundaries between consumer, OEM, and business arenas. I'm referring to a design and schematic-layout application that I recently had the opportunity to take for a test spin: *SmartDraw Professional Plus*. For me, this Windows-based software took all of five minutes to learn before turning out complex schematics.

With its comprehensive symbol libraries, SmartDraw primarily targets electronic and mechanical engineers and programmers. Surprisingly, it also includes tools for creating custom business forms, correspondence, greeting cards, invitations, and free-form drawing, all capable of interfacing with Microsoft's Office suite. One could say the application feels equally comfortable on the drawing board, in the office and at home.

Be aware, this is not an endorsement of the product but merely a brief personal observation of its performance and features, and most of all its ease of use. SmartDraw may or may not have the muscle to challenge the high-end CAD monsters, but perhaps enough to give them a run for their nickels. For details and a free trial version, visit: smartdraw.com/products/smartdraw/proplus.htm and smartdraw.com/downloads/download.asp.

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