



Photoshop's automatic tools save time

With high school graduation upon us, it's always helpful to have a quick run-through of how to edit and manage all those senior photos.

To work this magic, we'll use the automatic tools in Photoshop. I've written about this topic before, but am inevitably questioned about it each spring.

First, decide what you want to do to your batch of photos. You may just need to use ordinary options to edit the photos, like 'image size,' 'auto levels,' 'go to gray scale,' 'unsharp mask' and save in TIFF format to a finished folder.

Photoshop can help you do these things to a batch of photos quickly and painlessly.

Start by going to the 'actions' palette under Windows in Photoshop. Notice the pop-up menu button right of the word 'actions.' This menu holds a bevy of time-saving tools. Just about any multiple of edits can be made into a single step.

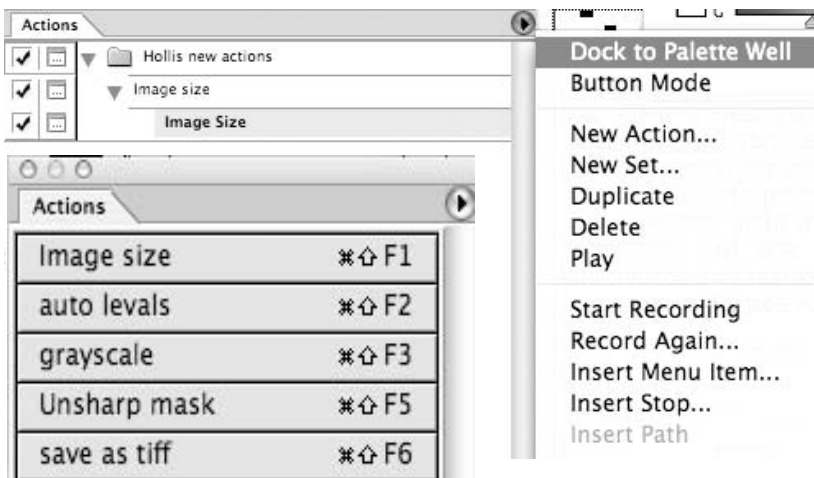
Start by creating a 'new set' and give it a name you'll remember. Next, with your set chosen, go to new action and give it a name and, if you want, a keyboard shortcut. Now, with one of the photos open, go to the first action you need to correct the photo.

For example, if you want to resize all the photos to the same size, go to the 'image size' menu and input the desired values. Click 'OK,' go to the actions palette and click 'stop recording.' You now have your first action under this set. Try



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computer notes
from the road



recording another one within the same set until you have all the commands required to correct the photos, including 'save as' to the correct folder in the correct format.

If you want an action to stop in a dialogue box to allow you to choose different settings for each

photo, such as 'levels' or 'curves,' try the 'Insert Menu Item' command. This brings up a pop-up window titled "Insert Menu Item." Now go to the 'levels' box and put the word 'levels' in the "Insert Menu Item" window. Click 'OK' to stop the action. It may take you 30 minutes to get the picture automation set like you want.

Note: when you want to test the action, click 'Button Mode' with 'Insert Menu Item' still up. This creates buttons out of the actions menu. To see if they work, just click "Button Mode" again.

From this point, go to the File menu and look at the "Automate>Batch..." menu. This is the final step in this process. During this process, you can go to lunch and let the computer work.

These directions may look daunting, but just read through it. The trick is to pick the folder you want to start from with all your pictures in it. Be sure it is on the hard drive, as it's not wise to work from a CD. Then choose the folder you want to go to.

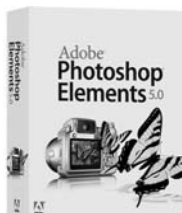
Also, you can override the 'open' and 'save as' commands if things don't go the way you want.

First test it on a few files to see if you need to tweak it. You can save out your actions and burn them to a CD for backup for next year's project.

Look for the 'Help' command at the top of your menu screen for assistance since different versions of Photoshop automate differently.

Hopefully, this will save you hours and hours of editing individual photos and let you work on other projects.

Wilma's picks for almost free photo editing software



After looking at software lately, I thought I might throw out 'Wilma's Picks' of the best options for free (or almost free) software that could work for newspapers.

First let's take a look at alternatives to Photoshop, since it's a pricey program.

