Blatner Tools 1.0.1
DTP Tools
$149
Windows and Mac OS X
Rating: 🕯🕯🕯🕯🕯

Ratings Key

🕯	Not worth it even if it's free
🕯🕯	Not recommended
🕯🕯🕯	Average
🕯🕯🕯🕯	Exceptionally good
🕯🕯🕯🕯🕯	A must-have

By MICHAEL MURPHY

Editor's Note: To avoid any conflict of interest, David Blatner recused himself from editing this piece, except for minor technical corrections. —Terri Stone

Most people take advantage of some of InDesign's time-saving features—the ones they really need every day. Every InDesign user, however, has a mental list of "I wish InDesign could…" features rattling around in their heads. We wait and hope the next version will answer these wishes, but that doesn't always happen. David Blatner decided not to wait. David (noted ID expert and editorial director of this magazine) spent most of InDesign's first decade teaching people how to get better with what InDesign has built in, but with the release of Blatner Tools—a suite of 12 plug-ins designed by Blatner and developed by DTP Tools—he expands InDesign's feature set and adds numerous productivity boosters to existing features in both CS3 and CS4.

All of the plug-ins perform identically in CS3 and CS4 on the Mac OS. I did not test Blatner Tools using Windows, but DTP Tools says users will experience no difference between platforms. Its $149 price includes fully licensed CS3 and CS4 versions of the plug-ins. Incremental discounts are available for multiple licenses, and a 14-day free trial version is available for those who want to test the waters first.

Two of the 12 plug-ins (Keyboard Shortcuts and Tip of the Day) have been around for a while as free advertising-based plug-ins, and one (History Lite) is a pared-down version of DTP Tools' stand-alone History plug-in. I'll cover all of the 12 plug-ins below, in no particular order.

1. AutoPage

InDesign CS4's built-in Smart Reflow acts only on Master Text Frames, or on every frame in the document. There's no middle option. AutoPage enables greater control between these two extremes, allowing overset text to generate and flow into new document pages on a story-by-story basis. The text frame either expands vertically down to the bottom page margin (which Smart Reflow does not do), or AutoPage adds a new page or spread to flow the overset text into. You can also set it to do both (Figure 1, next page).

For CS3 users, this is a little taste of Smart Reflow functionality without having to upgrade to CS4. However, unlike CS4's Smart Reflow, the added pages and threaded frames are not automatically removed when text is deleted and no longer flows into them. That's certainly not a deal-breaker. I prefer having the option to set my caption frames to auto-expand vertically, but I typically don't want that on every frame in my document.

While AutoPage lets you expand only the frames you want to expand, its behavior is the same for all frames. You can't set a caption to expand only to the bottom of the page, but a body copy frame to
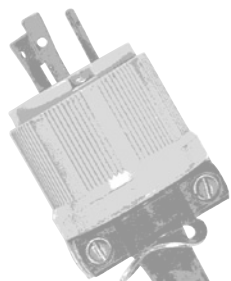
generate and flow to a new page. All frames expand in the same manner. CS4 users get the best of both worlds if they set Smart Reflow to generate new pages from master text frames, and use AutoPage to expand only within the page for captions, margin callouts, and other smaller frames that don't warrant a new page.

Figure 1. AutoPage preferences define how frames are expanded, as well as if and where new pages are added.
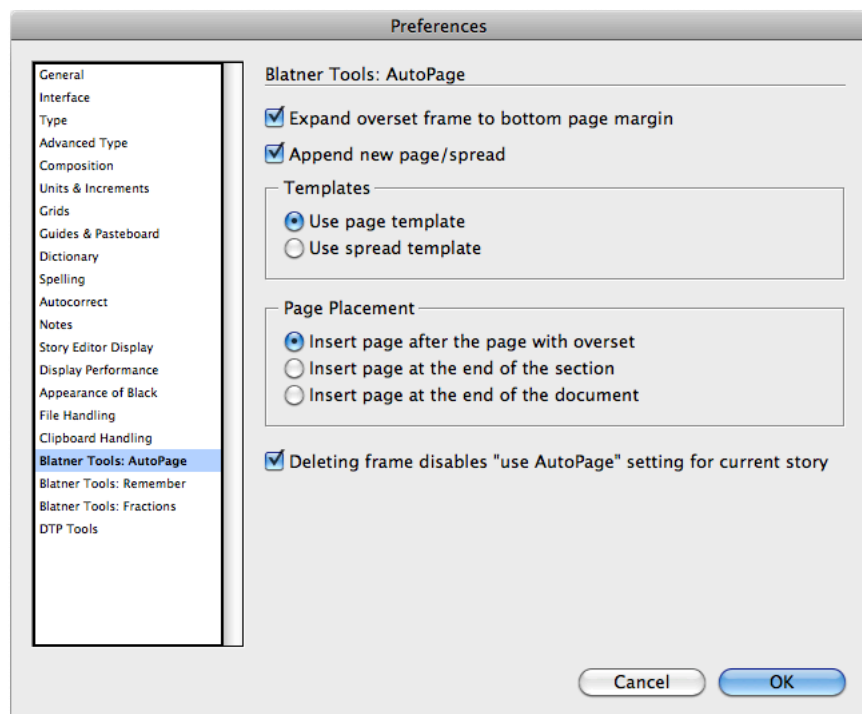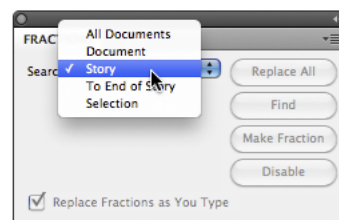

