



Photo and graphics editing software Jasc Paint Shop Pro 8.0

As digital photography continues its exponential rise in popularity, there is an equal demand for photo-editing software that allows photographers to enhance, improve and manipulate their images. Paint Shop Pro has long been one of the most popular software packages worldwide and with this latest version Jasc Software has elegantly addressed the needs of the digital camera user.

From its humble beginning as a simple image viewer and file format converter, Paint Shop Pro exploded into a fully featured photo editor and enhancement tool. But as is the case with so many sophisticated packages, the features tend to get lost amid a blur of interface elements and flashy, if not altogether useful, extras. With Paint Shop Pro 8.0, Jasc has taken the program back to its roots, combining power with simplicity.

The principal improvements in this version involve ease of use. While this product will appeal to professional image editors, it is priced to suit home users and amateur photography enthusiasts. Such users may have little or no experience of software like this and could easily become overwhelmed by a vast array of features. What Paint Shop Pro 8.0 does so well is it allows you to dive right in and get immediate results. It does this in several ways.

Learning curve

The first is the new Learning Center, which contains simple-to-follow step-by-step guides to performing common tasks, as well as links to product tour movies which give an in-depth view of the main features of the package. The second improvement is the dramatically redesigned interface, which looks far more up-to-date than in previous versions.

The main toolbar has functions grouped into related categories. There's an enhanced Layer palette as well as a fully dockable and streamlined Tool Options palette.

It's easier to find your way around and every element of the interface can be customised. You can even create entirely new toolbars and save your interface layout so it can be shared with other users or used on other machines. If, on the other hand, you're more comfortable with the look and feel of Paint Shop Pro 7.0, there's a custom interface profile which allows you to revert to its appearance.

But ease-of-use improvements alone are not enough to warrant a new version of a major product, so Jasc has also packed a wide range

→ The Product Tour provides movies with detailed descriptions of each of Paint Shop Pro's key tools and features

of other enhancements and new features, both artistic and practical.

Paint Shop Pro 8.0's painting engine has been rewritten to give smoother control over your brushstrokes. There's also a host of new tools including the Background Eraser brush that allows you to simply paint away any part of a photo, while detecting edges to leave foreground objects in place.

Feature frenzy

The Warp brush lets you paint distortions and other effects directly on to the picture. The Retouch tool has been separated out into a collection of individual Retouch brushes and an Edge Seeker function has been added to the Freehand Selection tool, making it much easier to create accurate selections. The Offset and Seamless Tiling tools allow for the creation of background images for websites and desktop wallpaper.

The Type feature has been redesigned, although it's frustrating that you still have to enter text into a dialog box rather than directly on the picture. However, unlike many image-editing packages, Paint Shop Pro's vector editing functions are tightly integrated. This allows you to seamlessly switch between creating vector and bitmap graphics, so the needs of photo editors and illustrators are equally well served.

Other tools have been added or improved specifically with digital photographers in mind. For example, the Straighten tool allows you to easily align crooked photos, while the Crop operator now includes preset image sizes



↑ The Photo toolbar provides easy access to a range of image-enhancement tools. Alternatively use the One Step Photo Fix button

optimised for digital prints. The one-click photo enhancement tool significantly improves poorly lit or overexposed photos, although if you'd prefer to finetune your pictures manually each of the requisite features such as Colour Correction, Clarify and Smoothing are easily accessible from the Photo toolbar.

There's also Perspective Correction available for fixing keystone and other relative errors, while Lens Correction filters correct pincushion, fisheye and barrel distortion – problems that commonly occur in pictures taken with the zoom lens on compact digital cameras. There's a range of fun and creative effects such as the Balls and Bubbles and Magnifying Lens effect filters, although these are unlikely to be of any real benefit.

As far as practical improvements go, the zoom tool now uses percentages instead of ratios so it's easy to fit an image to your screen or zoom out to 100 percent. A scripting engine has been added that allows you to perform pre-recorded sets of actions on an image or record your own scripts so that you can easily apply the same effects to multiple pictures.

You can view and edit Exif data, the information such as exposure levels and shutter speed recorded by many digital cameras, and there's support for a wide range of new file formats including JPG 2000, PDF, SVG, PostScript Level 3 and lossless JPG.

