

Helpdesk

Our Photoshop expert tackles your image-editing traumas and puts you back on track **BY JULIE EASTON**

MAKE A MONTAGE

Hello, I'm not sure if this question has been answered already, but I've searched high and low on the internet for an answer and have got nowhere! Basically, I'm trying to create a montage of two or three images that have been blended together. I've tried using the gradient masks, but this hasn't really created the look I'm after as the gradient blend is more of a straight line. Does anyone know of any different techniques? I would be grateful for any advice and help! Thank you.

Stewie, via the forum

There were a couple of replies to Stewie's post on the *Advanced Photoshop* forum, correctly suggesting that layer masks were the way forward, not gradient masks. There are plenty of tutorials for this on the web. One great one that we've come across can be found at www.informit.com/guides/content, which talks you through using layer masks alongside gradients to create a flawless montage. Another method for creating a montage, though not as advanced, is to place the images where you want them and then use the Eraser Tool to blend the edges in together. You can find a tutorial on doing this at www.graphic-design.com/Photoshop/montage. The best thing that you can do though, is to experiment with different Blending modes until you get the exact look you want – trial and error often produces some great results.

ON DISPLAY

I'm on the hunt for a new LCD monitor, but I'm unsure of what I should be looking for. I'm on a pretty tight budget after splashing out on other pieces of kit, but I need the best I can get for my money. I was wondering if you could advise me on the key factors that I should be looking for?

Jamie Tucker

Certain monitors are designed to be used for digital imaging and these usually have all the factors that you need for your work. The Apple Cinema displays, for example, are a great option. If this is out of your budget then you can get a perfectly adequate monitor for around the £200-300 mark. Resolution and contrast ratio are just two of the key factors that you need to consider when



ARTISTIC BLENDING: Montages can be created using a selection of different Blending modes along with layer masks and gradients

buying a new monitor. Resolution determines how sharp your images will appear and how much actual screen space you'll have for your work. Digital designers will find that they should get the largest screen size and resolution that they can, so they have room to manoeuvre. Aim for a 17 or 19-inch model, which will have a typical resolution of 1280x1024. The contrast ratio determines the brightness range of the display. Aim for the highest value that you can afford, but we wouldn't recommend dropping below 600:1.

Where possible stick to a good brand name, as they're usually better, and if you can see them in action at your local computer store, that's even better.

CLEVER WATERMARKING

Hi *Advanced Photoshop*,

I have set up a new site for clients to be able to view my work but I'm a little concerned about copyright theft. I followed your tutorial on watermarking in issue 24, but a visible logo just doesn't look attractive. I have seen websites that let you preview an image without a watermark, but if you download it the watermark is there. This seems great for what I need, but how would I go about doing it?

Mark Taylor

Well Mark, this really depends on how good your web design skills are, because this is going to involve quite a bit of coding. What you need to do in your chosen web design program is to create a rollover action on each of your images. Set it up so that the default display image is the unwatermarked version, and get the rollover animation to switch it to the watermarked version when a mouse is hovered over the image. Should a user then try to print the image, they should get the watermarked version. You can see this effect in action at www.istockphoto.com. If this seems a tad out of your league, then a visible watermark might be the only way to go. If you play around with the opacity enough so that it can be



WATERMARKS: iStock uses a rollover effect to display a watermarked version of the selected image



NOW YOU SEE IT: If you want to print off individual layers the easiest way to do it is to turn off the visibility of all layers apart from the one you need and print as usual

seen but doesn't intrude on the image, it should be fine. If you don't want to include a copyright, then the image must be of a low enough resolution to discourage any illegal use of the image.

MULTIPLE LAYERS PRINTING

I have a number of large layered PSDs in Photoshop, with each one bearing a different version of a piece of work. In order to compare each of these side by side I would like to be able to print them all out. What's the easiest way of printing each layer out individually?

Matthew Skinner

This is a pretty lengthy process unfortunately, depending on the number of layers you have in your documents.

The simplest and most time-consuming method is the one we'd recommend, and that is to turn off each layer's visibility except for the one that you want to print. You can then use the Print dialog as usual to just print out the layer that's on show. You then have to work through all the layers that you want to print, following the same method.