2. Fractions

Will there ever be the day when designers and production artists aren't yearning for a new and better way to deal with fractions? Blatner Tools' Fractions panel takes yet another crack at this problem, and handles fractions in a very thoughtful way, requiring minimal effort on the user's part. The plug-in can automatically swap out fractions—real or simulated—as you type, or you can use the Fractions panel to search a document for Fractions and convert them. No need to create a complicated GREP search for fractions… the search feature does it all.

If a font supports OpenType fractions, that attribute is switched on for text that matches the structure of a fraction. If an older PostScript font contains some basic fraction glyphs (typically a limited few), the typed fraction is replaced with that glyph. If neither of these solutions is available, the fractions are simulated with scale, spacing, and baseline shift adjustments

Figure 2. Blatner Tools' Fractions plug-in produces the best results when "Use OpenType Fraction Style" is checked in its preferences (top). When "Use Fraction Glyph when Available" is checked, you may end up with a mix of proper fractions and simulated fractions (middle). Turning off that option produces only simulated—but consistent—fractions (bottom).

(Figure 2). The simulated fractions look quite good by default, but the Preferences dialog for Blatner Tools' Fractions gives you customizable control over scaling, positioning, and spacing. The plug-in smartly swaps out the standard forward slash for the Fraction Slash glyph in a typeface—a small detail many of us forget when we find ourselves faking fractions—and produces a much better result.

If you activate Replace Fractions as You Type, the feature is quite dynamic. Any manual kerning adjustments you try to make within a fraction are

automatically removed. To fix any spacing between characters in a single fraction, you need to first turn that option off. Once you've kerned to your satisfaction, you can turn the automatic conversion option back on and kerning adjustments are preserved.

If you live and breathe fractions in your work, you may need a more robust solution like i.t.i.p.'s InMath mathematical typesetter (495 Euro) or Dan Rodney's fraction-specific Proper Fraction Pro script ($75 US), but for lightweight fraction needs, Blatner Tools gets the job done quite nicely at—pun intended—a fraction of the price.

3. Text Controls

Text Controls consolidates many options scattered throughout InDesign into one small panel. Nearly everything in Text Controls calls on existing InDesign features, but it does put some convenient character and paragraph attribute settings (size, leading, left/right indent, and space before/after) side-by-side.

Two options in the Text Controls plug-in panel add new text fitting options to InDesign. Scale Text to Fit Frame reduces or increases the point size of all text in a frame to fit its height, and Fit Text to Frame Using Leading reduces or increases the leading to accomplish the same thing. The controls are separate, but if you switch the leading in a given frame to Auto before clicking Scale Text to Fit Frame, that feature effectively adjusts both point size and leading (Figure 3). These fitting tools also work on threaded frames, so quickly getting copy to span an entire story is a one-click process.

IT WAS IN WARWICK CASTLE THAT I CAME ACROSS THE CURIOUS STRANGER WHOM I AM GOING TO TALK ABOUT. He attracted me by three things: his candid simplicity, his marvelous familiarity with ancient armor, and the restfulness of his company—for he did all the talking. We fell together, as modest people will, in the tail of the herd that was being shown through, and he at once began to say things which interested me.

