



Shipping the Easel

What it would mean to hand someone else the editor, and the four things standing in the way

Advertising is one act. Distributing, supporting, and paying for it are three others.

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Abstract. Easel is a 4,458-line terminal coding interface with no dependencies, 56 passing tests, and three days of history. It works. The question asked of it is whether typing `easel` at the Aesthetic.Computer prompt should now advertise a command-line tool, and whether that tool should be shipped. This report separates four acts that the word *shipping* routinely conflates — advertising, distributing, supporting, and funding — and finds that they have entirely different costs and entirely different blockers. Advertising is a nine-line change to `prompt.mjs` with an established pattern beside it. Distributing is blocked outright: the licence reads *all rights reserved*, and `package.json` carries `private: true` with no `bin` field, so `npm publish` would refuse before any policy question arose. Supporting is constrained by a fact easy to miss from inside the fleet — Easel is not self-sufficient. It drives the `claude` or `codex` binary over `stdio`, so a stranger who installs it and holds neither subscription gets a working interface attached to nothing. Funding is, as of today, the one dimension already solved: the identity gate and per-handle budget landed this morning, and without them a distributed Easel would have pointed strangers at inference Aesthetic.Computer pays for. We recommend advertising now and distributing later, and give the concrete shape of both. Registry facts are reported as measured: `easel` is taken on npm by an unrelated package last touched in 2022, while `ac-easel`, `aesthetic-easel`, and the `@aesthetic.computer` scope are free.

1. THE QUESTION

Typing `easel` at the Aesthetic.Computer prompt today does nothing. There is no piece by that name, and the word falls through to the ordinary not-found path. The proposal is that it should instead introduce the command-line tool of the same name, and that the tool should be shipped.

Those are two requests, and the second one is four. This report takes them apart, because they have different costs, different blockers, and — the point of separating them — different answers.

2. WHAT IS BEING SHIPPED

Easel is the terminal interface at `easel/` in this repository. It renders its own conversation, streaming, tool activity, interruption, and approvals, and drives an engine bridge — a subprocess on `stdio` — beneath that. Two bridges ship: one speaking the headless Claude protocol, one speaking `codex app-server`. It is 4,458 lines across sixteen modules with **zero npm dependencies**, and 56 tests pass in under a second.

It is also three days old, and was a separate git repository with no remote until this morning [Scudder, 2026]. That is not an argument against shipping it. It is con-

text for how much of the surface below has ever been exercised by anyone who is not its author.

3. FOUR ACTS, NOT ONE

3.1 Advertise

Make `easel` at the prompt say the tool exists. The pattern is already in the codebase: `prompt.mjs` carries a branch for `menuband` that jumps to an external URL, and neighbouring branches for `desktop`, `app`, and `electron`. An `easel` branch is the same shape.

This is cheap, reversible, and does not require any of the three acts below. Crucially, it can point at a page that explains what Easel is and what it needs — including that it needs a vendor subscription — without offering a download at all.

3.2 Distribute

Put the code where a stranger can install it. This is blocked, twice.

The licence. `easel/LICENSE` reads *all rights reserved*, and grants no right to use, copy, modify, or distribute without prior written permission. Publishing it anywhere public contradicts the file in its own directory. This is a decision to make, not a bug to fix, but it must

Assumption	Where, and what it costs
/bin/ps	slab-session.mjs reads the tty this way. BSD/macOS path; absent on many Linux images.
Slab markers	Sessions publish to ~/.local/share/slab. Harmless where absent, but dead code for everyone outside the fleet.
Openers	open / xdg-open / start are handled, so the browser login is portable.
Node floor	Unrecorded. Top-level await and node:test imply a modern runtime; nothing states which.

Table 1: Portability surface. None of these is hard to fix; all of them are currently untested off the fleet, because there has been nowhere else to run it.

be made before anything else in this subsection matters.

The manifest. package.json carries "private": true, which makes npm publish refuse by design, and has no bin field, so nothing would be linked onto a PATH even if it published [npm, Inc., 2026]. There is also no engines floor recorded, though the code uses top-level await and node:test.

3.3 Support

Be the place people arrive when it does not work. This is where the least-visible constraint lives, and it is the one this report most wants to surface.

Easel is not self-sufficient. Both bridges spawn a vendor binary — claude or codex — and sign in with that vendor CLI’s own credentials, already on the machine. This is an elegant design from inside a fleet where those binaries are always present. From outside, it means a stranger who installs Easel and holds neither subscription gets a correct, well-tested, attractively coloured interface attached to nothing at all.

The audience for Easel as it stands is therefore not “people who want to make pieces.” It is the strictly smaller set of people who *already pay Anthropic or OpenAI* and would like a different editor in front of that subscription. That set may be worth serving. It is not the set the word *shipping* usually implies, and the advertising copy has to say so in the first sentence or the support burden is people reporting that nothing happens.

Table 1 records what else assumes the machine it was written on.

3.4 Fund

Pay for what the installed copies consume. This is the dimension that was genuinely dangerous a day ago and is not any more.