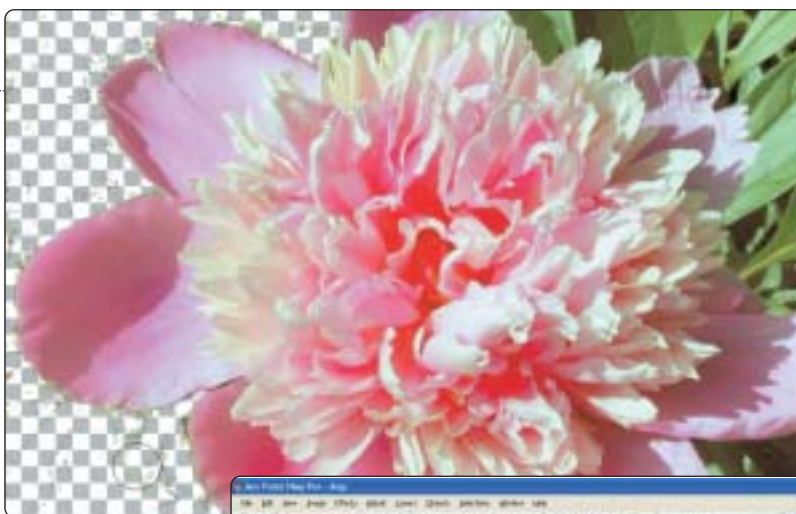
What's the catch?

The negatives of Paint Shop Pro 8.0 are few and far between, but there are one or two worthy of mention. It's supplied with the same web graphics animation package as its predecessor, called Animation Shop, although bizarrely the two don't share a file format. So if you use Animation Shop you can't export frames to Paint Shop Pro 8.0 and then update them back to Animation Shop.

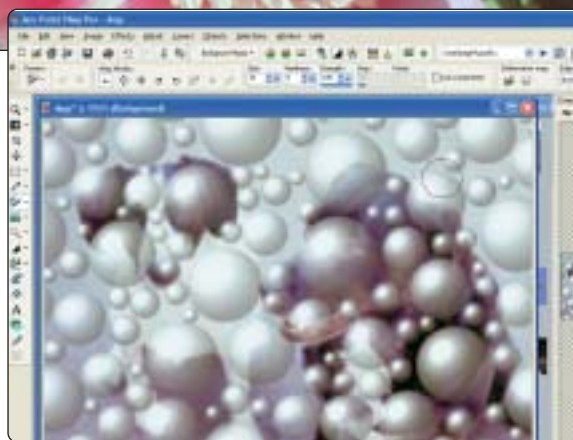
Furthermore, layered files need to be saved in Paint Shop Pro 7.0 format in order to open them in Animation Shop. Surely it wouldn't have been too hard to update Animation Shop to read native Paint Shop Pro 8.0 files?

The market-leading image-editing software for professional users is Adobe's Photoshop. There's little new in Paint Shop Pro that will have Photoshop users migrating in their droves, but crucially this release brings much closer feature parity between the two products.

Considering the huge difference in price – Paint Shop Pro costs under £100 compared to



↑ The Background Eraser makes it easy to remove an object from the background for creating composites



nearly six times as much for Photoshop – this is pretty impressive in itself.

In addition to Photoshop's price being a major turn-off for consumers, it's also packed with professional features which are way above and beyond the needs of your average digital photographer. Paint Shop Pro, on the other hand, is priced to appeal to home users and it therefore lacks some key professional features.

For example, you can't create or edit images in CMYK mode – required for output to professional printing devices. However, it is possible to create CMYK separations from an RGB image, which can be finetuned to the target output device.

Issues such as this mean that both Adobe Photoshop and Paint Shop Pro will maintain their respectful places in the market, but Paint Shop Pro's improvements and new features make it stand way out above the other consumer-oriented packages.

Verdict

Version 8.0 is the most impressive release of Paint Shop Pro yet. It's ideal for inexperienced users with its Learning Center and friendly interface, yet it contains enough power features to rival Photoshop – at a fraction of the cost. ■

Alex Katz

↑ Paint Shop Pro 8.0 includes a variety of new artistic effect tools such as Balls and Bubbles, although we're not sure how useful they'll be

Jasc Paint Shop Pro 8.0

- ☐ Digital Workshop: 0870 120 2186
- ☐ www.digitalworkshop.com
- ☐ £85

System requirements

Pentium processor; Windows 98/NT
4.0/2000/Me/XP; 128MB RAM;
200MB hard disk space; 16bit colour
display at 800x600 resolution

