

# Pixology

The Magazine for Photographers

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**{{ Excerpt }}**

**A New Dark Cloud  
over Photoshop?**

# From the Editor

Spring is in full effect and summer is just around the corner, with plenty of reminders that change is in the air. That usually makes me think of changes in the weather as well as changes in foliage and flowers, but recently there's a different sort of change in the air.

I'm referring to the recent announcement by Adobe that—moving forward—Photoshop will only be available through a Creative Cloud subscription. The announcement clearly frustrated many photographers, and in this issue I address the change head-on.

I also address some less contentious issues, such as a suggestion that you get your feet wet every now and then, a discussion of perspective correction for panoramas, and more.

I hope you feel this issue is informative and enjoyable. As always, please feel free to share your thoughts with me via email at [tim@tingrey.com](mailto:tim@tingrey.com).

Thank you,

  
Tim Grey  
Editor





A New  
**Dark Cloud**  
Over

# Photoshop?

One Photographer's  
Thoughts on the Updated  
Adobe Creative Cloud  
Subscription Model

By Tim Grey

**Software is a tricky business. In theory a software application is aimed at addressing a particular need for a particular category of user. But therein lies the rub. If a particular software application is truly great, it will perfectly address the needs of the target user, and it will never need to be updated. Ever.**

If a company were to create the perfect software application that never really needed updating, the only way to generate ongoing revenue would be to consistently earn new customers. That can work perfectly fine for a little while, but eventually you'll run out of potential new customers—at least in theory. Existing customers will be perfectly happy with the original version of your application and will therefore feel no need to pay for an updated version.

Of course, most applications aren't exactly perfect in their first version. There are surely a few bugs to fix here and there, and more often than not users will be interested in new and improved features. This has helped ensure ongoing revenue for companies that create software applications. But what happens when you sort of run out of new and interesting features?

It seems to me that this is the challenge many software companies are currently faced with. In short, I think many software applications have matured to the point that it has grown increasingly difficult to convince existing customers to pay for each new version. This leaves software companies trying to find new ways to maintain—or hopefully increase—revenue for their applications. And that's where the subscription model enters the scene.

There are a variety of ways the subscription model has been implemented, but to me it all comes down to a single issue. Specifically, you are paying an ongoing subscription price rather than a flat fee up front. In other words, with a subscription model the software companies are able to exert a little more pressure on users for them to keep paying month after month and year after year.

Before delving into some of the consequences of this approach, I'd like to clarify one common point of confusion. The “old”

model of selling software didn't truly involve “buying” the software. Whether you're paying a flat fee up front or a monthly subscription fee, you've always been merely licensing software, not purchasing it outright, at least in the context of “normal” software applications.

The licensing terms for software applications generally come across as being a little onerous, and in most cases those terms could be changed at any time without your approval. But in almost all cases you never truly owned the software. You were just renting it. The difference is, in the past you were essentially renting the software forever with a single one-time fee. With the subscription model you're renting for a fixed period of time, and you must continue making payments to continue making use of the software.

Admittedly, this is a bit of a semantic issue, but I do think it is important to understand the distinction. That distinction, however, doesn't change the fact that things have changed rather dramatically when it comes to using a variety of software applications. And for photographers, that type of dramatic change is now occurring with Photoshop.

## Introducing Photoshop CC

Whenever rumors start swirling about a new version of a software application such as Photoshop, there's a natural tendency to refer to the anticipated release with a version number that increments from the prior version. So, when Photoshop 4.0 was the current version, and a new version was expected, photographers would naturally refer to what they assumed was the upcoming “Photoshop 5”.

This assumption has proven wrong more than once. When photographers were talking about Photoshop 8, they were perhaps surprised when Adobe launched Photoshop

CS (referring to the Creative Suite) instead. And now with Photoshop CS6 as the current version of Photoshop, photographers had naturally been assuming that the next version would be Photoshop CS7. But Adobe had a bit of a surprise in store, announcing that the upcoming release of Photoshop would be branded “Photoshop CC”.

The “CC” in Photoshop CC stands for Creative Cloud. You may already be familiar with Adobe Creative Cloud as a subscription option for users of Adobe applications. And a subscription to Adobe Creative Cloud is an option that represents tremendous value for many users, especially creative professionals. If you tend to use a relatively large number of Adobe applications, it can be much less expensive to subscribe to Creative Cloud than to update to a bundle of applications every 18 to 24 months (give or take). Even better, a Creative Cloud subscription includes somewhat frequent updates to applications, so you’re getting new and improved features more often, as well as other benefits such as online storage.

## **The Value Proposition for Photographers**

An Adobe Creative Cloud subscription makes perfect sense for many users. Unfortunately, for photographers that generally isn’t the case. After all, photographers tend to utilize a combination of a relatively small number of Adobe applications. Generally that means using Photoshop or Photoshop Elements, and possibly Lightroom.