First, check to see what software came with your scanner. This software will usually let you do basic manipulations to a photograph. Then you can turn over the photograph for the rest of the work to the person who has a full copy of Photoshop.

If you just use black-and-white photos in your paper, look at Photoshop Elements, which is my top choice. This program retails for around \$100, or comes free with some scanners like the Epson Perfection 4490 Flatbed Photo scanner. This is a good scanner and sound software that integrates with your full copies of Photoshop.

Next is ArcSoft PhotoStudio, which comes with Canon scanners. This photo editing software does the basics for black-and-white photographs.

And just like Photoshop Elements,

PhotoStudio costs \$100 when bought without a scanner.

PhotoStudio also offers many retouching tools along with image management, multiple undo/redo, multiple layers, editable text, macros and batch-processing. This program does CMYK but the conversion formulas are missing. (It might be something you could live with after some experimenting.)

This software also comes with some Canon all-in-one scanner printers. When you go to buy a scanner, remember to look at the included software. The software is available for purchase at the following Web site: www.arcsoft.com/products/photostudio/

What about free software? Free software is mainly for the adventurous, but there is good freeware software that runs on Macs. This software is called 'open source' – two words that sound very scary to some. If you're not faint of heart and don't want to pay for software, look at setting up this software.

GIMP (Graphic Image Manipulation Program) is the premier open source image editing package. It will open about 30 different graphic file formats. There is a wide variety of plug-ins, brushes, gradients and tools available

for GIMP. GIMP is a commercial product that retails for around \$50 (MacGIMP, see www.macgimp.org). GIMP is licensed under the GPL and can be downloaded in source form at no cost. Currently, free binaries for GIMP 1.2.5 are available.

The free Gimp.app is a self-contained application bundle of the GNU Image Manipulation Program for Mac OSX. It requires Apple's X11, which you install from your System disk for OS10.4. Gimp.app uses the gimp-print package built into OSX and the system's default Web browser for help and browsing requests.

If you didn't understand any of the last paragraph, then you're probably better off buying a standard program.

All the programs I mentioned work great for black-and-white photo work, but a good copy of Photoshop is unbeatable for color work because of the presets for CMYK.

Also, beware that most free software may one day have a price tag, since free is never really free in "software land."

People are always trying to make money, so proceed at your own risk.



Hunting for printers

Are you looking for a new printer for proofing PDF's? If so, I found a couple of types that should be available at local stores in your area.

The two printers I found were both under \$300.

Brother HL-5250DN, a network-enabled small-office laser, has it all. A compact footprint makes this PostScript level 3 printer a good fit for tight budgets and crowded workspaces of many small offices. This attractive monochrome laser printer also produces top output quality, can print on both sides of the paper and hooks up easily to your network. Your cost of consumables would be a reasonable 2.2 cents per page, since you have to replace the drum every so many pages.

The HP LaserJet P2015 features a 400MHz processor and 32MB standard memory, expandable to 288MB. It can handle large, graphics-intensive files and get a quick return to the print job's application, as well as increased up-time. The 250-sheet input tray lets you enjoy long periods of continuous printing, while a 50-sheet multipurpose tray supports a broad spectrum of special paper in addition to traditional paper sizes. This one is not networkable (as it uses the USB port) but could be a shared printer from a newer computer. It has HP postscript level 3 emulation, 32MB standard upgradable to 288MB of RAM. Toner replacement is \$80.99 for 7,000 pages.

I was recently looking for a scanner with Photoshop Elements included for the Holdenville News. The Epson Perfection 4490 fit the bill. ABBYY FineReader OCR is included with this scanner as well. It's an excellent stand-alone scanner and has the added benefit of quality software included.

If you're looking for something under \$100, the Canon scanners, including CanonScan LiDE70, include ArcSoft, PhotoStudio and OmniPage SE for your OCR. Also, Canon's all-in-one printers also include this software.

When looking for a quality PDF printer, be sure to make sure that the printer uses Postscript printer language (even if it is emulated). Can you network the printer? How much RAM memory does it come with, and how much can it be upgraded to? The more RAM you have, the faster you can print. Look for printers that allow you to print at least legal size. Also, check the price of printer replacement cartridges. Within a few months, you might wind up paying as much for cartridges as for the printer itself.