Ease of use



Features



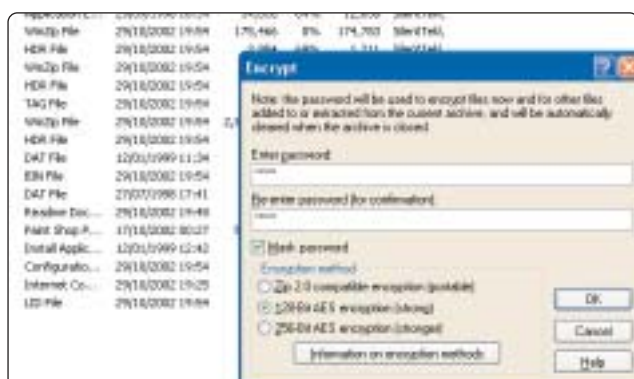
Value for money



Overall rating



File compression and encryption utility WinZip 9.0 beta



Since its launch in 1991, WinZip has become one of the most popular programs to compress and encrypt files for storage or sending. The latest version builds on the strengths of its predecessors offering greater capacity, enhanced encryption and compression and many improvements to the user interface.

To ensure that your files are kept safe from prying eyes, version 9.0 supports 128bit and 256bit key AES encryption. To put this into perspective, the US Computer Security Resource Centre website estimates that it would take around "149 trillion years to crack a 128bit AES key". So we'd say your files are pretty safe.

To lock down your files simply choose the encryption strength you want and specify your password. One thing to note is that current recipients of AES encrypted files must have WinZip 9.0 to decrypt them, although WinZip is working with third parties to expand support for the format.

Now that you know your files will be safe you might want to store even more, which is fine as WinZip 9.0 has a much higher capacity. It now supports 64bit extensions to the Zip file format, which means you can store a virtually unlimited amount of data in Zip files, whereas before the limit was 65,535. Despite their enhanced capacity, new Zip files are compatible with the old format.

To ensure that Zip files take up as little hard drive space as possible and are easier to email, version 9.0 uses an 'enhanced deflate' compression method that cuts down file size.

Verdict

WinZip 9.0 is a reliable and easy tool to compress and secure your files. Its low price makes it even more attractive. While an upgrade isn't a must, you will benefit from better security and support for higher capacity. Nervous users might want to wait for the final version that, at time of writing, was not available for download. ■

Ursula Seymour

↑ You are offered the choice of three different file encryption strengths

WinZip 9.0 beta

- www.winzip.com
- Free downloadable upgrade from WinZip 8.1: \$29 (£17); free trial beta version available for download

System requirements

Windows 98/Me/NT 4.0/2000/XP

Ease of use



Features



Value for money



Overall rating



Utility software Transfer MyPC



← Transfer MyPC's wizard-based approach walks you step-by-step through the migration process

If you've ever upgraded to a new PC you'll know how much of a hassle it is to get all your data from your old computer over to the new one. Transfer MyPC is a clever utility that makes the process simpler. Not only does it copy your data files across, it also transfers all your settings such as application preferences, internet favourites, email, music playlists and so on.

Transfer MyPC supports migration between different versions of Windows and even applications, such as from Office 97 to XP. However it doesn't transfer the programs themselves – you'll need to install any software you want to use on the new PC yourself.

Using the software is incredibly simple. The wizard-based approach guides you through all the migration process steps. The only tricky part is selecting what items you do and don't want moved. A little care is needed here to make sure you transfer all the required files, although if you're in any doubt you can just instruct the software to move everything across.

The software helpfully tells you how much space each group of files take up, so you can assess whether they're going to occupy too much precious hard drive space or whether they'll take too long to transfer.

When you get to the end of the process on your old PC, Transfer MyPC instructs you to install the software on to your new machine. The wizard will then continue walking you through the necessary steps, telling you when and how to plug in the supplied USB cable between the two machines (a parallel version is also available). A status bar on the new system will give you a rough indication of how long you have to wait until it has finished copying the files.

After the initial transfer you can use the File Transfer Utility to continue to swap files between the two computers.

Verdict

Transfer MyPC fills a genuine need and it does so elegantly, simply and effectively. A must for anyone who wants to make upgrading their hardware as seamless as possible. ■

Alex Katz

Transfer MyPC

- Orlogix: 00 353 6170 4531
- www.orlogix.com
- £34 ex VAT

System requirements

486 processor; Windows 95/98 SE/Me/2000/XP; 32MB RAM; 30MB hard disk space; USB or parallel port

Ease of use



Features



Value for money



Overall rating



Server operating system
Windows Server 2003

It may have been delayed but Microsoft's latest server operating system has been well worth the wait. Some three years in the making, Windows Server 2003 is more an evolutionary than a revolutionary upgrade to its predecessor, Server 2000. The most significant changes are the integration of the .Net framework and the much improved Internet Information Server 6.0. Version 2003 does, however, offer a heap of performance improvements and enhancements that are designed to make Windows-based networking faster, more reliable and more secure.