The problem is, if you only need Photoshop, a Creative Cloud subscription isn’t a great value. The standard subscription for Creative Cloud is \$49.99 per month, or just shy of \$600 per year. You can get a discount of up

to 60% off if you own a qualifying Adobe product, but that discount is only applicable for the first year.

If you only need Photoshop, you can opt instead for a single application subscription. The standard price for that subscription is \$19.99 per month, or a little less than \$240 per year. You can get a 50% discount for the first year if you own a qualifying product, but again that discount is only for the first year.

In other words, Creative Cloud, at least in the long term, really isn’t a good value for photographers who only need a single application from the Creative Cloud.

## **Reasons to Dislike Creative Cloud**

Let’s take a look at the key reasons I think Adobe’s announcement related to Creative Cloud is possibly bad news for many photographers who use Photoshop.

### **1) Subscribing is Now the Only Real Option**

When you have choices, if you don’t care for one of the options available to you that isn’t necessarily a problem. You can simply opt for the choice that is more appealing to you.

With the new subscription model for Photoshop CC, you don’t have much of a choice. If you want the latest updates to Photoshop, your only option is to subscribe and pay an ongoing subscription fee. If you don’t want to subscribe, you can still continue to use previous versions of Photoshop, since versions through Photoshop CS6 included a perpetual license.

In other words, if you want to continue to have access to the latest updates to Photoshop, you’ll need to purchase a subscription.

## 2) Photoshop is Now More Expensive

I've already outlined the overall pricing structure of a single-application subscription to Adobe Creative Cloud. But let's take a closer look at the specific math involved.

The standard upgrade price for Photoshop, at least for the past couple versions or so, has been \$179. The typical release schedule for Photoshop has translated to a new version around every 18 months or so. If you upgrade to every new major release (as Adobe effectively started requiring recently), that means you're spending about \$179 every 18 months, or about \$9.94 per month.

If you opt for the single-application subscription to Creative Cloud, you'll spend \$9.99 per month. An extra nickel per month isn't so bad. But that's only for the first year. After that, you'll be paying \$19.99 per month.

Over the course of the 18-month product cycle I've used as the basis of the "old" model above, that means you'll be spending \$239.82 for an 18-month subscription rather than \$179 every 18 months to upgrade to the new version of Photoshop. And this higher price includes the 50% discount for the first year. After that first year, each 18-month portion of your subscription will cost \$359.82 compared to a typical \$179 upgrade price each 18 months.

Taking this to an extreme, you could say that a subscription to Adobe Creative Cloud could be infinitely more expensive (figuratively, not literally) than buying a single version license of Photoshop. Let's pretend, for example, that you plan to use Photoshop for the next twenty years, and that you don't feel you need any additional features above and beyond what is currently available. You could opt to purchase Photoshop CS6 today for an upgrade price of \$179, and use it for the next twenty years.

Even if you did upgrade to every new version, assuming the upgrade price remains fixed and that there's a new version on average every 18 months, you'd end up buying about 13 new updates, at a total cost of around \$2,386.67.

Alternatively, you could subscribe to Adobe Creative Cloud to gain access to Photoshop CC, and then pay \$4,677.60 for the same twenty year period (including the 50% discount for the first year). I think this "long view" helps to illustrate why many photographers are unhappy with the new approach Adobe is taking to licensing their software.

I should hasten to add that the numbers here aren't entirely fair to Adobe, because with Photoshop CC you're actually getting what had been Photoshop Extended rather than the standard version of Photoshop. However, the vast majority of photographers simply don't need the additional features of Photoshop Extended, and therefore this isn't truly a benefit for most. As a result, I think it is fair to compare the new Photoshop CC subscription to the standard version of Photoshop when it comes to pricing.

## 3) You Could Lose Access to Your Images

I find it more than a little amusing—and I mean that in the most sarcastic way possible—that the Creative Cloud subscription model contains a potentially huge trap for photographers and other users of Adobe software. Specifically, if you sign up for a Creative Cloud subscription, and then stop paying for that subscription, you will lose access to the applications you had access to as part of your Creative Cloud subscription.

In other words, if you only have Photoshop CC installed on your computer, and haven't purchased a license for any prior version of Photoshop, if you stop paying for your Creative Cloud subscription you will lose access to

Photoshop. That means, you will no longer be able to open your Photoshop PSD files (or, by extension, any TIFF images containing layers that were created in Photoshop).

The reason I find this interesting is that Adobe has promoted their Digital Negative (DNG) file format with what I would characterize as something of a fear-based campaign relating to the potential loss of access to your photos.

