

Solve Your Font Problems

by Ilene Strizver

How to beat your fonts into submission with three of the best font management utilities

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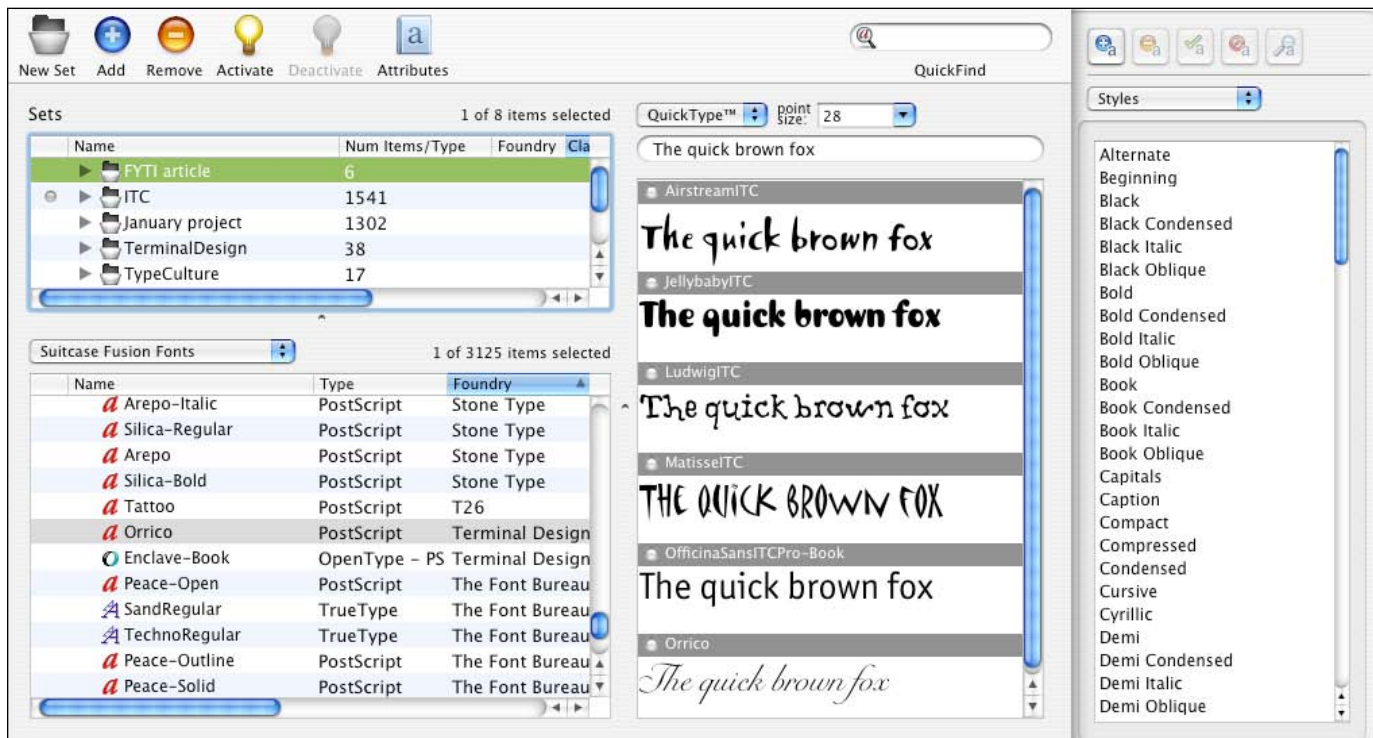
Fonts here. Fonts there. Fonts everywhere, especially in OS X. What's a font owner to do? Today's designer not only needs to have fonts available when required, but also demands the ability to manage an entire font library, which can consist of hundreds if not thousands of fonts in a variety of formats (Type1, TrueType and OpenType).

What do I mean by *manage*? In general, manage means to organize, create sets, auto-activate, handle font conflicts and generally make life easier so you can concentrate on the task at hand. Today's font management tools have come a long way and can not only accomplish these tasks fairly well, but in some cases can do a lot more. Depending on your needs and preferences, one tool might serve your purpose better than another. So let's take a look at three of the leading tools—Suitcase Fusion, FontAgent Pro and FontExplorer X—and see what each has to offer.

