



FileMaker Pro 11



Editor Rating *very good* ●●●●○

- **Pros** - Powerful, sophisticated new features. Makes it easy to graphically represent data. More streamlined performance. Tighter Web integration.
- **Cons** - Charting features confusing on initial use.
- **Bottom Line** - FileMaker Pro 11 isn't a drastic overhaul of FileMaker Pro 10, so users won't have much relearning to do. But version 11 is still a big enough enhancement, packing enough new features, that it's well worth buying.

Everything we liked about FileMaker Pro 10 returns in FileMaker Pro 11: Ease of use, powerful relational databases, a fast database design process, and helpful assistance with report-making. The latest version of the database software builds upon that rock-solid foundation by sporting a more streamlined interface, better overall responsiveness, and new features that focus on the graphical representation of data in charts and other layouts, Web integration, and ways to make it even easier for users to merge existing data into FileMaker than before. FileMaker Pro 11 still lists at \$299 (\$179 for upgrades), but the new features—in particular, chart creation and ad-hoc reporting—give the application even more gravitas in the database space.

FileMaker Pro 11 (available for both Mac and PC) isn't a solution for large businesses that require a lot of flexibility with database development; Microsoft's Access (\$229 direct) is more than capable of taking care of that. Because of its user-friendliness, FileMaker is also a much more consumer-oriented offering than either the business-oriented Microsoft Access or Alpha software's Alpha Five v10, which is best suited for those with development experience.

FileMaker isn't a substitute for enterprise-level database systems such as Microsoft SQL or Oracle Server, which process a high number of transactions. FileMaker Pro 11 is, instead, ideal for small businesses accustomed to keeping business data on spreadsheets, and the SOHO or home user who wants a great way to organize budgets or invoices. FileMaker Pro 11 allows users who may not be database-savvy to centralize data into one location and manipulate that data into charts and reports in ways that would be complicated and time-consuming using spreadsheets. In many ways, its most direct competition in terms of usage, if not actual abilities, is Excel, rather than Access. Yet FileMaker goes far beyond the power of Excel, however, support [ODBC](#) and JDBC connectivity to other database systems.

New Features

The database design process is still the same as that of FileMaker Pro 10: it's centered on forms. Forms serve as the front end for tables, and are the method by which users add and edit records. FileMaker Pro 11 does all of the messy database stuff for you, keeping relationships and data integrity up to par—two important factors in maintaining a database's health. Despite being more streamlined, FileMaker Pro 11 lets advanced users access tables and create scripts, and customize fields and forms to their liking.

Still, FileMaker could use further UI improvements. I found the new Charting feature (used to create bar, line, and other charts to graphically represent data) to be powerful, but could imagine it being confusing to novice users and the SOHO customer FileMaker is aimed at. For instance, when I created a product sales bar graph in my test database, I, despite many years of SQL and Access experience behind me, had to pause to look where to actually click to create the chart. You have to first edit the layout of the current screen before the Charting icon will appear (it's also wise to setup a new blank layout, otherwise you will have a bar graph floating in the middle of your current screen). Once you've figured it out, it works well, and charts can be created within a FileMaker database, appended to Web pages, and customized in a similar fashion to the way it's done Microsoft Excel.

Reporting And Importing

Of course, data can be displayed in other ways besides charts. Reporting makes it easy to summarize information in a spreadsheet view within FileMaker. You can add all sorts of calculations and totals in the reports. It's just as simple to create mailing labels and envelopes.

Recurring Import is an impressive feature that automatically keeps a database updated with data from an external source. For testing, I created a .CSV file with a list of contacts. I setup that file to be a recurring import in the test FileMaker Pro 11 database. Any time I added a new contact into the .CSV file, that data was added to the database. The feature works and it works well. You have to remember, though, that imported data is read-only and cannot be edited.

Reverse Web Integration

Besides letting you post charts and reports to the Web, FileMaker Pro 11 also brings the Web into your database with Web Integration. Each contact's record within the Contact Management database contains a "Website" and "Map" tabs. These bring up the Google Maps locations of each contact and the Web page of the contact (if one is defined in the "Website" field).

If you have data that gets updated a lot, you might want to only view data for a specific point in time; this is where Snapshot Link comes in. You can save a snapshot of a set of records to pull a report against. Links can be sent as email attachments, but the recipient needs FileMaker.

FileMaker Pro 11 isn't a dramatic overhaul of the previous version, so FileMaker devotees won't have to re-learn the interface. The new features add to the fluidity of the database design process. FileMaker Pro has always been a wonderful alternative for smaller scale database needs, and with the new features, it's even better than ever.

<http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,2817,2363972,00.asp>