IT WAS IN WARWICK CASTLE THAT I CAME ACROSS THE CURIOUS stranger whom I am going to talk about. He attracted me by three things: his candid simplicity, his marvelous familiarity with ancient armor, and the restfulness of his company—for he did all the talking. We fell together, as modest people will, in the tail of the herd that was being shown through, and he at once began to say things which interested me.

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Figure 3 (above). Text fitting results from Text Controls vary dramatically. Fit Text to Frame Using Leading (left) leaves the point size intact and adjust only line spacing. Scale Text to Fit Frame (middle) affects only point size and can produce less than ideal results when the paragraph uses a specific leading. Auto leading, combined with Scale Text to Fit Frame produces the best result (right). The original paragraph appears at the far right.

Text Controls brings some attributes to the foreground that are otherwise buried in dialog boxes or other panels. Word spacing, letter spacing, and glyph scaling can be nudged tighter or looser in pre-set increments. Other features emancipated from their respective dialogs and panels are on/off toggles for Ignore Text Wrap and Optical Margin Alignment. However, Optical Margin Alignments' related "based on" setting is not available here, so a trip to the Story panel is unavoidable for anything except 12 point text.

Uniting these options in one panel may be handy, but there isn't enough in the Text Controls panel to entice me to un-learn habits of working in other panels, or calling up panels and dialogs with keyboard shortcuts, especially since some of those

dialogs and panels offer greater precision. However, everything in a Blatner Tools panel can be assigned a keyboard shortcut. This is the real pay-off. Even if you never open the Text Controls panel, you can assign keyboard shortcuts to Ignore Text Wrap (not possible in InDesign), as well as to the new copyfitting features and anything else available in the panel.

4. Quality Assurance

This is the must-have feature for anyone who is the last pair of eyes on a file before releasing it. It is the control freak's dream come true. I should know. I am one, and I've used this panel every day since installing it. The Quality Assurance feature scans through your document for things that just shouldn't be there

(Figure 4). What sort of things? For starters, there's local character or paragraph formatting, typographic runts (including threshold adjustments for the number of characters that constitute a runt), trailing white spaces, overset text, empty text frames and text frames partially off the page, blank pages, hidden objects (not objects on hidden layers, but objects entirely obscured by overlapping opaque objects), duplicated objects, objects entirely on the pasteboard, non-printing objects, objects with too narrow a stroke (according to a threshold you set), orphaned brackets, incorrect dash use, objects colored with unnamed colors, and paragraph or character styles defined with fonts that don't appear in the document.
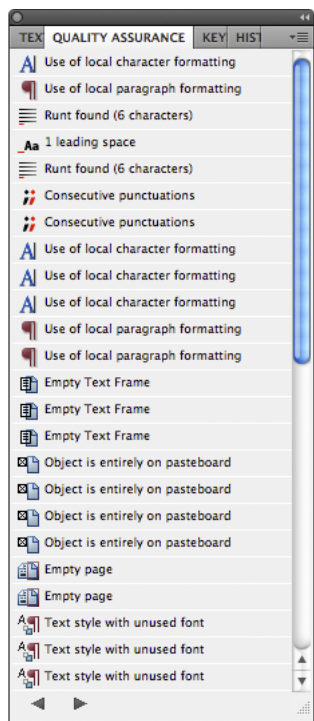

Figure 4 (right)**.** The Quality Assurance panel gives you a complete list of just how bad things are in your current document. Problems with local formatting, leading spaces, punctuation, empty frames and more are listed here. Click on any problem in the list to jump to its location and select it. The list is "live," so it gets shorter with each problem you fix.

Not only does the panel identify and list all instances of those problems in a document, it brings you to and selects the problem text or object when you double-click it in the list. As you deal with and eliminate problems, they instantly disappear from the list. Anyone who has inherited an InDesign document that they need to clean up will find this feature invaluable.

5. Power Styles

As an avowed style junkie, I can't help but love Power Styles. Have you found yourself deep into a project and realized you forgot to establish styles for much of its text and objects? Avoid the painstaking task of defining and applying styles after the fact with Blatner Tools' Create Styles options. This feature scans a document, then creates and applies all the necessary character, paragraph, and object styles from the existing formatting. It does an excellent job of only creating styles that are entirely unique. You won't get multiple bold character styles for every instance of local bold text. The resulting style names can be absurdly long, as they're a continuous string of the style's attributes, but you can easily rename them.

