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## CAD that Won't Break the Bank (Cadalyst Labs Review)

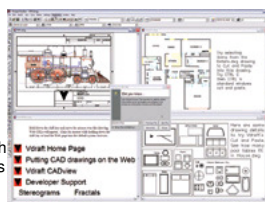
Inexpensive CAD applications can offer significant functionality for substantially less money than top-of-the-line products.

Jan 1, 2008  
 By [Ron LaFon](#)  
 Cadalyst



[back](#) Pages | [1](#) | [2](#) | [3](#) | [4](#) | [5](#) | [6](#) | [7](#) | [8](#) | [9](#) [more](#)

SoftSource has been developing CAD drafting systems, translation, and commercial management software since 1982. For this roundup review, I looked at v2.21 of the Vdraft application. Little has changed since the last time I evaluated Vdraft, other than an original equipment manufacturer (OEM)-requested programming change. A new version of Vdraft with updates for Microsoft Vista is in the works, but it is not yet ready for evaluation. The instruction manual has also been streamlined since *Cadalyst's* last review.



Vdraft, short for Virtual Drafter, is a CAD system for AutoCAD and DXF Drawings.

Vdraft is short for Virtual Drafter, and it's a 2D drafting application that is compatible with numerous AutoCAD DWG file formats. Vdraft is highly customizable but simple enough in operation to make it a good tool for teaching CAD drafting. The system requirements for Vdraft are relatively modest, with the application running well on PCs with Windows 95 through Windows XP.

You'll find an array of capable tools designed for 2D, including a sketch mode called Sketch Freehand for making fast sketches of an idea before actually committing it to a drawing. You can view or edit multiple drawings simultaneously and cut or copy and paste elements between drawings. Vdraft's hyperlink support is compatible with AutoCAD hyperlinks, so you can hold down the Shift key, move the cursor over a drawing object to view the hyperlink information, and click to load the Web page.

Vdraft reads AutoCAD DWG and DXF files and can export DWG, DXF, HPGL, and SVF files. No symbol libraries are included with the application, but the supported file formats provide opportunities to use a wide array of available symbol libraries.

Worth noting is the spiral-bound manual that ships with Vdraft. It offers an abundance of information about the product and also contains a number of useful appendices. For shops that are primarily AutoCAD-centric, a quick reference to supported AutoCAD commands show where they are located in Vdraft.

For those involved in academic pursuits, SoftSource offers low site-licensing fees, as well as a grant program for institutions that make a commitment to Vdraft in their CAD drafting curricula. Site-licensing fees provide one copy of the software and documentation. The licensing contract allows the institution the right to copy the software and its documentation for educational purposes only. Institutions that would prefer to purchase copies of the user manuals and software can do so at a very low cost per copy.

Vdraft is priced at \$250, toward the lower end of price scale compared with other applications in this review. SoftSource also offers a product called CADview for viewing and printing AutoCAD drawings. CADview can temporarily turn layers on and off and calculate measurements. An AutoCAD/DXF plug-in gives users the power to view and print AutoCAD drawings in Netscape or Internet Explorer. Users can zoom in on drawing details, turn layers on and off, and print the current view or entire drawing inside the Internet browser. SoftSource also offers a simple vector format (SVF) plug-in as a simple solution for access to SVF drawings from a Web browser.

For additional information or to download a trial version of Vdraft, please visit the company's Web site at <http://www.softsource.com/>. The trial version of Vdraft is time-limited to 30 days.

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