

Mike Nelson – SV article

VMware Fusion 4 Overview

As many know, I am a big VMware Fusion user, going all the way back to 2007 and version 1.1, and I use it on almost a daily basis in my work as a Virtualization Administrator and consultant. VMware finally rolled out their next major version of Fusion a few weeks ago and I, of course, was right there waiting to hit the Purchase button when it went live. I've had some time to work with it and thought I would pass on some of my thoughts and experiences, good and bad, that I've had with the new release during my upgrade. An upcoming article will go a bit deeper and cover some of the tips and tricks that I have found using it.

A few months ago I wrote an article about my dilemma over switching from Fusion to Parallels Mac product, then at version 6. Parallels has also recently released a new version 7 that I have yet to look at, so my opinions and devotion to Fusion may change once I review it. But, I'm doubting that outcome for now given what I've seen in this new release of Fusion.

To start off, I have two Mac's – one fairly recent iMac and the other an older non-unibody MacBook Pro. The MacBook pro is my diehard workhorse that I use almost daily, whereas the iMac is more for bookwork and family use. The iMac has been updated to OSX Lion, while the MacBook Pro is still at the Snow Leopard release. I knew I had to upgrade to the latest Fusion version since the virtual machines on my iMac were having all kinds of issues when I upgraded to Lion while still running Fusion 3.x. They were pretty much unusable with the Beach Ball forever spinning. To VMware's defense, they acknowledged the issue with Fusion version 3.x and Lion, and also recommended that users not upgrade to the new OS. Being the geek that I am, of course I could not wait to upgrade my OS, so I fell into that category of users who had to sit and wait for a fix from VMware. The MacBook Pro obviously had no issues in my upgrade since it was still at Leopard.

When I upgraded the iMac to Fusion 4, it went almost seamlessly, except for one issue which was easy to fix. Fusion showed my virtual machines when it started up, but claimed that the files were missing. I knew that I had them stored in a directory off the root of the drive, so I simply pointed the VM configuration to the file location and Fusion said all was well again with the world. I'm not sure where it was looking for them, but I got it fixed and if that was the only issue I was going to have, it was a pretty good upgrade in my book. Just as expected, the MacBook Pro had no issues during the upgrade.

After the upgrades, there were a few things I noticed right away with the changes to the look and feel of Fusion, specifically the Virtual Machine Library. The interfaces have been redesigned to look more like OSX Lion in the sense that they appear cleaner, if not more basic in nature. I, like some other MAC users, don't really prefer the new look as it tends to mask more of the advanced dials and knobs that geeks

like me like to tweak. But, this thinking of the UI design goes right along with Lion and is one of the biggest complaints by hardened MAC users. While I see the obvious benefit to the novice MAC user, it does leave veteran users wanting the old Leopard interfaces back.

One of the flagship features touted by VMware for this release is the ability to virtualize the OSX operating system itself as a virtual machine. Since I still don't feel the need to upgrade my MacBook Pro to Lion (and lose all my dials and knobs), I decided to try and run Lion in a VM on it. In order to do this, you must follow [a specific set of instructions provided by VMware](#) and you must also have the Lion OS installer. While that may prove to be a challenge for some, since Lion is no longer sold as a physical media or disk image download, you can readily [find instructions on the Internet](#) on how to extract the installer and save it to your drive. So, I jumped in and started the install. By following the steps exactly as VMware provided, I was able to start a virtual Lion machine in less than an hour. It ran very well, with only the occasional jagged screen movement and slow reaction to mouse gestures.

Some of the other things that I tried were the new Mission Control and Launchpad integration on Lion. While I see no real value in using those features in my daily use, it worked well on my family iMac and my son thought it was pretty "cool". On the iMac, I did experience an issue when trying to make a Windows 7 virtual machine full screen and then minimize it, as it caused my arrow keys and mouse movements to stop within the VM. I could move everywhere else, but I could not get the movements back in the VM and had to revert to the old keyboard shortcuts to get it shutdown and restarted. That was annoying and it appears that after trying to find a solution for this, I saw [many other Fusion 4 users are having the same issue](#). Besides that issue, I also had a problem with a USB stick and getting two VM's to recognize it once it was inserted. I never had this issue in version 3.x. Plugging it back in several times finally gets it recognized, but I have to do it every time, which is really a pain.

One of the features that I have used quite a bit in version 3.x of Fusion was the small virtual disk mount utility that VMware provided called VMDKMounter. I would use this to mount virtual disk files and navigate through the filesystem and copy files to and from VM's without the need to power them up. Well, this "feature" is no longer supplied in version 4, and while it is not really a deal-breaker for me, it sure is one less notch in Fusion's belt in my mind. Parallels for MAC has it and VMware should step up and bring it back.

As mentioned before, I'll be back soon with a more in-depth review of Fusion 4 and I will probably compare some of the things I find to the new Parallels 7 release, as I plan on installing that and giving it a go. VMware appears to have 2 new releases of bug fixes since the initial version 4 launch (now at version 4.0.2, with 4.0.3 almost out), which some folks think is due to them rushing it out the door to compete with Parallels 7 (which I somewhat agree with). For now, Fusion is pretty much solid, although a bit quirky and more basic, on my Mac's and is still the best I have ever used.