The feature won't generate all styles types at once. You must generate character, paragraph, and object styles from their individual panel menus, and table and cell styles are outside of the plug-in's scope.

That's just one part of Power Styles. For anyone who's ever forgotten what the differences are between the Body Copy and Body Copy 2 styles in their documents, Power Styles also generates comparison

Figure 5. The Power Styles plug-in produces fully-formatted reports that document as many, or as few, of style's attributes as you choose.

reports for any two or more paragraph, character, or object styles you select. The report is first delivered onscreen in a small dialog that, unfortunately, can't be expanded in any direction. Style attributes are in columns and rows for easy comparison, and inherited values in any style are asterisked. You can export and save the report, but only as a tab-delimited text file. Options for exporting to CSV or XLS format would

be more appropriate, since the comparisons are best viewed in a spreadsheet application.

Power Styles also generates comprehensive style reports for all, or just a few, of the styles in your document. Reporting for object, table, and cell styles isn't available, and paragraph style reports don't gather information about GREP Styles, Nested Line Styles, or Bullets and Numbering. Even with these limitations, the reporting feature is a fast, easy way to get a detailed, at-a-glance overview of nearly all of your paragraph and character style attributes without clicking through every area of the style option dialogs.

You can export the report as InDesign Tagged Text, and even launch a style report template that flows the information into a fully formatted InDesign document (Figure 5, previous page). This is particularly useful for users creating layout templates who must provide documentation to whoever works in those templates.

I hope that a future release will also include object, table, and cell styles and be 100% comprehensive in what it reports on for paragraphs.

6. Find Colors/Color Report

InDesign's Find/Change is incredibly powerful, except in one key area: colors and swatches. There are independent ways to search for colors applied to text and objects, but no color-centric find/change feature. Until now, that is.

The Find Colors plug-in is a color-based search and replace function with remarkably granular control over where to find/replace colors (in text, tables, effects, tints, gradients, strokes, and even gaps in strokes). It can also find (but not replace) spot colors in linked images. You can replace colors used in the document with any swatches that exist in the document. While working in the dialog, you can add unnamed colors, but you can't add a new color, which is unfortunate, considering how otherwise all-encompassing it is.

The Find Colors plug-in also generates two types of color reports for a document. One is a visual, in-document report that adds a new layer with numbered shapes over page objects. Those shapes correspond to a key at the bottom of the page on the same layer. The in-document option reports on colors applied in text, objects, and tables. Depending on the number of objects and colors on your page, this option can create a great many callout shapes and a large key (Figure 6). Its primary benefit, though, is that it provides a context that the other color report


Figure 6. The in-document color report adds a layer with numbered shapes on top of each instance of color. The three shapes represent either text, objects and paths, or tables, and each number corresponds to a key at the bottom of the page or spread identifying the various stroke and fill colors.

option—Separate Report Document—doesn't. The Separate Report Document is neater but requires a lot of decoding to get a full sense of the colors' usage in a document. The Separate Report option can list all colors (in use, unused, and unnamed) or just colors that appear in the layout (Figure 7). You can customize that report somewhat by toggling on or off

Figure 8. The Blatner Tools menu provides access to the product's individual panels (grouped under the Blatner Suite submenu), as well as to many of the plug-in's added commands for layers, swatches, shortcuts, etc.
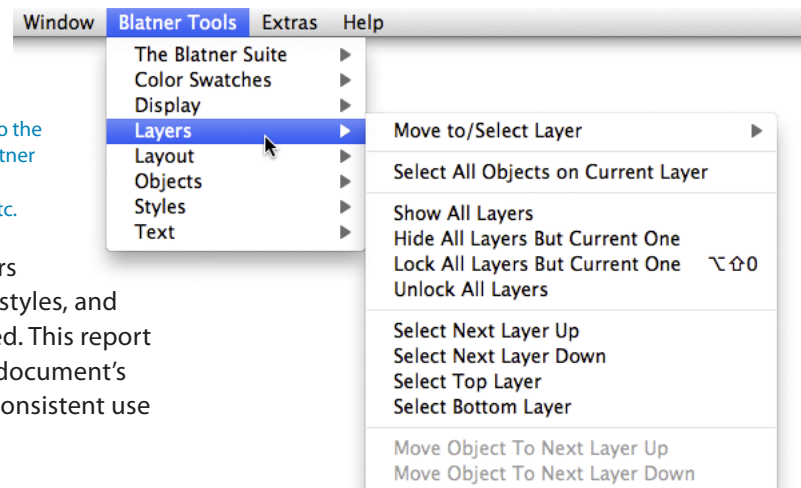
options to list the pages where the colors appear, as well as the object styles, text styles, and table and cell styles in which they're used. This report can be a great overview reference for a document's overall color usage and help identify inconsistent use of color at a glance.