Each has a different interface with its own look and feel, but all are relatively easy to get used to.

They share many of the same features, but often with different names, locations and graphics. All three do a decent job of auto-activating fonts, either globally or with plug-ins. Individual fonts within a suitcase can be activated by all three, saving time and memory, eliminating a mile-long font menu. All let you create libraries, sets and nested (or cascading) font folders. All have decent font previews that can be customized to suit your needs.

As for performance, this will vary from user to user depending on your hardware, software, the integrity of your font library and other particulars. Just as with cars, some people have their favorites, swear by them and never drive anything else; some get stuck with “lemons” which have constant problems; and others are always looking for something bigger, better, faster and with more features. As with cars, don't make your choice based on one person's “trash talk” or another's constant evangelizing. Know your needs, have an open mind and proceed forward.



**SUITCASE FUSION
EXTENSIS
WWW.EXTENSIS.COM
PRICE: \$99.95**

Extensis Suitcase is the grandfather of font management tools and was the utility of choice for the majority of designers years before the current competition. In 2003, Extensis acquired Font Reserve. The acquisition resulted in Suitcase Fusion, in which Extensis was able to incorporate the best of both Suitcase and Font Reserve.

Fusion does a decent job at what it sets out to do. It imports fonts, scans for problems and attempts to repair whenever possible. It can either collect fonts into a font Vault that filters out any duplicates, or it can leave them where they are. It can identify and activate the exact version of a font used in your document—a useful feature if you have multiple font versions in your library (different foundries or formats).

If you are a former Suitcase or Font Reserve user, this utility is comfortably familiar, reducing your learning curve accordingly. Fusion has the ability to import the folders, sets and suitcases from either of these programs, which you will lose when switching to another program. But don't make your choice based on which tool is easiest to migrate to, but rather which is best for you in the long run. So what about other features? Read on.

Attributes palette

An outstanding feature of Fusion is the Attributes palette. With it, fonts can be viewed by classification, foundry, keyword and style. Many of these tags are automatically assigned by Fusion when fonts are imported, but all are editable. All but keywords have preexisting lists to choose from. Keywords allow you to create your own descriptors in order to customize and identify fonts by the attributes of your choice, including client, project and the like. The Attributes palette is a great tool if you want to locate, sort and organize your library for easy reference. The interface is clean, simple and easy to manage.

Printed font samples

Fusion has a respectable font preview function, as do all the other programs. You can view any number of fonts at a time and customize the settings. But what I like best about Fusion is the Print Sample Pages feature. Select a single font or an entire set, and Fusion allows you to print a sample page for each font, including name, family, foundry, classification and much more. Below all this is a showing that includes a waterfall, ABC123 and paragraph sample. You can either print these pages and create your own custom typeface catalog or convert them into PDF. Type specimen materials are few and far between these days, yet are a necessary part of typeface selection. I applaud Extensis for this very valuable and extremely useful feature.

Suitcase Fusion now includes an Attributes palette where individual fonts as well as sets can be tagged by classification, foundry, keyword and style. The font preview allows several fonts to be compared at once.

FONTAGENT PRO 3.3.0
INSIDER SOFTWARE
WWW.INSIDERSOFTWARE.COM
PRICE: \$99.95

FontAgent Pro's innovative Font Player allows you to view selected fonts in a slide show. By clicking on the Record button during the slide show, you can save fonts in a folder for viewing at a later date.

FontAgent Pro from Insider Software is chronologically the middle child of font management tools, but it is by no means a passive contender. In fact, it is an elegant, powerful, professional program created to meet the needs of designers. Insider Software has incorporated the most useful features from other font tools and added some new ones.

