



Photoshop Mastery

Little things make a big difference when working in Photoshop

■ BY BEN WILLMORE

The Fine Art of Screen Shots

If you've ever wanted to capture the look of your screen, then you'll be amazed at how many hoops you need to jump through to get a high-quality result. Let's explore how the pros achieve those perfect screen shots and see the most popular options used to make the capture.

The standard way for making a screen shot is to type Shift-Command-3 (PC: Option-Print Screen). But if you take a lot of screen shots, you'll quickly abandon that and go with some specialized software designed specifically for taking screen shots. My current favorite is Snapz Pro from Ambrosia Software, Inc. It intercepts the standard screen shot keyboard command and allows you to specify such things as file format, region of the screen to capture, and more.

Shipping & Handling
\$4.95 per order (U.S. only)
\$12.00 per order (Canada)
1 video \$15.00 / 2 or more
\$30.00 (International)

Regular capture vs. 300-dpi PDF image

The first challenge is how to get accurate color. If you capture to the clipboard and then paste the result into a new Photoshop document, then Photoshop will misinterpret the colors. To get them to look right, choose Image>Mode>Assign Profile and set the pop-up menu to your current screen profile. If you're not sure what that is, then choose Apple Menu>Control Panels>ColorSync and see what the Display profile is set to. Then choose Image>Mode>Convert to Profile and choose the RGB working space setting. That should get your colors in order, but now let's think about using this image for different types of output.

If you're going to use it on the Internet, then you'll usually get the smallest file size and highest quality by using the GIF file format. It's very good at compressing large areas of solid color, which is perfect for most screen shots. If you find the image is too wide, then you'll want to scale it down with the Image Size command. That usu-

ally causes the text to be harder to read, so I choose Image>Adjust>Levels and move the upper left slider in until the text becomes nice and dark.

If you'll be reproducing the image on a printing press, then I'd suggest saving it as a TIFF file and turning on LZW compression. LZW will make the file size dramatically smaller without degrading the quality of the image. I find the screen shots often look slightly out of focus when they're reproduced on a printing press. There are two culprits that cause this, so let's figure out how to overcome them both.

The first one creeps in when you convert an image to CMYK mode. To get a good result, you'll need to choose Edit>Color Settings and then set the CMYK pop-up menu to Custom CMYK. When you do that, be sure to use GCR with Maximum black generation and set the Black Ink Limit to 100%. The other settings should be set based on the type of printing that will be used (newspaper, magazine, brochure, etc). With the properly chosen setting, you'll end up with the ideal amount of ink that will be used in the dark part of the image, but there's something more that can cause your images to look soft.

When you send your image to a commercial printing company, they'll often output them using some software that attempts to fix common mistakes. One of the things that software does is check the resolution of your images to make sure your images don't look jaggy. That's fine for photographic images, but screen shots are jaggy by nature and this software will often increase the resolution of the image, which causes it to look soft. To prevent that, choose Image>Image Size, turn on the Resample checkbox and set its pop-up menu to Nearest Neighbor. Finally, change the resolution setting to 291 (not 300, mind

you). That will cause each pixel in your image to become a four-pixel wide solid square, which will make your image look identical, but will fool the output device into thinking it has a lot more detail than it does. This is also useful when you'd like to add text and callouts to a screen shot and you'd like to keep them crisp next to your otherwise jaggy screen grab.



left=regular, right=from ScreenCatcher

Finally, I'll share two tricks for capturing Web pages. For long pages, be sure to visit www.versiontracker.com and download ScreenCatcher. It's designed to scroll down an entire Web page and capture it as a single image. Or, if you'd like the HTML text on a page to appear high-res instead of jaggy, choose print, then look for a setting called either "Save as File" or "Output Options" and save the file in PDF file format. Then open the image in Photoshop and specify the resolution you'd like. ■

Ben Willmore is founder of Digital Mastery, a Colorado-based training and consulting company that presents the national seminar tour of "Photoshop Mastery." He's also the Author of Photoshop 6 Studio Techniques. Ben provides hundreds of free Photoshop tips and tutorials at his Web site, www.digitalmastery.com.