Secure server

Windows Server 2003 comes in four editions: Web, Standard, Enterprise and Datacenter (which can only be bought with a server). The Enterprise Edition scales up to eight processors and 32GB RAM on x86-based hardware. The upcoming 64bit version of the OS (for Intel Itanium-based systems) supports up to 64GB of RAM, while the Datacenter Edition will support no less than 32 processors and 512GB of RAM.

Security, a known Microsoft weakness, has been addressed with Windows Server 2003. There are more than 20 security features such as IIS (internet information services), Clipbook, licence logging, telnet, terminal service session discovery and Network DDE. However these features aren't enabled by default – you must explicitly install each in turn.

Other enhancements such as driver protection, process isolation and fault tolerance all contribute towards this OS' excellent stability. Individual servers can handle more users while backup and recovery won't slow performance. By any measure, Server 2003 is faster than its predecessors, although these performance gains will only be noticeable on larger networks.

IIS 6.0 is very different in this OS update. The app has been cut up into modules and now separates web server operations from website application code processing. The result? It runs faster. You can also apply patches without downing the server – a major boon. Sadly, though, there is no direct upgrade path from IIS 5.0.

Enterprise-class installations will benefit from 2003's Virtual Disk Service, which integrates the OS with directly attached SAN and NAS backup systems. You can now snap in storage management tools directly into the Microsoft Management Console, which is a real timesaver. Support for the emerging iSCSI storage networking protocol became available in June.

→ Every Windows Server 2003 network service needs to be installed using the Manage Your Server Wizard



Mirror image

One potential brow soother is the Volume Shadow Copy service. This lets you take a 'snapshot' of single or multiple volumes. Users can then view and optionally restore files from the snapshot, which effectively lets you 'travel back in time' to recover accidentally deleted files without IT intervention. All of which sounds too good to be true. It is – Windows Server 2003 does have a down side.

Surprisingly, the operating system offers poor backward compatibility with existing server apps. It can't even run most versions of Microsoft's own major server programs like SQL Server and Exchange – you must upgrade to the 2003 versions, but these have yet to be released. As for the rest of your NT or Windows 2000 applications, it's likely that as many as one in three programs won't run.

One possibility of redemption lies in Virtual Server. Microsoft recently bought the virtual machine assets of Connectix and is turning them into this add-on. Virtual Server will let users running a Windows NT 4.0 line of business applications continue to run these as a 'virtual machine' alongside Server 2003.

Verdict

Windows Server 2003 is a significant improvement over its predecessor. Fundamental changes are thin on the ground but the new server is noticeably faster than before. If you're about to deploy a new network, this is definitely one for the shortlist. Those with NT servers to upgrade may need careful forethought before making the jump, though. ■

Roger Gann

↑ Among the raft of management improvements, Windows Server 2003 now has a Terminal Services client that's a Management Console snap-in

Windows Server 2003

- ☐ Microsoft: 0870 601 0100
☐ [www.microsoft.com/
 windowsserversystem/default.msp](http://www.microsoft.com/windowsserversystem/default.msp)
☐ Standard £732; Enterprise
 £2,795; Web £285 ex VAT

System requirements

733MHz Pentium or compatible processor; 512MB RAM; 200MB hard disk space

Ease of use



Features



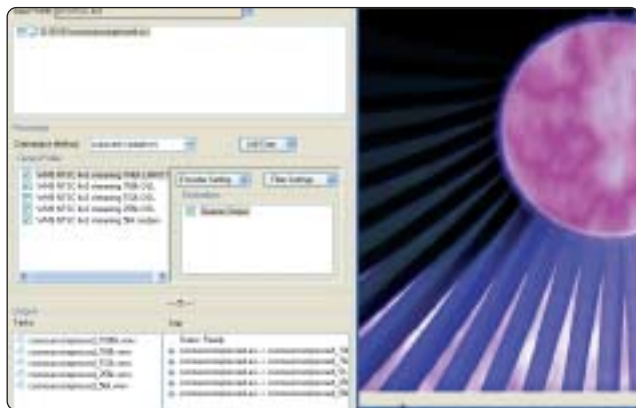
Value for money



Overall rating



Video conversion software Cleaner XL



Cleaner has long been used to convert between different video formats. Adobe Premiere fans will be familiar with the cut-down version that exports video for Real, Mpeg and other formats. XL is radically different to previous releases, however, with a complete makeover in terms of interface and purpose.