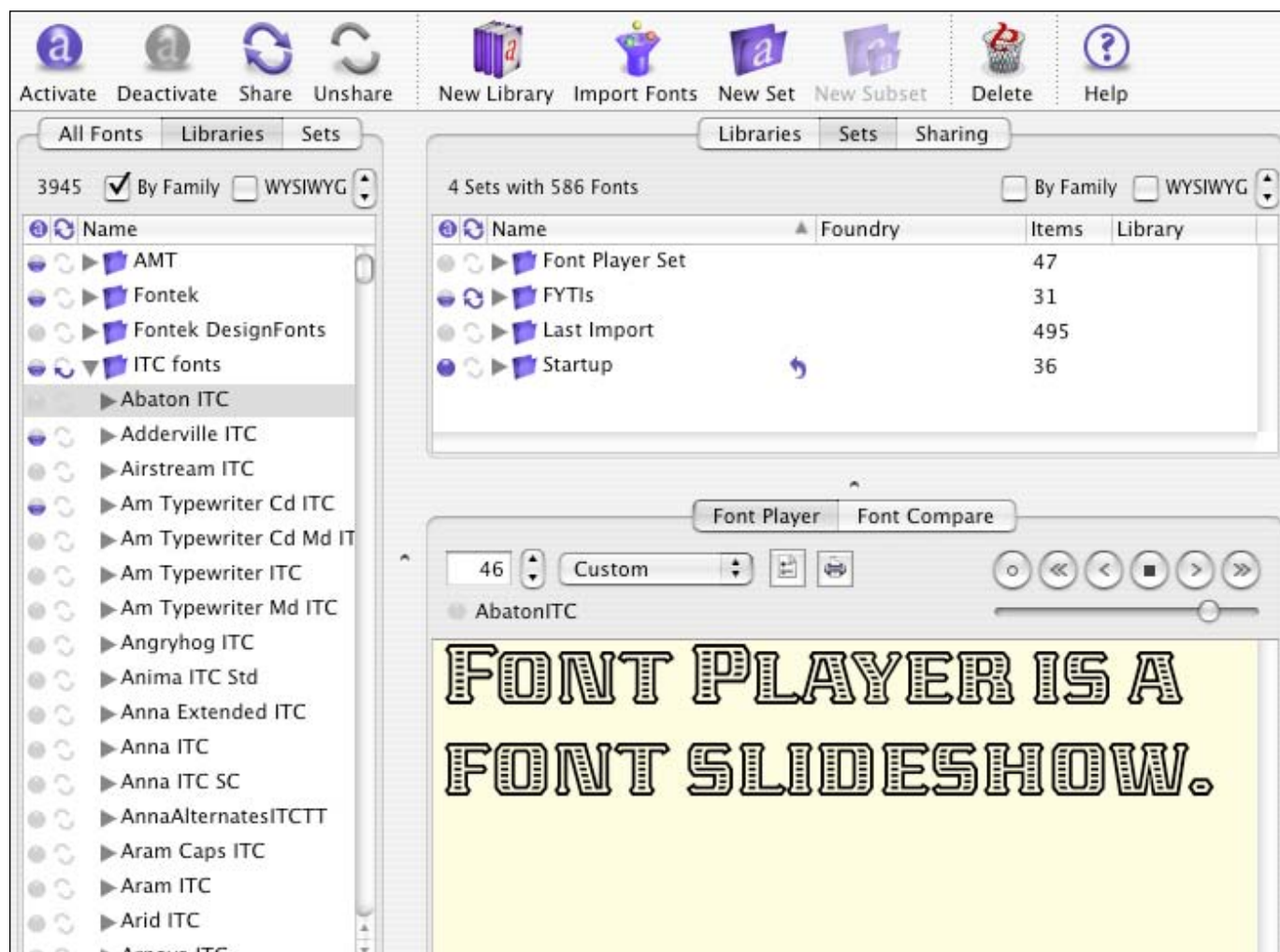
When loading fonts into FontAgent Pro, it will either copy or move them into a location of your choice. It organizes them alphabetically, which can be great if you have fonts all over the place. You can even drag-and-drop your entire hard drive into

FontAgent Pro—it might even find fonts you forgot or didn't know you had. Another convenience is the ability to load separate libraries for different clients—even if they have duplicate fonts from other libraries—that can easily be collected for output or removed later. All methods work seamlessly.

One of the coolest features of FontAgent Pro is that it can work in the background. That is, it doesn't have to be running to auto-activate fonts, which it does effortlessly. How it does this is a mystery to me, but nonetheless it allows you to do your work easily and without interruption.