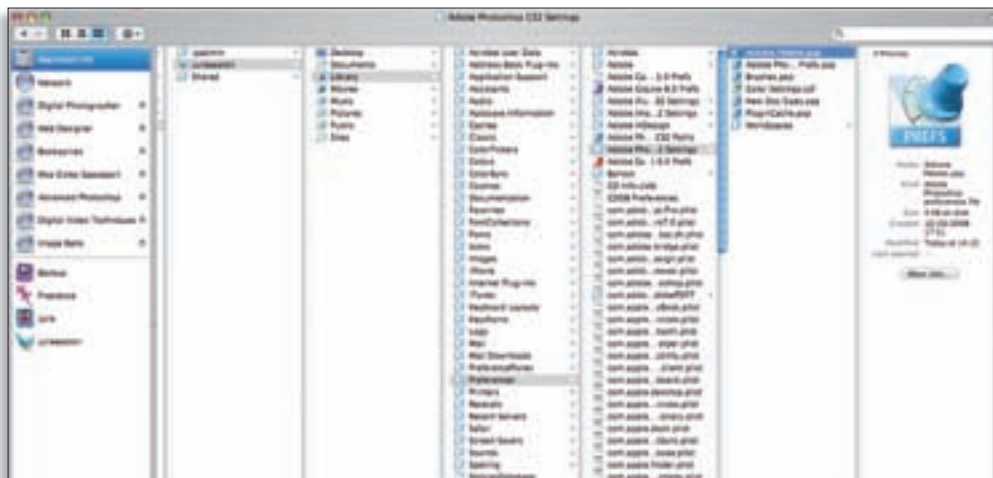
It's possible to set up an action to do this for you, but there are a couple of issues to be aware of. First, the action will only work for PSDs with the same number of layers. Second, Photoshop will print based on the current printer setup, so if you make any changes to your default print presets, your images will not print correctly.

TYPE COMPLAINT

I work closely with both Adobe's Photoshop and InDesign to create leaflets and pamphlets for a local business. I often use Photoshop to create graphic page designs, but I find that the text quality in Photoshop doesn't compare to the text in InDesign. How can I get around this?

Marc Bailey

What you need to bear in mind here Marc, is that Photoshop is designed to work with images and not text; it just happens to have the ability to work with text as well. InDesign however, is designed to work



PREFERENCES: Delete your Actions Preferences file if you are having problems with your Actions palette

with text rather than images. Both programs work to their strengths and integrate well with each other, but due to its intended purpose, text in Photoshop is never going to compare with text in InDesign. There are a few things to check, however. First make sure that you're viewing your work at 100% to give you the most accurate representation of the text quality. The resolution also needs to be high enough – at least 300dpi – or it will look even more blurry than usual. There are other methods for improving text in Photoshop, but the easiest option is to try and keep your text in InDesign.

DISAPPEARING ACTIONS

I am having a problem with CS2 on my Mac system (using OS X 10.4.6). My Actions palette keeps turning blank, i.e. all my saved and default Actions are no longer listed, though the palette is still visible. I can make it reappear by closing the palette and reopening it from the Windows menu, but it's a pain to have to keep doing this. Any advice?

Anna Hammond

It sounds like you have a corrupt Actions Preferences file. The first thing that you need to do is save all your Actions when they're visible in the palette. Do this by selecting the Save Actions command from the fly-out menu on the top right-hand corner of the palette. Next, you need to trash your preferences file to clear it off your system for good. You can find this on your Mac by going to Users>[user profile name]>Library>Preferences>Adobe Photoshop CS2 Settings, then simply drag and drop it into your trash folder. Alternatively, if you're working on a PC you have to locate the preference file within My Computer. Here you will find Actions Palette.psp, which is what you need to delete. Now relaunch Photoshop, and reload your Actions. Hopefully that'll sort it out.

SECOND COPY

I have a copy of Photoshop installed on my home computer and would like to install it on a second computer at my office. Can I do this or do I need to fork out on another copy? I know Adobe has really cracked down on registration. I really hope there is some way around it as there's no way I'd be able to afford two copies!

R. Hargreaves

Take a look at the end of your licence agreement – you can track this down by locating the application folder on your computer. It's possible to have one version installed on two machines, just as long as you don't use it on both at the same time. This will mean you don't have to fork out on additional software but you can only activate it on two at once.



LICENCE TO DUPLICATE: You can install your software onto two machines, but not at the same time!