A shipped Easel signs in through Aesthetic.Computer’s Auth0 client and then talks to Aesthetic.Computer’s own endpoints: it publishes pieces under the user’s handle, and it pushes source to live code channels. Until this morning, /api/ask served any caller a model of their choosing on Aesthetic.Computer’s API keys, and /run

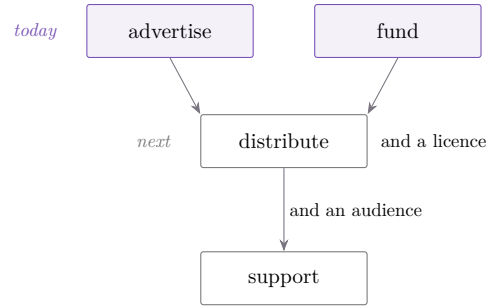


Figure 1: What each act rests on. The two in purple are available today — advertising needs nothing, and funding was settled this morning by the identity gate and per-handle budget. Distribution rests on both of those *and* on a licence decision; support rests on distribution having found anyone at all.

accepted unauthenticated writes to any channel [Scudder, 2026]. Distributing a CLI into that arrangement would have been an efficient way to convert a design oversight into a bill.

Both are closed. Identity is resolved from a token, a handle receives a daily budget that degrades rather than refuses, and channel ownership is a check against the token rather than a secret in a name. The funding question for a shipped Easel is now a matter of setting a number, not of building a mechanism — which is a real change in posture, and the reason this report can recommend anything at all.

One note on identity: the Auth0 client embedded in ac-session.mjs is a public PKCE client [Sakimura et al., 2015] — the kind designed to be embedded in distributed software, because the proof of possession is generated per authorisation rather than stored in the binary. It is already shared with ac-login, the Slab menubar, the Xbox account flow, and the Whistlegraph MCP. Shipping does not expose a secret. It does mean a stranger’s sign-in traverses the same client as internal tooling, which is worth knowing before it is true rather than after.

4. THE SHAPE OF ADVERTISING, CONCRETELY

Figure 1 orders the four acts by what each one requires of the last.

If only the first is done, the work is: a branch in prompt.mjs beside the menuband one, and a destination. The destination should state, in order, what Easel is, that it requires a Claude or Codex subscription, and what it does that a terminal does not — the piece is live at a URL from the first second, and the address is scannable from the prompt rock.

That page can honestly exist before any decision about distribution, and it is the cheapest way to find out whether anyone wants this.

5. IF AND WHEN IT IS DISTRIBUTED

Three routes, in ascending order of commitment.

npm. The conventional route for a Node CLI, and the one the artifact is closest to: remove `private`, add `bin` and `engines`, publish. The name `easel` is taken — an unrelated package at version 0.2.6, last modified in June 2022, whose description does not match its name. Squatted names are occasionally recoverable through npm’s dispute process, but the cheaper answer is that `ac-easel` and `aesthetic-easel` are both free, as is the `@aesthetic.computer` scope, which has the advantage of naming the publisher in the install line.

An install script served from Aesthetic.Computer. `curl | sh` is what most terminal tools do, and Aesthetic.Computer currently serves no shell script of any kind, so this would be a new pattern rather than an extension of one. It also asks the user to pipe a remote script into a shell, which is worth being deliberate about rather than adopting because it is common.

Homebrew. A tap is the most macOS-native answer and the most maintenance per release. Given the portability surface in Table 1, a macOS-first distribution is an honest match to what is actually tested — but it is also the route that forecloses the least.

Menu Band is the relevant precedent: it ships through the Mac App Store at \$4.99, carries a version manifest, and counts its downloads through a backend endpoint. That machinery exists and could be pointed at a second product without inventing anything.

6. RECOMMENDATION

Advertise now; do not distribute yet.

Advertising costs a branch and a page, is reversible, requires no licence decision, and answers the question that should be answered first — whether anyone outside this fleet wants a terminal editor whose output is a live URL. The page should lead with the subscription requirement rather than bury it.

Before distributing, four things want doing, and only one of them is a judgement call. Relicensing is the judgement call. The other three are small: add `bin` and `engines` and drop `private`; replace the `/bin/ps` tty lookup with something portable; and run the test suite once on a Linux machine that has never seen this repository, which has not happened.

7. LIMITATIONS

This report is an audit of an artifact and a survey of options; it is not a market estimate. We do not know whether anyone wants this, and nothing here establishes that they do. The npm name availability was measured against the registry today and can change. Whether the squatted `easel` package is recoverable was not investi-

gated beyond confirming it exists and is stale.

The portability claims are read from source, not from running Easel on another operating system — which is precisely the test that has not been performed, and the one that would most cheaply de-risk any distribution decision.

8. CONCLUSION

The question was whether to advertise the CLI and ship it, and the useful answer is that those were always two questions wearing one word.

Advertising is available now and blocked by nothing. Funding, which would have been the serious objection a day ago, was settled this morning for unrelated reasons. Distribution is blocked by a licence that says so in plain language inside the directory being discussed, and that is a decision rather than an obstacle. Support is constrained by the one fact most easily lost from inside a fleet where every machine already has the vendor CLIs installed: Easel is a beautiful front end to a subscription somebody else sells, and to a stranger without one it does nothing at all.

That is not a reason to keep it private. It is the first sentence of the page that advertises it.

References

- npm, Inc. npm docs: `npm-publish` and the `private` field. <https://docs.npmjs.com/>, 2026. A package with `private: true` is refused by the registry; `bin` is what links a command onto a `PATH`.
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