Auto-activation

True auto-activation is a tremendous time-saver for designers. If you've ever had to manually search and activate dozens of fonts in order to open a docu-



ment, you'll know what I mean. Auto-activation can be a bit dicey and unreliable with some font utilities, but FontAgent Pro has truly mastered it. Open a document, and as long as the fonts have been imported into FontAgent Pro, they will be scanned and activated. This feature is particularly useful if you are switching from one font manager to another and you can't take (or import) your sets with you.

Font Player

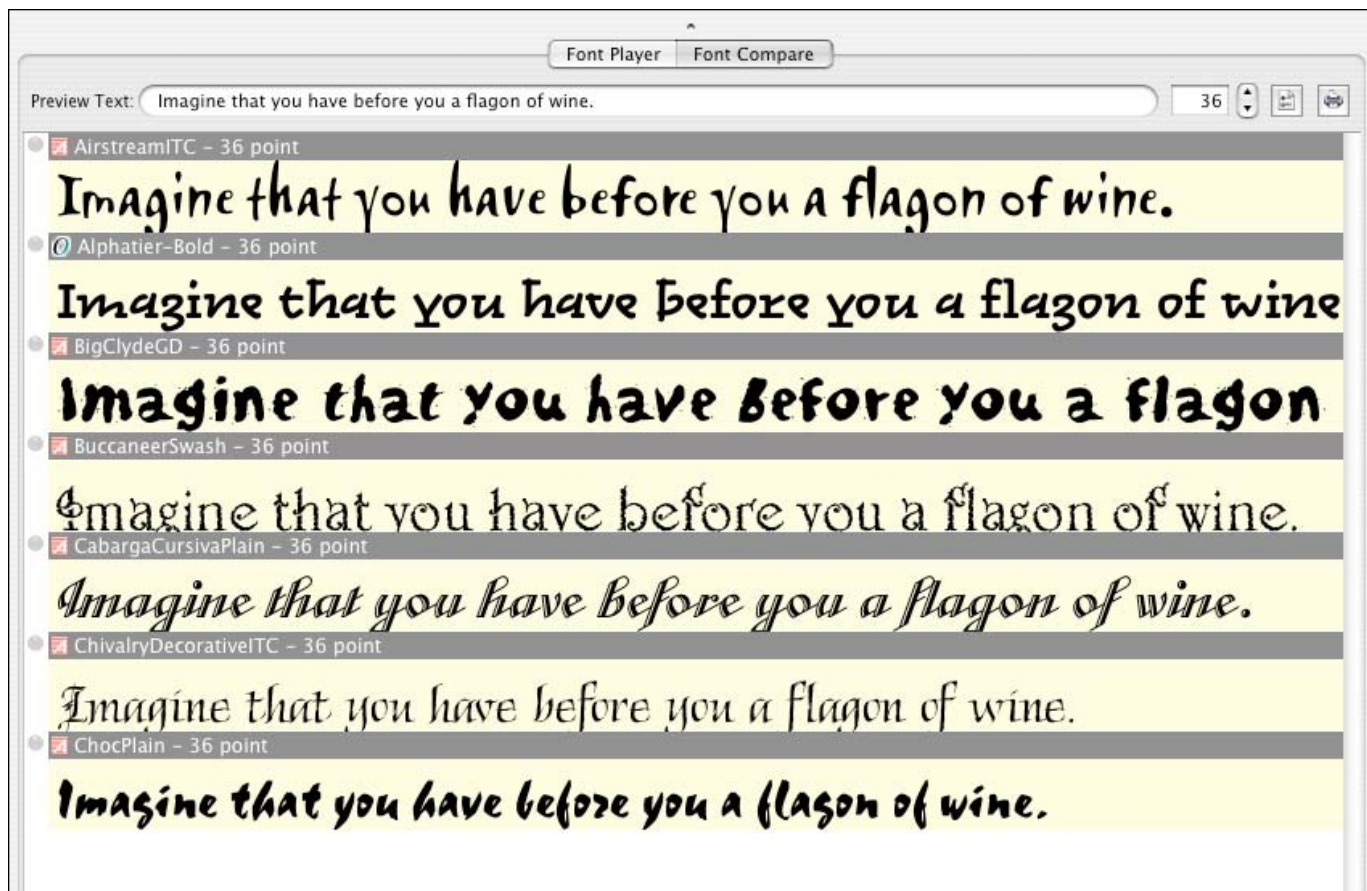
Font Player is my favorite FontAgent Pro feature by a landslide. Not only will the Player preview fonts in a customizable format (text, point size and color), but also it will “play” or automatically cycle through a group of fonts, families, sets or libraries while you just sit back and watch, with the speed adjustable via a slider. What's more, you can add any of the previewed fonts to a Font Player Set for future viewing, or save by clicking the “record” button. You can even print the previews—whether just one or an entire set or library—automatically. If you

