



Comparing Electronic Cutting Machines: Cricut Explore™ and Silhouette CAMEO®

The personal electronic cutting machine revolutionized the crafting and home DIY industry. Finally, a consumer could easily and automatically cut out shapes from vinyl, iron-on, and cardstock to fabric, thin metals, and stencil material. The introduction of the Cricut® cutting machine gave consumers the freedom to create beautiful craft projects exactly the way they wanted.

Since then, several companies entered the market with cutting machines of their own. Today, Cricut® and Silhouette are two of the leading players—and Cricut® has just introduced the Cricut Explore™, their most advanced machine to date. While the basic functionality of the Cricut Explore™ and the Silhouette CAMEO® is similar, there are key differences between the two systems.

The machine

The design of any product is a huge part of the overall experience. Because personal cutting machines are large investments, quality is also a very important factor for selecting and recommending a specific brand. In a study of over 1600 craft consumers, 80% agreed that it is very important that the machine “lasts a long time”.

Machine aesthetics



When designing the new Cricut Explore™ machine, the team focused on perfecting the machine details. The simple and sleek machine design is approachable—something many consumers believe would fit nicely into their craft space. The machine is robust but not too heavy, giving consumers the feeling that it is a high-quality product.

Other features of the Cricut Explore™ highlight the attention to detail, including an integrated tool cup on the top and two storage compartments located in the machine doors. One compartment has specific space to hold extra blades, a blade housing, and an accessory housing, while the other can store Cricut® tools or other crafting materials.



Silhouette positions the Silhouette CAMEO® as follows:

“Like a home printer, it plugs into your PC or MAC® with a simple USB cable. However, instead of printing, the CAMEO uses a small blade to cut your designs into a wide array of materials.”

This categorizes the machine as a computer accessory—and its design reflects that. The Silhouette CAMEO® design is functional in nature, and many consumers believe it resembles a piece of office equipment. When removing the machine from the box, consumers may notice that the machine is very light. The blade housing is plastic and may need to be changed if the user wishes to switch between paper and fabric.

Design software

With both the Cricut Explore™ and the Silhouette CAMEO®, a user designs on a computer and then connects their machine when it is time to cut. Both systems include free basic software.

Installed vs. web-based

The Silhouette software, Silhouette Studio®, must be downloaded and installed on a computer. The basic software is free while a more fully-featured version of Silhouette Studio® is available for purchase for \$49.99. Because users need to install the software, all projects and images are saved on the computer’s hard drive. With this approach, there is a risk of losing projects in the event of a computer crash.

The free Cricut Explore™ software, Cricut Design Space™, is offered in one version with full functionality. A user simply installs an Internet plugin to start designing and cutting projects.

Because Cricut Design Space™ is web based, when a user logs in, they automatically open the most up-to-date version, including the newest software features, professionally designed projects, and Cricut® images and fonts. Cricut Design Space™ also stores every project and all images in the cloud, allowing users to access them from any computer. More and more companies are offering services through the cloud, from email providers to photo storage, because of this ability to access data from multiple points and devices. It also lowers the risk of data loss.



Design options

Silhouette Studio® allows users to design projects without being connected to the Internet (using images that they have already downloaded); an Internet connection is required to search for or purchase images in the Silhouette Online Store. Because Cricut Design Space™ is web based, an Internet connection is required to design projects, as well as to browse and purchase images.

Content flexibility

Both the Cricut® and Silhouette online stores have extensive libraries of professionally designed content, including licensed images. The Cricut® Image Library contains images from Disney®, Pixar®, Anna Griffin®, and others. The Silhouette Online Store offers licensed images from DC Comics™ and Harry Potter™, among others.

The most significant difference in the image libraries is how consumers use and purchase images. With Cricut®, a user can select an image from the extensive library and design with it before purchase. Consumers are only required to purchase the image when they are ready to cut or write their design. This allows users to make an image or font work with their project before committing to a purchase.

The Silhouette Online Store requires users to purchase and download any image or font before they can start designing their project.

Uploading images

Cricut® makes it free for users to upload and cut all files types that work with the software including .jpg, .png, .bmp, .gif, .svg, and .dxf files.

Silhouette allows users to upload and cut files including .jpg, .bmp, .wmf, .dxf, .gsd/gst, .png, and .gif for free, but requires that consumers purchase an upgraded software package for \$49.99 in order to import .svg files.

Font choices

Many consumers integrate text into most, if not all, of their DIY projects. Therefore, consumers want a range of fonts to choose from. Cricut® offers over 300 custom-designed font families. Most Cricut® fonts include a bold and italic version of the font as well as a writable version that mimics a handwritten look as part of the capabilities of Cricut Explore™. In addition to purchasing Cricut® fonts, users can cut or write the fonts already installed on their computers for free.