7. Blatner Tools Menu

While the entire suite of plug-ins is packaged as Blatner Tools, one of the plug-ins creates a menu that's also called Blatner Tools. Its features overcome a long-standing InDesign limit, whereby styles can only be assigned shortcuts using numbers on the numeric keypad. It's an unfortunate limitation for all users, but a maddening one for laptop users, who lack extended keyboards.

Blatner Tools enables up to ten unrestricted keyboard shortcut options per style type (paragraph, character, object, cell, and table). While a welcome addition, this is an application-wide setting, not document-specific. As a result, you're bound to have keyboard shortcuts for styles that aren't in your working document, unless you habitually name styles generically, such as Body, Heading 1, Heading 2, Caption, and so on. However, when you're

Figure 7. The external color report provides a cleaner, more swatch-based breakdown of color in the document, but without any of the visual context of the in-document report.

working intensely in a long-document project for an extended period of time, these shortcuts can be a huge time-saver.

The Blatner Tools plug-in also adds shortcut options where none have existed before—namely, for certain Layer panel tasks, and for applying swatches. Layer shortcuts include Select All Objects on Current Layer, Hide All But Current Layer, Move to/Select Layer, and more (Figure 8).

You can assign a Blatner Tools keyboard shortcut to up to 10 layers. Invoking the shortcut moves any selected object to that layer or makes that layer active if no object is selected. These shortcuts are most effective if your typical document has layers such as Transparency, Body Text, Images, Template Items, etc. Unless the layer names are consistent across multiple documents (including case sensitivity), the layer keyboard shortcuts won't work in other documents.

Additional tasks like adding guides, rounding corners, and applying Photoshop clipping paths are included here as well. Some of the features might seem at first to be re-named versions of identical InDesign shortcut options, but some have never been available in InDesign. For example, you might think there's no difference between the Edit Current Paragraph Style (or Edit Current Character Style) shortcut and InDesign's ability to call up the Style Options dialog via a keyboard shortcut. But if the paragraph (or character) styles panel isn't open when you invoke InDesign's built-in shortcut, the result is a dialog for a new paragraph (or character) style. The Blatner Tools shortcut calls up exactly what it says: the dialog of options for the style currently in use wherever your cursor happens to be. That's several keystrokes and clicks saved every time you want to modify a style.

8. Keyboard Shortcuts Pro
DTP Tools released Keyboard Shortcuts (KBSC) as a free, advertising-based plug-in in 2007. The Pro version included with Blatner Tools adds the ability to export a shortcut list to a fully formatted two-column InDesign layout. KBSC Pro's export function can filter the shortcut list to include only one product

Figure 9. InDesign's Show Set… function in the Keyboard Shortcuts dialog only generates a bland text file listing every keyboard shortcut in the current set (left). Blatner Tools' Keyboard Shortcuts plug-in produces an easy-to-read, fully-formatted InDesign document (right) of the current set, an inactive set, or all sets. It can also filter out unassigned shortcuts.

area's worth of shortcuts, assigned shortcuts only, or a handful of other choices. This adds up to a customized printable reference for your keyboard shortcuts (Figure 9) in only four clicks of the mouse.

The Keyboard Shortcuts panel allows you to switch the current set of shortcuts on the fly; add, delete, or load a keyboard shortcut set; assign new shortcuts; and remove new shortcuts without ever going to the Keyboard Shortcuts dialog. The panel

also goes beyond the capabilities of that dialog in several ways: A search field lets you quickly access the desired command without scrolling through a lengthy list, or exporting a text-based list to search through. You can also filter out unassigned shortcuts when searching.