prefer, they can be converted into PDF. Font Player allows you to easily view and collect your favorite fonts, conduct a font exploration for a job and even make a type specimen book. The only problem with this feature is that there isn't a pause button, an annoying inconvenience when one plays through dozens or hundreds of fonts at a time. Insider says it's working on this oversight.

Font Compare

Font Compare allows you to display sample text in multiple fonts of your choice for easy comparison. These showings can also be printed or converted into a PDF, just as the Player previews can. This is extremely helpful when doing font explorations, eliminating time-consuming steps required to manually accomplish the same thing. I've spent many hours viewing, selecting and comparing fonts manually. I have thousands of fonts in my library. No more whining! FontAgent Pro can accomplish this task quickly and effortlessly.

FontAgent Pro's Font Compare feature allows you to display sample text in multiple fonts of your choice for easy comparison. These showings can also be printed or converted into a PDF.





FontExplorer X's Font Store is the iFonts of the design world. It includes many recognizable features—favorites, shopping cart, order history—in addition to a top 10, staff picks and great graphics.

LINOTYPE FONTEXPLORER X 1.1
LINOTYPE
WWW.LINOTYPE.COM/FONTEXPLORERX
PRICE: FREE

Linotype FontExplorer X is the newest addition to the font management market. This utility is different from the others in a number of ways, most notably that it's developed by a type foundry and it's free. Why, you might ask? What's in it for Linotype? Plenty, actually. FontExplorer X has a built-in Font Store which links to Linotype's website, kind of like an iTunes for fonts. This makes FontExplorer X the sweetest, slickest of marketing tools for Linotype. But more on that later—there is a lot more to this feature-rich tool than just slick marketing.

The most instantly noticeable thing about FontExplorer X is its interface; it looks very much like iTunes. Its icons, buttons, use of color and arrangement all mimic iTunes—creating a comfortable familiarity for OS X users.

FontExplorer X imports fonts and libraries easily and quickly. It alerts you to conflicts, duplicates, missing printer fonts and the like, highlighting them in red with options for repair. You can label, rate and add comments to fonts, folders and sets—a conve-