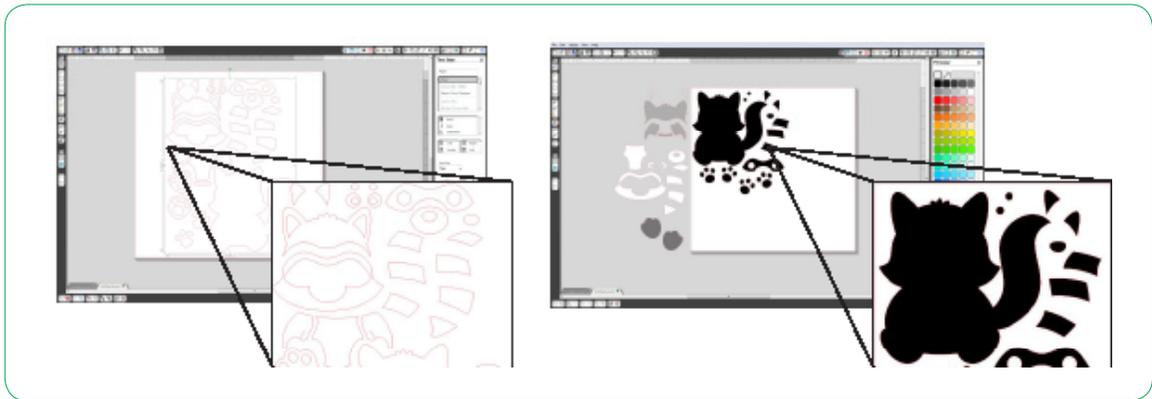
Silhouette users can either download one of over 200 Silhouette fonts available through the Silhouette Online Store or use their system fonts available on their computer. However, none of the Silhouette fonts feature single-stroke designs especially for writing nor do they include bold and italic versions of the fonts.

The user experience

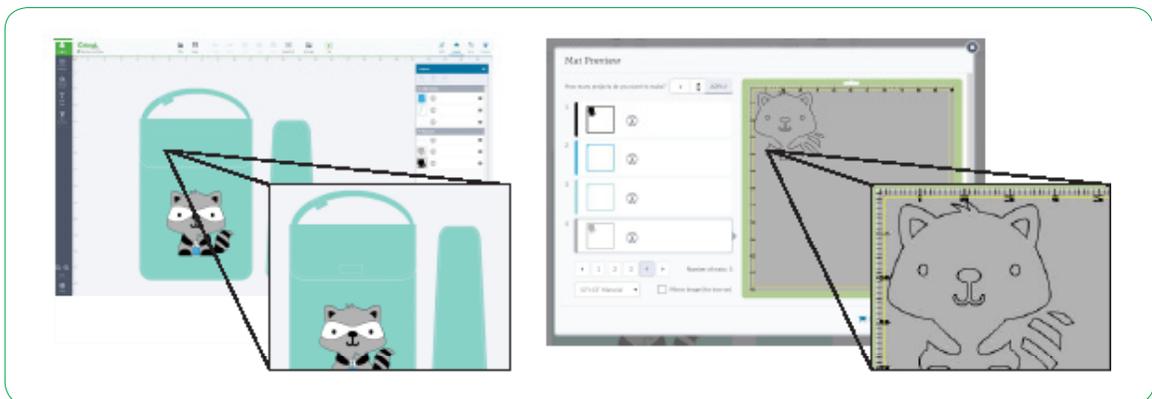
While the Cricut Explore™ and Silhouette CAMEO® share some features, there are significant differences in the overall product experience, from design to creation.

The design experience

The Silhouette Studio® software has users add designs to a “virtual cutting mat,” manipulate images on the mat, and then cut each component of the image separately. Layered images are added to the mat as a group. A consumer then needs to ungroup the image, separate out the layers, and remove the irrelevant layers from the cut area for each paper color to be cut.



With the Cricut Design Space™ software, consumers no longer lay cuts out on a virtual cutting mat. Instead, they can design on a “canvas” that mimics the final project (a t-shirt, a banner, etc.). Once the design is finished, the image layers are automatically prepared so a consumer can simply start cutting.





Users can also bridge the gap between inspiration and creation with Make It Now™ projects. A consumer can browse Cricut Design Space™ to get inspired, select a project to make, and see details including time required, project difficulty, materials used, and assembly instructions. The consumer can then make the project in just a few clicks.

Cutting and writing

The Silhouette CAMEO® offers a drawing option simply by replacing the blade housing with a sketch pen.

The Cricut Explore™ machine was designed with a dual carriage that holds both a pen and a cutting blade. This dual carriage allows consumers to cut a shape and write inside that shape in one step. The dual carriage will also accept a scoring stylus, allowing a user to cut a shape and score a fold line in one pass.

Print then cut

This function refers to a machine that is able to take an image printed separately, on a home printer, and then cut out the image using marks that the machine understands.

The Silhouette CAMEO® includes this functionality out of the box. The Cricut Explore™ machine has an LED scanner built into the dual carriage to enable a print then cut function. This function will be activated with a software change in the third quarter of 2014.