HELPDESK

CALL FOR QUESTIONS

Want help with your Photoshop problems? Then let our team of experts sort you out.

Send your emails to us at:
advancedpshop@imagine-publishing.co.uk

Remember to specify whether you are using a PC or Mac and the version number of your edition of Photoshop.

"IF YOU HAVE THE CHOICE, TRY AND WORK WITH TEXT IN INDESIGN RATHER THAN IN PHOTOSHOP"



dvd
drives

DVD DRIVES

With competitive prices and high standards of DVD drives available, you really can't afford not to back yourself up

How much would you lose if your hard drive failed right now? If you've put countless hours into your work, equipment failure can be devastating, which is why we're constantly being told to back up the contents of our hard drives.

As one of the few mechanical parts in a computer, hard drives are vulnerable to complete and catastrophic breakdown. There are many ways you can back up your files – online storage, specialist back-up hardware, secondary hard disks – but by far the cheapest and most convenient are DVD burners. Blank DVD media is now inexpensive, with prices online coming to about £6 for 25 brand-name discs, and they can also last a while provided they're stored correctly.

If you don't own a DVD burner however, there's a huge amount of choice and a dizzying array of technical terms to understand. If you buy any DVD now it should support both + and – DVD discs; these are different competing types of blank media and the early drives only supported one or the other. You should also ensure your drive supports dual-layer (DL) discs, which allows you to burn up to 8GB onto dual-layer media. DL discs are

more expensive than standard 4.7GB single-layer, but the additional storage space can obviously be an advantage in some situations. There's also a great deal of variation in the speeds, with 16x burning being the current fastest for both + and – single-layer DVDs, 8x for +R DL and 6x for –R DL. At 16x you can fill a 4.7GB disc in around five minutes, but you must have blank media that is rated for those speeds. Even at 8x however, a disc is usually finished within about ten minutes.

Even if you have a slightly older DVD drive it may be worth upgrading since prices are so low. Although you'll find some models that are more expensive due to the inclusion of a particular feature or gimmick, most internal burners are around the same £20-30 price range. So when we talk about one drive being cheaper it's often just a matter of a few pounds. Most drives are available as OEM (Original Equipment Manufacturer) packages, meaning they don't include any additional software. If you don't need any of these extras this is the best way to buy. The exception to this is external drives that require cables and sometimes specialist software, so with this as well as additional hardware costs they're significantly pricier.

“EVEN IF YOU HAVE AN OLDER DVD DRIVE IT MAY BE WORTH UPGRADING BECAUSE PRICES ARE SO LOW”



DVD drives ROUND UP

Pioneer

Web: www.pioneer.co.uk

Contact: 0870 600 1539

As well as car stereos and home entertainment gear, Pioneer also has a nice line-up of DVD burner – as you would expect from a company that is one of the founding members of the DVD Forum, the group that created the DVD standard. They may not necessarily be the cheapest,

but many users swear by their reliability. If you ask around about the best optical drives, Pioneer is a name that often crops up, with a lot of praise for years of hassle-free burning. The DVR-111 is its very latest model, which supports every current format from basic CD writable to 8x dual-layer media. It also supports the fairly obscure DVD-RAM format, most commonly found in stand-alone DVD recorders.

Pioneer DVR-111

Best Froogle Price: £23.49/\$33.99

DVD+/-R write speed: 16x/16x

DVD+/-RW write speed: 8x/6x

DVD+/-DL write speed: 8x/8x

DVD-RAM write speed: 5x

CD-R write speed: 40x

CD-RW write speed: 32x

DVD-ROM read: 16x

CD-ROM read: 40x

Interface: Internal IDE



NEC 3550A

Best Froogle Price: £21.99 (\$28.99)

