

Topic:
CAD & Upgrades

CAD/CAM User Views

The frequency of software upgrades

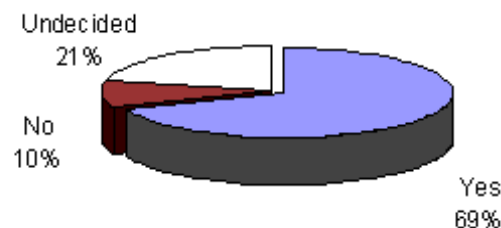
With CAD vendors adopting various tactics to attract upgrade take-up by customers, we thought we'd investigate how CAD using companies feel about the issue. How often do they actually want upgrades? Do they find them value for money? To investigate, we interviewed 253 UK CAD/CAM using companies in March 2001 from a cross section of industry sectors.

When Was The Last Time, And How Was It For You?

Almost two thirds of the sites had installed an upgrade for their main CAD software within the past year. A further 19% had upgraded within the past 2 years.

The majority of our sample (69%) were satisfied with their most recent software upgrade in terms of value for money; 21% were undecided, and only 10% felt that it had offered poor value.

Were CAD/CAM Users Satisfied With Their Most Recent Software Upgrade In Terms Of Value For Money?



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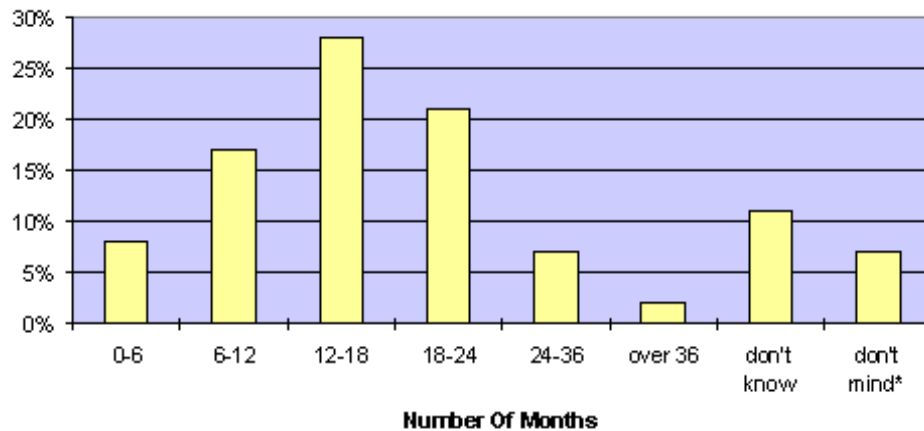
Are Vendors On the Right Frequency?

Two thirds of our sample said that they feel that the vendors of their CAD software have got the frequency of upgrades about right. Almost one in four companies however, feel they are too frequent. About 6% of companies want their vendors to get cracking and produce more upgrades!

So How Often Do You Want Them?

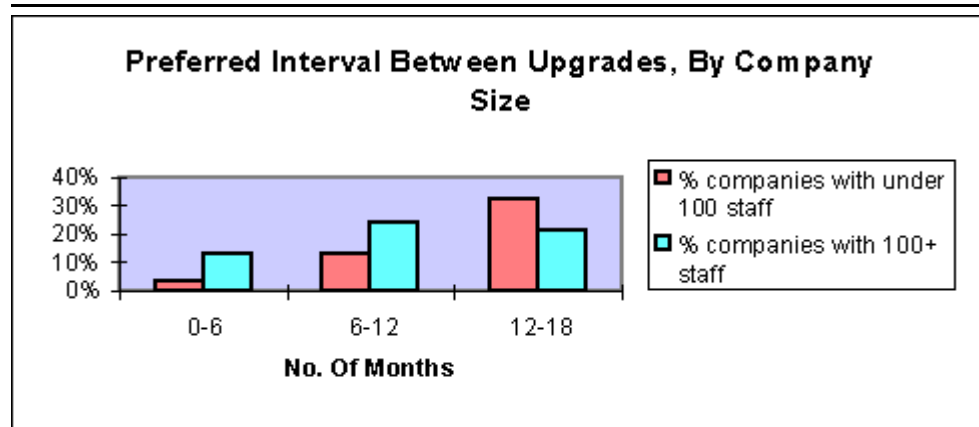
So what is the ideal time span between upgrades? One in four of our sample were happy to receive them every 12 months or less, while nearly half suggested between one to two years was right for them.

Preferred Interval Between Upgrades



* don't mind, if cost-effective

Medium-sized companies are overall more likely than smaller ones to want to receive upgrades at shorter intervals. Thirteen percent of companies with more than 100 staff would like to receive upgrades every six months or less, compared to 3% of companies with less than 100 staff. Anecdotal evidence suggests however that this correlation drops off for the very large organisations that can face particular problems in incorporating new releases smoothly.



Conclusion

The questions relating to the preferred interval between upgrades are hypothetical for a high proportion of users who are forced to upgrade through pressure from vendors or customers. However if they had a choice in the matter, around 30% of our sample would prefer to receive upgrades at intervals of eighteen months or longer. With users frequently telling us that they don't use their CAD packages to full capacity, it's no surprise to find a large group with limited enthusiasm for further features.

We asked Martyn Day, Group Editor of MCAD, CADdesk AEC Magazines and cadserver.co.uk (visit www.cadserver.co.uk), for his views on the upgrade scene. *"I think you will find that there are large differences between the competence, richness of content, price and timing with all the major software developers in the CAD industry. Similarly, the enthusiasm for new features varies between industries; the MCAD industry is always hungry for them, AEC professionals are not."*

"It's always fun to ask CAD developers where all this technology is going leading us to. In my experience you will get amorphous non-specific answers with words like 'Internet', 'distributed' and 'concurrent' used liberally. However, dig deeper and ask for specifics of what's in the next two releases or coming in the next 24 months and you will pretty much draw a blank. There are two issues playing here, the first being that they don't want to spoil their quarterly sales by talking up the next upgrade before absolutely necessary and the second being, perhaps more worryingly, that they may not actually know yet. Your data safe in their hands I ask?"



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"Data compatibility can be an issue here too. Customer's engineering projects may have a lifetime of anything up to 50 years or more; the software developers exist in an environment that can at best look forward to the next 3 years. Here you have a dichotomy where the clients of the software developers require the longevity of both dumb and intelligent data to mirror their projects, while the software developers feel they can't realistically plan beyond a much shorter timescales due to competitive pressures, the perceived demand for new features and the very nature of the software industry, its tools and constant evolution."

"CAD companies also use tactics to force customers to upgrade - take the next release of AutoCAD due out in June/July. This comes out the year R14, one of the most popular releases, is phased out as an upgradable version (if you miss out the upgrade this year you have to pay for a complete new copy)."

What are the implications for users of the trend towards software by subscription? "If users have no choice and all end up on subscription, getting a regular flow of 'improvements', I hope users get more vocal about what features they want and don't want and are more willing to complain about poor service," says Martyn. "There has been a distinct lack of end-user clout in the engineering CAD world. At the end of the day, these software developers are looking at ways to smooth their cashflow and reduce costs by delivering over the net. Subscription is something that is tailored to the way 'they' want to see things improve - I am not so convinced the same can be said for customers."

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