Ease of use

To cut different material types, the Silhouette CAMEO® requires users to remove the blade and make manual adjustments to the settings. The Cricut Explore™ features the Smart Set™ dial, which automatically changes blade pressure for seven most commonly used materials.

Eliminating manual adjustments dramatically reduces the number of steps it takes to make projects (for more details, see “Cricut Explore™: World’s Easiest Design and Cut System”).

Value

The Cricut Explore™ and the Silhouette CAMEO® both have an MSRP of \$299, but the cost of the machine itself is only part of the equation. Consumers should also consider the cost of images and accessories.



Images

Both Cricut® and Silhouette provide consumers with the flexibility to purchase single images, most of which are priced at \$0.99 each. Cricut® also sells image cartridges—sets of themed images which are available at an even greater value (often as low as \$0.11 each.)

Silhouette offers an image subscription option. The Basic subscription allows users to download 25 regularly priced images per month (about 300 a year) for an annual fee of \$113.89. With full use of the subscription, consumers pay \$0.38 per regularly priced image.

Cricut® also offers a subscription option. For an annual fee of \$99.99, consumers gain unlimited access to over 25,000 selected images and over 200 fonts. The cost per image with the Cricut® subscription is less than \$0.01—or 38 times less than the cost per image with a Silhouette subscription. If a consumer prefers a more flexible payment plan, the Cricut® subscription can be accessed for \$9.99 per month. This monthly subscription can be canceled at any time.

Accessories

Consumers also must consider the ongoing costs associated with cutting blades and mats. Cricut® blades are 65% less expensive than Silhouette blades (Cricut® sells two blades for \$9.99 while Silhouette blades are \$12.99 each). Similarly, Cricut® StandardGrip cutting mats are 55% less expensive than Silhouette mats—Cricut® sells two mats for \$12.99 while Silhouette mats are \$14.99 each.

Cricut® has also developed an iPad® app and a Bluetooth® adapter, which allows consumers to create Make It Now™ projects on an iPad®. Currently, Silhouette does not offer any wireless adapter accessories.

Conclusion

Cricut Explore™ offers a more intuitive design experience, easier cutting of a wide range of materials, one step cutting and writing, free SVG uploads, and flexible access to a larger subscription library at a fraction of the cost.

All trademarks and registered trademarks are the property of their respective owners. The term “images” as used herein comprises digital images and fonts. The Bluetooth® adapter will be available second quarter of 2014. Information contained in this paper was verified in Feb. 2014.



Features	Cricut Explore	Silhouette Cameo
Machine Details		
Size	22.2"W x 6"H x 7"D	20.9"W x 5"H x 6.5"D
Weight	10.9lbs	6.5 lbs
Replaceable blade	Yes	No
Blade setting (pressure & depth)	One click Smart Set™ dial	Remove blade and manually adjust depth; select pressure on computer
Speed setting	Automatically adjusts to image	Manual selection on the computer
Carriage head	Dual	Single
Integrated storage	Yes	No

Pricing		
MSRP	\$299	\$299
Single Image Pricing	Starting at \$0.99	Starting at \$0.99
Discounts for Image Sets	Yes	Yes
Subscription model	Unlimited access to 25K+ images and 200+ fonts	Download 25 regularly priced images per month
Monthly subscription	\$9.99/month - cancel anytime	\$9.99/month - cancel after 3 months
Annual subscription	\$99.99/year	\$113.89/year
Design before you buy	Yes	No
Free images with machine	100 images, 2 fonts 2-week free access to 25K+ images	50 images \$10 download card

Cutting		
Cutting range using mats	From 0.25" to 23.5"	From 0.25" to 24"
Matless vinyl cutting	No	Yes
Maximum materials thickness	Up to 1mm - most materials Up to 2mm - less dense materials	Up to 0.8mm



Software		
Design on the computer	Yes	Yes
Software type	Web based	Downloadable
Updating software	Automatic	Manually download update
Use own images on any computer	Yes	No
Access projects from any computer	Yes	No

Image & Fonts		
License image partnerships	Disney®, Sesame Street®, Pixar® & more	DC Comics™, Harry Potter™ & more
Use system fonts on your computer	Yes	Yes
Upload own images	Yes	Yes
FREE images to upload	.jpg, .gif, .png, .bmp, .svg, .dxf	.jpg, .gif, .png, .bmp, .wmf, .dxf, .gsd/.gst
Cost to upload SVG files	Free	Requires \$49.99 software upgrade

Steps to complete designs		
Cut & score a fold line	8 steps	12 steps
Cut & write a message	8 steps	21 steps
Cut a 5 layered image	19 steps	33 steps

Key features		
Make It Now™ projects	Yes	No
Canvas for project visualization	Yes	No
Smart Set™ dial	Yes	No
Dual carriage	Yes	No
Try before you buy images	Yes	No
Wireless Bluetooth® connectivity	Yes - Cricut® adapter required	No
Print then cut	Available third quarter 2014	Yes