DVD+/-R write speed: 16x/16x

DVD+/-RW write speed: 8x/6x

DVD+/-DL write speed: 8x/6x

DVD-RAM write speed: unsupported

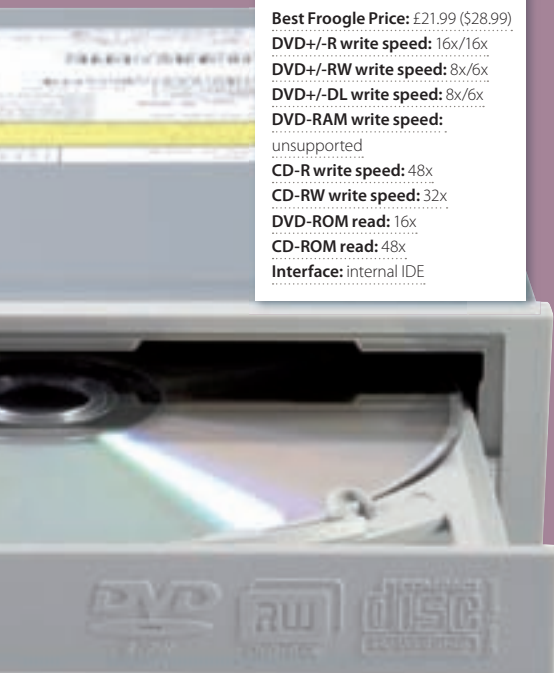
CD-R write speed: 48x

CD-RW write speed: 32x

DVD-ROM read: 16x

CD-ROM read: 48x

Interface: internal IDE



NEC

Web: www.nec.com

Contact: 020 8752 3535

Japanese electronics giant NEC has a reputation for producing low cost DVD burners. Although it's often among the first companies to introduce a drive supporting a higher speed or new media standard, it rarely innovates beyond that. What NEC drives do best is offer high performance at a price that's hard to beat. Even its newest model is found online for a smidgen over £20 as an OEM package. At that price you can afford to buy two for on-the-fly disc-to-disc copies and redundancy should one drive fail to operate. Not the most innovative or exciting products around, but the value for money, assuming you don't mind buying a bare OEM drive, is undeniable. The 3550A pictured here looks identical to NEC's previous models but updates the speed to support writing on both +R and -R DVD media to a maximum 16x. The only omission is a lack of support for DVD-RAM, but this is unlikely to be missed by most users.

Plextor

Web: www.plextor.com

Contact: via website

Plextor is the electronics wing of a Japanese company called Shinano Kenshi, who released the first optical CD-ROM drive in 1989 under its TEXEL brand name. TEXEL later became Plextor, and the company is well known for its innovative optical drives. Plextor is renowned for pushing the limits of optical drive technology. One of the key features of Plextor DVD burners, however, is its Plextools software included with all the drives, or available to be purchased separately if you want an upgraded version with more advanced features. Plextools allows for a huge number of extra options including security features and disc creation applications and is part of the reason Plextor products are so highly regarded. The two models pictured here are both external models using a standard USB2 interface, which is the perfect solution if you've got multiple systems. The 775UF is brand new and uses an internal drive fitted into a convenient external caddy, which makes it bulky but gives you faster write speeds. It's also worth noting that the 775UF includes firewire support as well as USB2. The 608U is a more specialised device, an ultra-slim drive designed for travellers. It has slower read and write speeds but is obviously well suited to use on notebook computers without built-in DVD burners.

Plextor 608CU

Best Froogle Price: £90.71/\$91

DVD+/-R write speed: 8x/8x

DVD+/-RW write speed: 8x/6x

DVD+/-DL write speed: 4x/4x

DVD-RAM write speed: 5x

CD-R write speed: 24x

CD-RW write speed: 24x

DVD-ROM read: 8x

CD-ROM read: 24x

Interface: USB2



Plextor 775UF

Best Froogle Price: TBA

DVD+/-R write speed: 16x/16x

DVD+/-RW write speed: 8x/6x

DVD+/-DL write speed: 10x/6x

DVD-RAM write speed: unsupported

CD-R write speed: 48x

CD-RW write speed: 24x

DVD-ROM read: 16x

CD-ROM read: 48x

Interface: USB2 & firewire



dvd drives



The burning question

In contrast to the huge number of DVD drives available, there isn't a great deal of choice when it comes to the software you use for creating a CD or DVD. The best known products are Nero Burning ROM and Roxio Easy Media Creator. These are both fully featured and mature products that offer a massive amount of extra features in addition to the standard disc-burning tools. A similar application is Pinnacle Studio MediaSuite, which incorporates Pinnacle Instant CD/DVD. Most of the other applications are more simple burning tools from small companies and they're nowhere near as popular or well known, but still well worth considering since they're often cheaper and offer a no-frills approach to disc creation.