Previously, Cleaner was mainly used for compressing one clip at a time. XL has redefined itself as the essential video export utility for batch jobs – for example, you may need to produce different file formats of the same clip for distribution to the internet or DVD. Unlike Cleaner 6.0 for the Mac, XL is designed to work in the background with 183 profiles that are loaded from disk (as well as your own additions). So you can set up a batch job to process a file into ASF, QuickTime and Mpeg-2 formats, all at different sizes and aimed at different audiences.

Cleaner supports all the important file formats but it's clear that the utility is ultimately aimed at video professionals – ideally in conjunction with editing packages such as Adobe Premiere and After Effects. Trimming and colour balance controls are used for basic editing, but the real power of the package lies elsewhere. You can experiment with different types of coding to squeeze out the best-looking video at the smallest file size.

Verdict

Users who will gain the most from Cleaner XL are those who need to repurpose the same footage for multiple platforms, from DVD to QuickTime and the latest Microsoft formats (there are even profiles for the latest generation of mobile phones). Its interface is well suited to the task of batch processing multiple jobs, but for that reason the novice or occasional video user will find it fairly intimidating. ■

Jason Whittaker

Cleaner XL

- ☐ Discreet: 01252 456 669
- ☐ www.discreet.com
- ☐ £433 ex VAT

System requirements

800MHz PIII; Windows 2000/XP; 256MB RAM; 50MB hard disk space

Ease of use



Features



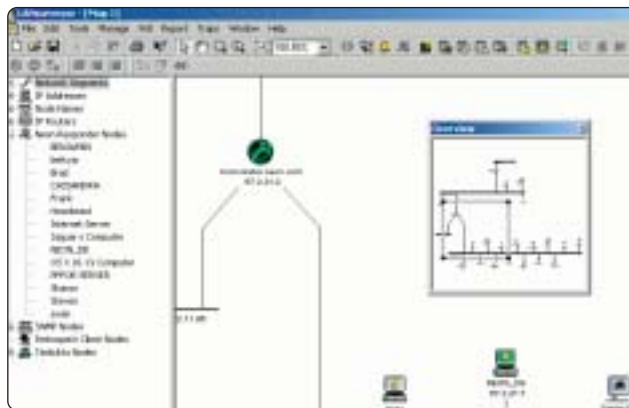
Value for money



Overall rating



Network management tool LANsurveyor



Long-time Mac secret LANsurveyor has, with its latest release, made the crossover to the world of Windows. This network management tool helps administrators keep accurate documentation, alerts them to problems and manages virtually any device connected to a network.

Out of the box LANsurveyor includes a licence for 20 Neon Responders – in other words, local agents – which are installed on individual workstations. LANsurveyor can then Hoover up data from the clients or issue commands to them. It can make use of common or garden SNMP (simple network management protocol) agents, but the Responders will harvest more data.

First things first: let LANsurveyor loose on the network to find out precisely what's there. It works out which TCP/IP segment to scan and then draws a hierarchical network map, complete with detailed profiles of each discovered device. The map charts all IP-based hardware including desktops, servers, printers, hubs, switches and routers. This key feature is at the heart of LANsurveyor as all reporting, alerting and management features are based on or stored within it.

You can monitor specific devices for performance or reliability, set alerts for given incidents that can then be forwarded to an email address. You can shut down and restart workstations and launch or quit programs. It also integrates with remote control apps, such as VNC or Timbuktu as well as the Retrospect backup client.

Verdict

Network management headaches will disappear overnight once you install LANsurveyor. Thanks to its Swiss army knife approach, it covers most network management needs in one go. ■

Roger Gann

↑ The network map is at the very heart of LANsurveyor

LANsurveyor

- ☐ Neon: 01798 873 001
- ☐ www.neon.com
- ☐ £340 (20 users); each additional 25 clients £340 ex VAT

System requirements

64MB of memory (or more depending on the network size); Windows NT/2000/XP; Neon Responders require Windows 95/98/NT/2000/XP/Mac OS X 10.1.5 or later/Mac OS 8.0 or 9.0

Ease of use



Features



Value for money



Overall rating