Keyboard shortcut enthusiasts will love that by elevating a number of options from dialog boxes into the Blatner Tools panels (i.e., Highlight Custom

```
Mike's KBSC.txt                                         Page 1 of 28
Printed: 1/29/10 9:28:25 AM                   Printed For: Michael Murphy

Shortcut Set : Mike's KBSC

Product area : Application Menu
    About InDesign... --- [none defined]
    Configure Plug-ins... --- [none defined]
    Hide InDesign --- [none defined]
    Preferences: Advanced Type... --- [none defined]
    Preferences: Appearance of Black... --- [none defined]
    Preferences: Autocorrect... --- [none defined]
    Preferences: Clipboard Handling... --- [none defined]
    Preferences: Composition... --- [none defined]
    Preferences: Dictionary... --- [none defined]
    Preferences: Display Performance... --- [none defined]
    Preferences: File Handling... --- [none defined]
    Preferences: General... --- Default: Cmd+K
    Preferences: Grids... --- [none defined]
    Preferences: Guides & Pasteboard... --- [none defined]
    Preferences: Interface... --- [none defined]
    Preferences: Notes... --- [none defined]
    Preferences: Spelling... --- [none defined]
    Preferences: Story Editor Display... --- [none defined]
    Preferences: Type... --- [none defined]
    Preferences: Units & Increments... --- [none defined]

Product area : File Menu
    Browse in Bridge... --- Default: Opt+Cmd+O
    Browse in New Window... --- [none defined]
    Check In... --- [none defined]
    Close --- Default: Cmd+W
    Document Presets: Define... --- [none defined]
    Document Setup... --- Default: Opt+Cmd+P
    Export for Digital Editions... --- [none defined]
    Export for Dreamweaver... --- [none defined]
    Export... --- Default: Cmd+E
    File Info... --- Default: Opt+Shift+Cmd+I
    Import XML... --- [none defined]
    New: Book... --- [none defined]
    New: Document from Template... --- [none defined]
    New: Document... --- Default: Cmd+N
    New: Library... --- [none defined]
    Open... --- Default: Cmd+O
    PDF Export Presets: Define... --- [none defined]
    Place... --- Default: Cmd+D
    Preflight... --- [none defined]
    Print Booklet... --- [none defined]
    Print Presets: Define... --- [none defined]
    Print... --- Default: Cmd+P
    Revert --- [none defined]
    Save --- Default: Cmd+S
    Save As... --- Default: Shift+Cmd+S
    Save a Copy... --- Default: Opt+Cmd+S
    User... --- [none defined]
    Versions... --- [none defined]
    XML... --- [none defined]

Product area : Edit Menu
    Assign Profiles... --- [none defined]
```

Keyboard Shortcuts

Shortcut Set: Mike's KBSC

Product area: Apple Menu

Product area: Blatner Tools
Add Horizontal Guide	Default: Ctrl+Opt+H
Add Vertical Guide	Default: Ctrl+Opt+V
Edit Current Character Style	Default: Ctrl+C
Edit Current Paragraph Style	Default: Ctrl+P
Highlight Custom Tracking/Kerning	Default: Ctrl+Opt+-
Highlight HJ Violations	Default: Ctrl+Opt+J
Ignore Text Wrap	Default: Ctrl+I
Layer 01	Default: Ctrl+Opt+B
Layer 02	Default: Ctrl+Opt+T
Lock All Layers But Current One	Default: Opt+Shift+0
Paragraph Style 01	Text: Ctrl+1
Paragraph Style 02	Default: Ctrl+Cmd+B

Product area: Edit Menu
Copy	Default: Cmd+C
Cut	Default: Cmd+X
Deselect All	Default: Shift+Cmd+A
Duplicate	Default: Opt+Shift+Cmd+D
Edit in Story Editor	Default: Cmd+Y
Find/Change...	Default: Cmd+F
Paste	Default: Cmd+V
Paste Into	Default: Opt+Cmd+V
Paste in Place	Default: Opt+Shift+Cmd+V
Paste without Formatting	Default: Shift+Cmd+V
Quick Apply...	Default: Cmd+Return
Redo Fit Text to Frame	Default: Shift+Cmd+Z
Select All	Default: Cmd+A
Step and Repeat...	Default: Opt+Cmd+U
Undo Clear	Default: Cmd+Z

Product area: File Menu
Browse in Bridge...	Default: Opt+Cmd+O
Document Setup...	Default: Opt+Cmd+P
Export...	Default: Cmd+E
File Info...	Default: Opt+Shift+Cmd+I
Open...	Default: Cmd+O

Place...	Default: Cmd+D
Print...	Default: Cmd+P
Save	Default: Cmd+S
Save As...	Default: Shift+Cmd+S
Save a Copy...	Default: Opt+Cmd+S