Buying blank media

The type of media you use when burning discs is just as important as your choice of DVD drive. Low quality discs will not only result in having a plentiful supply of coasters (faulty discs that are good for nothing but to rest your drink on) but they can also be more vulnerable to damage. You don't want to discover that a disc you made a year ago is now unreadable, so only use brand-name media for vital backups and leave the cheap silver discs from the supermarket for non-critical data. Brands such as TDK, Imation, Sony and Verbatim are all reliable, but the most highly rated discs of all are from a company called Taiyo Yuden. They may cost a little more, but TY media is renowned for being reliable and resilient.

Sonic

Web: www.roxio.com

Contact: via website

Easy Media Creator started life as Adaptec Easy CD Creator. When Roxio was created as a spin-off from Adaptec it took Easy CD Creator and bundled it with a selection of media applications to form Roxio Easy Media Creator. Now it's owned by Sonic Solutions and is a direct competitor to Nero. Easy Media Creator has become a little more user-friendly, with a simplified user interface and a number of photo and audio tools that would suit home users. Its burning engine is reasonably competent but lacks the power, features and control of Nero Burning ROM. Although unlike Nero, if all you want to do is copy data to a blank disc, the company also sells Roxio RecordNow, a simplified burning tool. One problem many have with Easy Media Creator (and Nero, to a lesser degree) is that it insists on installing many background processes and the program can be rather sluggish on older machines.



Nero Burning ROM Premium 7 Reloaded

Price: £59.99/\$79.99

Pros: Excellent disc burning tool that's powerful and easy to use

Cons: Package includes extras that may be of no use and the burning application isn't available separately

IN OUR OPINION NERO BURNING ROM IS THE BEST DISC BURNING APPLICATION BAR NONE

Nero AG

Web: www.nero.com

Contact: via website

Formerly known as Ahead, Nero AG was renamed due to the immense popularity of its Nero Burning ROM application. Up until version 6 of Nero, the program mainly dealt with disc burning with just a few extra features.

Nowadays, it's a full media suite and includes many video, audio and image tools including a virtual mixing desk and video conversion. The latest version also includes Nero AG's SIPPS voice-over-IP application, MP3 conversion and support for Blu-Ray and HD-DVD. The core of the package is still Nero Burning ROM however, and in our opinion it's the best disc burning application bar none. On the surface it offers a very simple interface for creating data discs, but once you delve into its advanced features there's a wealth of extra options. The only drawback is that you can't get Burning ROM without paying for the rest of the package. That said, we'd still much rather have the whole package than nothing at all, as the quality of the product makes up for the fact you're forced to buy more than you may want.



Roxio Easy Media Creator

Price: £59.99/\$99.95

Pros: Easy to use and some of the extra tools can be useful

Cons: Puts a heavy demand on the system and its burning tools aren't as powerful as Nero



Pinnacle Studio MediaSuite Titanium

Price: £89.99

Pros: Instant CD/DVD is relatively easy to use

Cons: It's only available as part of the MediaSuite package and is not as powerful as competing applications

Pinnacle Systems

Web: www.pinnaclesys.com

Contact: via website

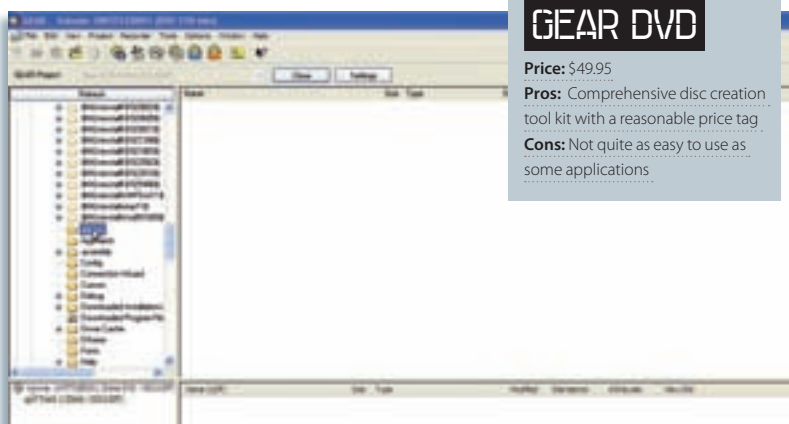
Pinnacle used to sell Instant CD/DVD, a disc-burning package, as a direct competitor to Nero Burning ROM and Easy CD Creator. The last version was released in 2004 and since then it's been integrated into Studio MediaSuite Titanium, a consumer-level video editing package. This means that unless you own that program already or were looking to buy a video editor, it's not going to be of much use. Even if you do buy MediaSuite though, you may want to consider a dedicated tool like Nero or Easy Media Creator because Instant CD/DVD is not as sophisticated or powerful as either of those. It's a useful extra when bundled with MediaSuite, but doesn't stand on its own.