Specifically, from my interpretation Adobe has communicated in various ways that if you didn't adopt the Adobe DNG file format as a replacement for your proprietary RAW capture formats, someday you might discover that you no longer had access to your own photos. I felt from the start that this was a spurious claim. After all, there are many software tools available for processing your proprietary RAW captures.

But now Adobe is actually taking what could be described as an active role in preventing you from being able to access your own photos, by virtue of preventing you from accessing your Photoshop PSD (or TIFF) images unless you pay an ongoing subscription fee. That doesn't sit well with me, nor with many other photographers based on what I've seen and heard.

#### **4) Photoshop CS6 isn't a Guaranteed Solution**

Adobe has made it clear that Photoshop CS6, as with prior versions of Photoshop, includes a perpetual license. In other words, once you've purchased a license to a prior version of Photoshop, that license never actually expires. You can keep using that version indefinitely without paying any additional fee to Adobe.

This has been presented as something of a mitigating factor, with the suggestion that if

you don't like the new subscription model for Photoshop CC, you can simply purchase a license of Photoshop CS6 and use it forever.

There are a couple of problems with this concept. To begin with, there is no guarantee that Adobe will continue to provide updates to Photoshop CS6. In fact, I think it is fair to assume that there will be very few if any updates to Photoshop CS6. There may be some updates providing additional support for new RAW capture formats, but I would imagine there won't be any new features.

And even the updates for new RAW file formats aren't likely to continue indefinitely. In other words, sticking with Photoshop CS6 and deciding not to "upgrade" to Photoshop CC might be fine in the short term, but it may prove problematic down the road.

Perhaps more significantly, at some point we'll likely run into a situation where the existing Photoshop CS6 application (as well as earlier versions of Photoshop) won't run on new computers. This may take a considerable amount of time, but at some point we'll likely run into limitations based on changes to operating systems or computer hardware, among other factors.

The bottom line is that opting for Photoshop CS6 and attempting to make that your "permanent" solution for having access to Photoshop could create some additional challenges down the road.

#### **5) Lightroom is not Necessarily a Photoshop Replacement**

Adobe has suggested that Lightroom will continue to be offered with a perpetual license, meaning you won't need to pay a subscription fee to have ongoing access to Lightroom. That's all well and good, of course, but it isn't a guarantee. At some point in

the future Adobe could decide to take the Creative Cloud subscription approach with Lightroom as well.

Of more immediate concern to many photographers, however, is the fact that Lightroom doesn't yet represent an entirely adequate replacement for Photoshop. For example, the image cleanup tools in Lightroom are not as sophisticated as those in Photoshop, and Lightroom doesn't include the ability to create composite photos such as high dynamic range (HDR) images, composite panoramas, or other composite creations.

Some photographers may use this new change to a subscription model for Photoshop as encouragement to adopt a Lightroom-only workflow. But there are certainly many photographers who feel that Lightroom hasn't yet gotten to the point that this approach is truly feasible. In other words, at least in the near term, they're going to want to utilize Photoshop in addition to Lightroom.

This is a good time to mention that for many photographers Photoshop Elements represents tremendous value, featuring most of the features that photographers feel they need in Photoshop at a much lower price. For example, the image-cleanup tools in Photoshop Elements essentially match those in Photoshop. As such, for photographers who want to use Lightroom and feel that some of the features of Photoshop may still be necessary or desirable, a combination of Lightroom and Photoshop Elements may represent an ideal solution.

## **6) This Isn't Likely to Change**

I've observed a variety of efforts aimed at trying to convince Adobe to change course on their announcements regarding the subscription model for Photoshop and other Adobe applications. In my opinion, Adobe

isn't likely to change their embrace of a subscription model, no matter how many photographers rise up in protest.

This opinion is based in part on the assumption that photographers don't represent the largest segment of Adobe's customers, nor even a large enough customer base to sway the decision-making process at Adobe.

My opinion is also influenced by how Adobe has responded to similar complaints among customers in the past. You may recall that not too long ago Adobe changed their upgrade policy so that in order to qualify for upgrade pricing for a new major release of Photoshop you needed to have a license for the immediately prior major release. So, for example, you needed to own a license for Photoshop CS5 in order to be eligible for upgrade pricing for Photoshop CS6.

After photographers and other Photoshop users raised a considerable uproar, Adobe relented, but only a little. Specifically, they extended the deadline for the upgrade requirement. But ultimately, the new policy requiring that you essentially upgrade to every major version in order to continue having access to the upgrade price remained in force. In my view the new Creative Cloud subscription model is simply an extension of this policy.