Product area: Help Menu
InDesign Help...	Default: Help

Product area: Layout Menu
First Page	Default: Shift+Cmd+Page Up
Go Back	Default: Cmd+Page Up
Go Forward	Default: Cmd+Page Down
Go to Page...	Default: Cmd+J
Last Page	Default: Shift+Cmd+Page Down
Next Page	Default: Shift+Page Down, Text: Shift+Page Down
Next Spread	Default: Opt+Page Down
Previous Page	Default: Shift+Page Up, Text: Shift+Page Up
Previous Spread	Default: Opt+Page Up

Product area: Object Editing
Decrease scale by 1%	Default: Cmd+,
Decrease scale by 5%	Default: Opt+Cmd+,
Increase scale by 1%	Default: Cmd+.
Increase scale by 5%	Default: Opt+Cmd+.
Nudge down	Default: Down Arrow
Nudge down 1/10	Default: Shift+Cmd+Down Arrow
Nudge down 1/10 duplicate	Default: Opt+Shift+Cmd+Down Arrow
Nudge down duplicate	Default: Opt+Down Arrow
Nudge down x10	Default: Shift+Down Arrow
Nudge down x10 duplicate	Default: Opt+Shift+Down Arrow
Nudge left	Default: Left Arrow
Nudge left 1/10	Default: Shift+Cmd+Left Arrow
Nudge left 1/10 duplicate	Default: Opt+Shift+Cmd+Left Arrow
Nudge left duplicate	Default: Opt+Left Arrow
Nudge left x10	Default: Shift+Left Arrow
Nudge left x10 duplicate	Default: Opt+Shift+Left Arrow

Kerning/Tracking, Ignore Text Wrap), more InDesign features than ever can be invoked by keyboard shortcuts. Get a good look at the panel in Figure 10.

9. Script Manager/Extras Menu
There are a handful of InDesign scripts I consider invaluable, but navigating through the Scripts panel to invoke them is tedious, and I tend to forget that scripts can also be assigned keyboard shortcuts. That's where the Extras menu comes in. With Blatner Tools, you can add any of InDesign's pre-installed scripts—and any scripts you may have downloaded yourself—to the Extras menu and give them menu-level prominence. You can even give a script a more logical name. It's a simple implementation that makes calling upon scripts a more user-friendly experience.
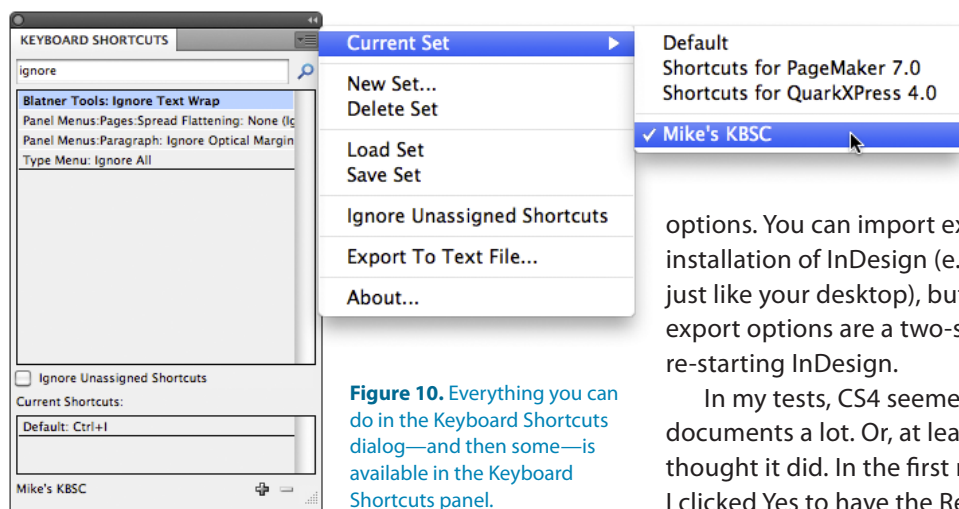
Figure 10. Everything you can do in the Keyboard Shortcuts dialog—and then some—is available in the Keyboard Shortcuts panel.

This is also where you'll find third-party scripts that ship and install with Blatner Tools. They add functionality ranging from small single tasks (e.g., Delete All Images, which does what its name implies) to major extensions of the application like Layout Zones (see page 20 of the August/September 2009 issue of *InDesign Magazine*). Although developed by reputable contributors to the InDesign community, DTP Tools' tech support won't handle any problems these scripts may cause, so run them with caution.