Gear Software

Web: www.gearsoftware.com

Contact: via website

Gear Software is something of a pioneer in this market, having been one of the first companies to develop disc-burning software way back in the Eighties with financial assistance from the EC. You'd expect it to be a lot bigger than it is, but the company specialises in cross-platform disc creation tools, with its software available for Linux and other operating systems, and sells a lot of its applications to other companies like Apple, where it appears as part of iTunes. GEAR DVD sits between DeepBurner and Nero/Easy Media in terms of functionality and ease of use. Its disc burning is more advanced than DeepBurner and it has a few extra features such as an audio editor and disc ripper, and this is reflected in a slightly higher price. It's still not expensive however and compares very favourably to Nero Burning ROM, so until Nero releases a stand-alone burning package this is a very worthy rival.



GEAR DVD

Price: \$49.95

Pros: Comprehensive disc creation tool kit with a reasonable price tag

Cons: Not quite as easy to use as some applications

Jargon

Dual-layer

Dual-layer discs have a second layer of data under the first, which the drive accesses by adjusting the wavelength of the laser. This doubles the capacity of discs to 8GB.

DVD/CD R

This is used to describe blank media that can be written to only once. The data can't be changed or deleted from the disc afterwards.

DVD/CD RW

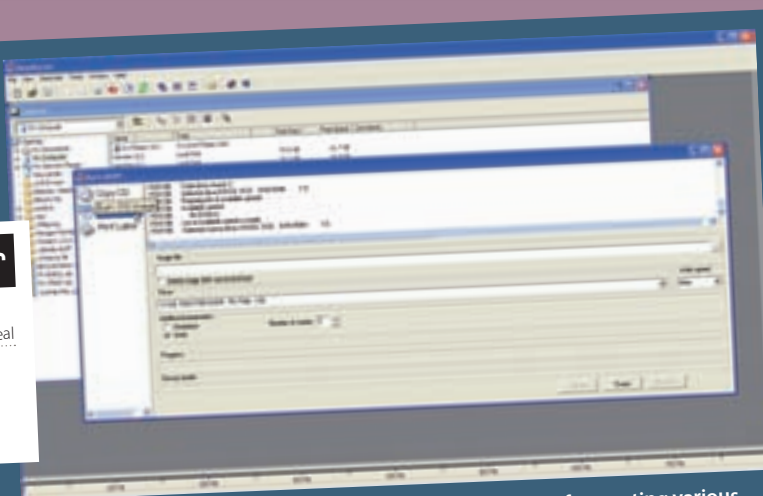
As apposed to DVD/CD R, rewritable discs can be erased and used again. Write times are slower however, than write-once discs and some drives can struggle to read them.

DeepBurner

Price: \$24.95/FREE

Pros: Simple and cheap, ideal for basic disc creation and data backup

Cons: Lacks advanced features and extras



Astonsoft

Web: www.deepburner.com

Contact: via website

Aside from the two biggest names – Nero and Roxio – there's very little competition in the disc-burning market with only smaller companies like Astonsoft releasing products online as shareware. It's very easy to dismiss DeepBurner and similar tools when they have no high street presence and no fancy packaging, but DeepBurner could actually be the perfect alternative. It bears a resemblance to Nero Burning ROM, presenting you with a menu on

startup with several options for creating various types of disc. And when you come to copy data over it's a very simple case of dragging and dropping files. Everything is done in a step-by-step format and there's even an option to create your own autorun menu. Compared to the full-price packages DeepBurner looks very basic, and while it does lack some of the advanced options found in Nero there's really no need to use anything else if you just want to copy data onto a CD. If you're still not sure head over to the website – as well as a trial version of the full DeepBurner Pro, you can download a no-frills freeware edition.