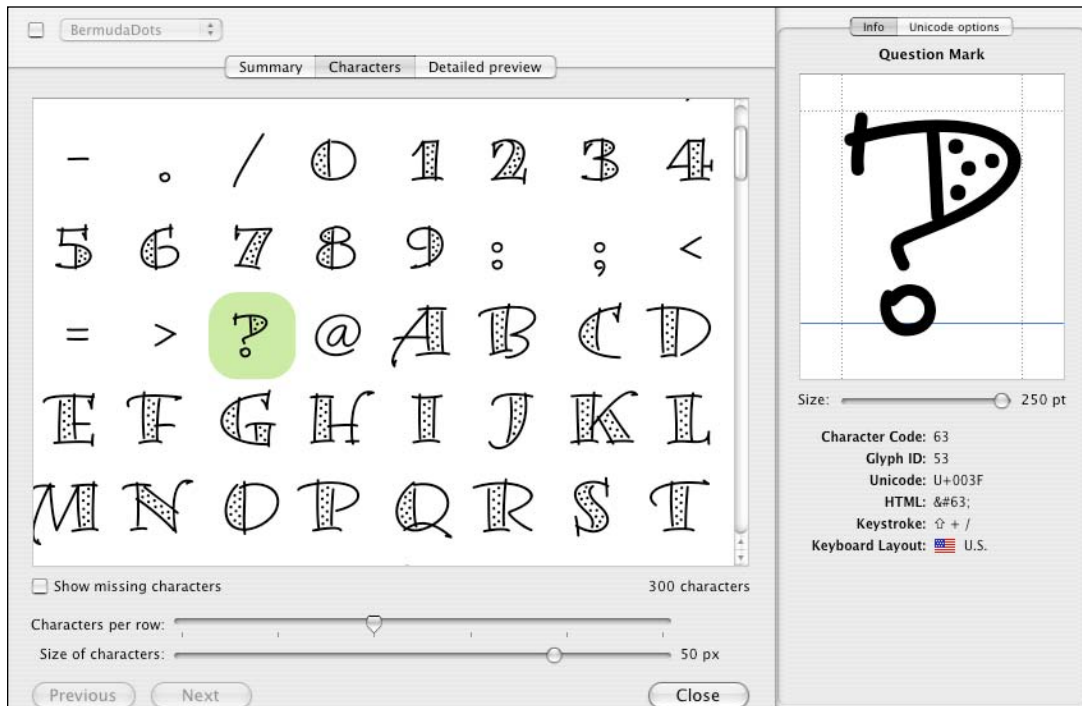
nient feature for exploring, organizing and prioritizing fonts. You can also create Smart Sets, à la OS X.

Another nice feature of FontExplorer X is the ability to clean your font caches without the use of a separate utility. Cleaning your font cache regularly can eliminate many font problems, and this feature makes it easy.

One downfall of this smart little utility is the lack of decent documentation. There virtually is none (nope, not even a PDF manual), except for the Apple Help Viewer, which is sparse and difficult to navigate. Learning this tool isn't brain surgery, but it could be made user-friendly with a manual. Another downfall is the inability to temporarily activate fonts—once they're on, they're on, even after a restart, until you manually turn them off—a small, but irritating inconvenience. Hopefully these issues will be addressed in future upgrades and releases.

Auto-activation

While some font management utilities require you to download and manually install the auto-activation plug-ins required for many applications, FontExplorer X makes it fast, easy and painless. It has a smooth plug-in manager which can be accessed from the menu bar and upon installation.



The character preview in FontExplorer X has a scalable character palette with the ability to view an enlargement of any character, as well as key information on that character.

Plug-ins can be installed and removed from here with ease in seconds. Kudos to Linotype for finessing this process.

When opening a document, a dialog box alerts you to available, missing and duplicate fonts and deals with them accordingly. It also gives you the option to purchase missing fonts via its Font Store.

Information button

One of the coolest and most unique features of FontExplorer X is the information button. Click here and you can access an expansive array of information and visuals on any font. The submenu includes summary, characters and detailed preview.

- The Summary lists font particulars—including name, format, copyright, embedding rights and designer (if included in the font by the manufacturer), vendor, as well as your rating, label and comments.
- The Characters palette shows the complete character complement (similar to the glyph palette located in many apps), whose point size can be adjusted by a slider. Now for the really cool stuff: There is a sub-palette which shows an enlargement of any character, adjustable up to 250 pt.—great if you want to see a character blowup before making a font selection. There is another layer of detailed info on each character ... and the most useful for some might be

its HTML code. This is a real convenience if you have ever had to hand-code smart quotes, ampersands, dashes and the like.

- The Detailed Preview lets you customize any font to the max, including size, color, line spacing and tracking.

Font Store

The Font Store is a brilliant marketing concept that is as beneficial for the font user as it is for Linotype. The store has lots of amazing features, including a powerful Font Finder, Top 10 for text and display, Staff Picks, Unseen Charms, as well as a gallery called Designers In Focus. Clicking on a font takes you back to the preview window to view and explore each font in depth. All this plus fabulous graphics of typefaces, designers and the like make Linotype's Font Store entertaining as well as useful and convenient.

SUMMARY

All three utilities are decent, reliable font management tools that do the basics, but they all have their own landmark features. If you are considering exploring or switching to another program, my advice is to do your research, then “test drive” before you switch over or buy, using trial versions (available for the two utilities that are not free), and decide which works best for you and suits your particular needs. ☺