10. Remember
Under certain circumstances, InDesign forgets things; specifically, its recently opened documents and preferences. You don't have to worry about that with the Blatner Tools Remember plug-in, which activated by default. It backs up your list of recent document, InDesign preferences, autocorrect settings, color settings, workspaces, glyph sets, keyboard shortcut sets, and menu customization options. You can import exported sets into another installation of InDesign (e.g., to configure your laptop just like your desktop), but both the import and export options are a two-step process that requires re-starting InDesign.

In my tests, CS4 seemed to forget recent documents a lot. Or, at least, the Remember plug-in thought it did. In the first release I tested, each time I clicked Yes to have the Remember plug-in restore

my list of recent documents, the application crashed. However, the 1.0.1 release seems to have fixed the issue, and any forgotten settings were successfully restored. Users experiencing crashes should check to be sure they're running the latest version.

11. History Lite
DTP Tools' $55 standalone History plug-in is the basis for the "lite" History panel in Blatner Tools, which lists all tasks in order of execution in a current InDesign session. You can jump back to any point in the list and save a copy of the document as it was in that state, then click back to the last thing you did and keep working, without having to use the Undo command and lose any work you've done. Unlike the full version, the document's history doesn't last beyond the current InDesign session. Once you save and close, that history's gone. If you already use the full History plug-in, installing Blatner Tools will not overwrite the more full-featured version.

12. Tip of the Day
The Blatner Tips plug-in has been around for a long time for free. It appears when the application launches, displaying a handy InDesign tip. The version included with Blatner Tools is the same plug-in, but without advertising, and you can turn it off at any time.

A Few Nits to Pick
The Add to Blatner Tools Menu option appears at the top of the context menu when you right-click on a style, swatch, or layer name. Years of well-established

habits have trained my hand, eye, and mind to expect Edit "Style Name…" to be the first option in that menu when I'm working with styles, and I find the Blatner Tools option's placement above all others to be intrusive for a plug-in.

On a related note, the 10 Blatner Tools shortcut slots available for styles, swatches, and layer commands are far better suited for repeat and common workflows within a set of existing standards (e.g., corporate typography and color restrictions), and documents with a common layer structure. If the shortcutted style, swatch, or layer doesn't exist in a document, the shortcut does nothing. Also, deleting an assigned shortcut altogether requires first re-assigning the shortcut to something that does exist in the current file (or creating a new style, swatch or, layer with the same name), then removing that shortcut.

Once Blatner Tools is installed, it adds two new menus, five panels, roughly a dozen new commands to various existing InDesign menus, and numerous panel menu and context menu options. I had assumed that most of the suite's features would be available from the Blatner Tools menu, but they're not. For instance,

under **Blatner Tools** > **Styles**, I might expect to see the Create Paragraph Style Report… option, but that's in the Paragraph Styles panel menu or the Type menu. The Blatner Tools menu only includes certain features, along with the 10 custom shortcuts available for swatches, layers, etc.. This makes figuring out where to find the controls for different plug-in features difficult unless you really dig around or spend some time with the product's documentation.

Speaking of documentation, there's no offline help installed with the plug-in. Choosing **Help** > **Blatner Tools Help…** from within InDesign takes you to the DTP Tools Web site. The documentation on the site is generally good, but there are some gaps (e.g., no information on how to remove Blatner Tools menu shortcuts). However, DTP Tools' response to e-mail inquiries was excellent in my experience.

The Bottom Line
There's a lot here—possibly too much for some users—but the same can be said of InDesign itself. Like the application, the Blatner Tools plug-in suite includes features that many users will find essential,

and others they may never use at all. I've already found a permanent home in my InDesign workspace for several of the suite's welcome additional functionality. Some features—like Quality Assurance and Power Styles—are robust and valuable enough to sell as standalone products, but they're just part of a much larger suite that, at $149, is worth the price even if you use only some of its features.

What's most impressive about the Blatner Tools suite of plug-ins is how well thought-out it is, from the common problems included in the Quality Assurance panel, to the exploitation of INX-based templates to produce style reports within the application itself. It's a reflection of David Blatner's long experience with InDesign and other page-layout programs.

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Michael Murphy is an award-winning art director with extensive graphic design and design technology experience. The author of *Adobe InDesign CS4 Styles: How to Create Better, Faster Text and Layouts* and an Adobe Certified Expert in InDesign, Michael is also a trainer and speaker. Contact him at info@theindesigner.com.