It is possible, of course, that a significant outcry from photographers might cause Adobe to change their policy regarding Creative Cloud subscriptions. But if that does happen, I suspect it will be a minor change. For example, the 50% discount enabling you to purchase a single application subscription for \$9.99 per month rather than \$19.99 per month may be extended beyond the current one-year term. I would be very surprised, however, if Adobe changed their current subscription model beyond that.



Perhaps I'm being overly cynical here, but from my perspective when you want to encourage customers to give you more money, the right approach is to provide greater value to the customers, not to simply raise prices. I'm concerned that part of the reason Adobe won't change this new subscription policy (or at least won't change it all that much) is that they feel this is the only way to grow revenue. That doesn't make me too optimistic about the type of updates we might see in the Creative Cloud version of Photoshop. After all, now that Adobe will lock in a monthly fee, with the software no longer working once you stop paying, what's their incentive to provide frequent updates with great new features?

In fairness, Adobe has recently communicated that they are well aware of the negative outcry from customers in response to their new subscription model. It is clear Adobe is giving some thought to how they can best deal with this frustration among their customers. But I'm not confident any changes Adobe adopts will truly satisfy those who are unhappy with the new subscription model.

## A Bit of Perspective

I think it is only fair to add a bit of perspective regarding the new subscription pricing model for Photoshop. There's no question that for most photographers the new model represents a price increase for Photoshop, especially for photographers who weren't previously in the habit of upgrading to each new version of Photoshop.

But I think it is worth keeping in mind that for many photographers, this new higher price may very well represent good value. When you consider how much the typical photographer spends on cameras, lenses, accessories, travel, computers, storage, and

many other components of photography today, Photoshop suddenly doesn't seem quite so expensive.

Of course, "expensive" is a relative term. In order to determine whether something represents a good value, we need to consider not only the price, but the benefits we will accrue with our purchase. Is it worth spending more money (possibly much more money) to obtain the version of a lens that has a maximum aperture size of f/2.8 rather than getting the less expensive version that only goes to f/4? This is a subjective question, and different photographers will have different answers.

The point is that the new pricing structure for Photoshop doesn't necessarily represent an unreasonably high price, just a higher price than had been available previously.

I think most people have grown accustomed to the concept of "buying" rather than "renting" software. I also think a lot of photographers don't like the notion of having to pay for software every month essentially forever, rather than being able to choose when to upgrade to a new version. In other words, I think it is fair that many photographers feel that the new subscription model for Photoshop CC represents a potential positive for Adobe, but a very big negative for many photographers. I tend to agree with this thinking.

## The Bottom Line

At the end of the day, it will be up to each photographer to decide how they want to move forward in the new landscape Adobe has created. In any relationship between a vendor and a consumer, there is a certain balance of power. The vendor can set any terms of sale they choose, but the buyer can ultimately choose whether to accept those terms.

A certain challenge arises when the product offered by a given vendor has reached a point where customers feel—for one reason or another—that they are tied to that product and they don't have any other viable alternative. Perhaps these changes will inspire other software developers to offer enticing alternatives to Photoshop (and in many respects, these alternatives already exist). Or perhaps Adobe will have their way, and most photographers will sign up for a Creative Cloud subscription.

In my opinion, Adobe is embarking on the subscription model because the company has found it increasingly difficult to convince customers to upgrade to each new version of their various software applications. But that is neither here nor there. At the end of the day, Adobe has somewhat dramatically changed their approach to licensing most of their software applications. It will be up to each photographer to choose whether they are willing to subscribe (both literally and figuratively) to those changes.

If you would like to provide feedback to Adobe regarding the change to a subscription model for Photoshop, there are two options you might consider.

First, you may want to review a blog post from Adobe regarding the change to a subscription model for Photoshop, and perhaps add your comment to the long and growing list of comments that have already been posted. You can find that blog post here:

<http://bit.ly/AdobePSCCBlog>

Second, there is an online petition at Change.org you can sign. There's certainly no guarantee this petition will get Adobe's attention or convince them to make any

changes, but you can review the petition and additional information regarding the changes here:

<http://bit.ly/ChangeOrgAdobeCC>

I'll be curious to see how many photographers choose to abandon Photoshop because of the new subscription model. I suspect many will opt for Photoshop Elements instead of Photoshop. Others may decide (or may have already decided) that Lightroom is "good enough" and that Photoshop simply isn't needed anymore. I imagine a fair number may take an "intermittent subscription" approach, subscribing to Photoshop CC, but letting that subscription lapse from time to time, only reactivating the subscription when they actually need to access Photoshop.

A great many photographers have made it clear they don't like the new subscription-only model for Photoshop CC. It remains to be seen what the impact of a relatively large number of unhappy photographers might be.



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*Tim Grey is regarded as one of the top educators in digital photography and imaging, offering clear guidance on complex subjects through his writing and speaking.*

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# Parting Shot

